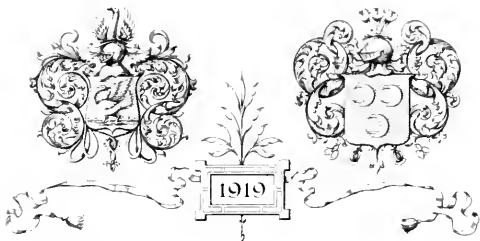


NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 06828159 5



GANSEVOORT-LANSING  
COLLECTION

*given to the New York Public Library  
Astor Lenox and Tilden Foundations*

BY VICTOR HUGO PALTSITS

*under the terms of the last will and testament of*

CATHERINE GANSEVOORT LANSING

*granddaughter of*

*General Peter Gansevoort, junior*

*and widow of the*

*Honorable, Abraham Lansing*

*of Albany, New York*

Blai

2







Gardner.

1000



# SERMONS,


BY

HUGH BLAIR, D. D. F. R. S. ED.

ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF THE HIGH CHURCH, AND PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC AND  
BELLES LETTRES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.



SECOND COMPLETE AMERICAN EDITION.



IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



*PHILADELPHIA:*

HICKMAN & HAZZARD, NO. 121, CHESNUT-STREET.

1822.

3723A

## CONTENTS OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

### SERMON XLII.

#### *On Moderation.*

PHILIPPIANS, iv. 5.	Let your moderation be known unto all men,	PAGE 9
---------------------	--	--------

### SERMON XLIII.

#### *On the Joy and Bitterness of the Heart.*

PROVERBS, xiv. 10.	The heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy,	17
--------------------	---	----

### SERMON XLIV.

#### *On Characters of Imperfect Goodness.*

MARK, x. 21.	Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him—	26
--------------	---------------------------------------	----

### SERMON XLV.

#### *On the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as a Preparation for Death.*

[Preached at the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

MATTHEW, xxvi, 29.	But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom,	33
--------------------	--	----

### SERMON XLVI.

#### *On the Use and Abuse of the World.*

1 CORINTH. vii. 31.	They that use this world, as not abusing it,—	42
---------------------	---	----

### SERMON XLVII.

#### *On Extremes in Religious and Moral Conduct,*

PROVERBS, iv. 27.	Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left,	50
-------------------	--	----

### SERMON XLVIII.

#### *On Scoffing at Religion.*

2 PETER, iii. 3.—	There shall come in the last days scoffers,	58
-------------------	---	----

### SERMON XLIX.

#### *On the Creation of the World.*

GENESIS, i. 1.	In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,	66
----------------	--	----

## SERMON L.

*On the Dissolution of the World.*

- 2 PETER, iii. 10. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up, - - - - - PAGE 74

## SERMON LI.

*On the Causes of Men's being weary of Life.*

- JOB, x. 1. My soul is weary of my life, - - - 82

## SERMON LII.

*On Charity as the End of the Commandment.*

- 1 TIMOTHY, i. 5. Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned, - - - - - 90

## SERMON LIII.

*On our Lives being in the Hand of God.*

[Preached at the Beginning of a New Year]

- PSALM, xxxi. 15. My times are in thy hand,—— - 98

## SERMON LIV.

*On the Mixture of Bad men with the Good in Human Society.*

- MATTHEW, xiii. 30. Let both grow together until the harvest.— - - - - 106

## SERMON LV.

*On the Relief which the Gospel affords to the Distressed.*

[Preached at the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

- MATTH. xi. 28. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, - - - 114

## SERMON LVI.

*On Luxury and Licentiousness.*

- ISAIAH, v. 12. The harp, and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands, 123

## SERMON LVII.

*On the Presence of God in a Future State.*

- PSALM, xvi. 11. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore - - - 131

## SERMON LVIII.

*On Curiosity concerning the Affairs of others.*

JOHN, xxi. 21, 22. Peter seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me,

PAGE 139

## SERMON LIX.

*On our present Ignorance of the Ways of God.*

JOHN, xiii. 7. Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter, 147

## SERMON LX.

*On the Slavery of Vice.*

2 PETER, ii. 19. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage, 156

## SERMON LXI.

*On the Importance of Public Worship.*

PSALM, xxxvi. 8. Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth, - 163

## SERMON LXII.

*On the Fashion of the World passing away.*

1 CORINTH. vii. 31. The fashion of this world passeth away, 173

## SERMON LXIII.

*On Tranquillity of Mind.*

PSALM XV. 5. He that doeth these things shall never be moved, 181

## SERMON LXIV.

*On the Misfortunes of Men being chargeable on themselves.*

PROVERBS, xix. 3. The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord, - - 189

## SERMON LXV.

*On Integrity as the Guide of Life.*

PROVERBS, xi. 3. The integrity of the upright shall guide them, - - - - - 197

## SERMON LXVI.

*On Submission to the Divine will.*

JOB, ii. 10. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? - - - - 205

## SERMON LXVII.

*On Friendship.*

PROVERBS, xxvii. 10. Thine own friend, and thy father's friend,  
forsake not, - - - - PAGE 213

## SERMON LXVIII.

*On the Conduct to be held with regard to Future Events.*

PROVERBS, xxvii. 1. Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou  
knowest not what a day may bring forth, - - 220

## SERMON LXIX.

*On following the Multitude to do Evil.*

EXODUS, xxiii. 2. Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil, 228

## SERMON LXX.

*On the Wisdom of God.*

I TIMOTHY, i. 17. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invi-  
sible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever!  
Amen, - - - - 236

## SERMON LXXI.

*On the Compassion and Beneficence of the Deity.*

[Preached before the Society for the Benefit of the Sons of the Clergy of the  
Established Church of Scotland, 20th May, 1796.]

JEREMIAH, xlix. 11. Leave thy fatherless children; I will pre-  
serve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me, 245

## SERMON LXXII.

*On Hopes and Disappointments.*

PROVERBS, x. 28. The hope of the righteous shall be gladness;  
but the expectation of the wicked shall perish, - 256

## SERMON LXXIII.

*On the proper Disposition of the Heart towards God.*

ACTS, xvii. 28. In Him we live, and move, and have our  
being, - - - - 265

## SERMON LXXIV.

*On the Moral Character of Christ.*

ACTS, x. 38. Jesus of Nazareth, who went about doing good, 274

## SERMON LXXV.

*On the Wounds of the Heart.*

PROVERBS, xviii. 14. The spirit of a man will sustain his infir-  
mity: but a wounded spirit who can bear? - 282

## SERMON LXXVI.

*On all Things working together for Good to the Righteous*

ROMANS, viii. 28. We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose, - - - PAGE 291

## SERMON LXXVII.

*On the Love of our Country.*

[Preached 18th April, 1793, on the day of a National Fast appointed by Government, on occasion of the War with the French Republic.]

PSALM cxxii. 6, 7, 8, 9. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companion's sake, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy peace, 302

## SERMON LXXVIII.

*On a Contented Mind.*

2 KINGS, iv. 13. Say now unto her, "Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?" And she answered, "I dwell among mine own people." - - - 312

## SERMON LXXIX.

*On drawing near to God.*

[Preached at the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

PSALM lxxiii. 28. It is good for one to draw near to God, 320

## SERMON LXXX.

*On Wisdom in Religious Conduct.*

PSALM ci. 2. I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way, 329

## SERMON LXXXI.

*On the Immortality of the Soul, and a Future State.*

2 CORINTHIANS, v. 1. For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, 338

## SERMON LXXXII.

*On overcoming Evil with Good.*

ROMANS, xii. 21. Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good, - - - 348

## SERMON LXXXIII.

*On a Life of Dissipation and Pleasure.*

PROVERBS, xiv. 13. Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness, - - 356

## SERMON LXXXIV.

*On the Conscience void of Offence.*

ACTS, xxiv. 16. Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men,

PAGE 365

## SERMON LXXXV.

*On the Ascension of Christ.*

[Preached in the Evening after the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

LUKE, xxiv. 50, 51. And he led them out as far as to Bethany and he lift up his hands and blessed them: And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them and carried up into Heaven, - - - - - 373

## SERMON LXXXVI.

*On a peaceable Disposition.*

ROMANS, xii. 18. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men, - - - - - 383

## SERMON LXXXVII.

*On Religious Joy, as giving Strength and Support to Virtue*  
NEHEMIAH, viii. 10.—The joy of the Lord is your strength, 393

## SERMON LXXXVIII.

*On the Folly of the Wisdom of the World.*

1 CORINTH. iii. 19. The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, - - - - - 401

## SERMON LXXXIX.

*On the Government of Human Affairs by Providence.*

PROVERBS, xvi. 9. A man's heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps, - - - - - 409

## SERMON XC.

*On Prayer.*

PSALM lxxv. 2. Oh thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come! - - - - - 417

## SERMON XCI.

*On the Last Judgment.*

2 CORINTH. v. 10. For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad! - - - - - 429



## SERMON XLII.

### ON MODERATION.

---

*Let your moderation be known unto all men.*—PHILIPPIANS, iv. 5.

THE present state of man is neither doomed to constant misery, nor designed for complete happiness. It is, in general, a mixed state of comfort and sorrow, of prosperity and adversity; neither brightened by uninterrupted sunshine, nor overcast with perpetual shade; but subject to alternate successions of the one, and the other. While such a state forbids despair, it also checks presumption. It is equally adverse to despondency of mind, and to high elevation of spirits. The temper which best suits, is expressed in the text by *moderation*; which, as the habitual tenour of the soul, the apostle exhorts us to discover in our whole conduct; *let it be known unto all men*. This virtue consists in the equal balance of the soul. It imports such proper government of our passions and pleasures as shall prevent us from running into extremes of any kind; and shall produce a calm and temperate frame of mind. It chiefly respects our conduct in that state which comes under the description of ease, or prosperity. Patience, of which I treated in the preceding discourse, directs the proper regulation of the mind, under the disagreeable incidents of life. Moderation determines the bounds within which it should remain, when circumstances are agreeable or promising. What I now purpose is, to point out some of the chief instances in which Moderation ought to take place, and to shew the importance of preserving it.

I. MODERATION in our wishes. The active mind of man seldom or never rests satisfied with its present condition, how prosperous soever. Originally formed for a wider range of objects, for a higher sphere of enjoyments, it finds itself, in every situation of fortune, straitened and confined. Sensible of deficiency

in its state, it is ever sending forth the fond desire, the aspiring wish, after something beyond what is enjoyed at present. Hence, that restlessness which prevails so generally among mankind. Hence, that disgust of pleasures which they have tried; that passion for novelty; that ambition of rising to some degree of eminence or felicity, of which they have formed to themselves an indistinct idea. All which may be considered as indications of a certain native, original greatness in the human soul, swelling beyond the limits of its present condition, and pointing at the higher objects for which it was made. Happy if these latent remains of our primitive state served to direct our wishes towards their proper destination, and to lead us into the path of true bliss!

But in this dark and bewildered state, the aspiring tendency of our nature unfortunately takes an opposite direction, and feeds a very misplaced ambition. The flattering appearances which here present themselves to sense; the distinctions which fortune confers; the advantages and pleasures which we imagine the world to be capable of bestowing, fill up the ultimate wish of most men. These are the objects which engross their solitary musings, and stimulate their active labours; which warm the breast of the young, animate the industry of the middle-aged, and often keep alive the passions of the old, until the very close of life. Assuredly, there is nothing unlawful in our wishing to be freed from whatever is disagreeable, and to obtain a fuller enjoyment of the comforts of life. But when these wishes are not tempered by reason, they are in danger of precipitating us into much extravagance and folly. Desires and wishes are the first springs of action. When they become exorbitant, the whole character is likely to be tainted. If we suffer our fancy to create to itself worlds of ideal happiness; if we feed our imagination with plans of opulence and splendour far beyond our rank; if we fix to our wishes certain stages of high advancement or certain degrees of uncommon reputation or distinction, as the sole stations of felicity; the assured consequence will be, that we shall become unhappy in our present state; unfit for acting the part, and discharging the duties that belong to it; we shall decompose the peace and order of our minds, and foment many hurtful passions. Here, then, let Moderation begin its reign; by bringing within reasonable bounds the wishes that we form. As soon as they become extravagant, let us check them by proper reflections on the fallacious nature of those objects which the world hangs out to allure desire.

You have strayed, my friends, from the road which conducts to felicity; you have dishonoured the native dignity of your souls, in allowing your wishes to terminate on nothing higher than worldly ideas of greatness or happiness. Your imagina-

tion roves in a land of shadows. Unreal forms deceive you. It is no more than a phantom, an illusion of happiness which attracts your fond admiration; nay, an illusion of happiness which often conceals much real misery. Do you imagine, that all are happy, who have attained to those summits of distinction, towards which your wishes aspire? Alas! how frequently has experienced shewed, that where roses were supposed to bloom, nothing but briars and thorns grew? Reputation, beauty, riches, grandeur, nay, royalty itself, would, many a time, have been gradually exchanged by the possessors, for that more quiet and humble station, with which you are now dissatisfied. With all that is splendid and shining in the world, it is decreed that there should mix many deep shades of woe. On the elevated situations of fortune, the great calamities of life chiefly fall. There the storm spends its violence, and there the thunder breaks; while safe and unhurt the inhabitant of the vale remains below.—Retreat, then, from those vain and pernicious excursions of extravagant desire. Satisfy yourselves with what is rational and attainable. Train your minds to moderate views of human life and human happiness. Remember and admire the wisdom of Agur's wish. *Remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.\**—Let me recommend,

II. MODERATION in our pursuits. Wishes and desires rest within. If immoderate and improper, though they taint the heart, yet society may not be affected by them. The obscure and harmless individual may indulge his dreams, without disturbing the public peace. But when the active pursuits in which we engage rise beyond moderation, they fill the world with great disorder; often with flagrant crimes. This admonition chiefly respects the ambitious men of the world. I say not that all ambition is to be condemned; or that high pursuits ought, on every occasion, to be checked. Some men are formed by nature, for rising into conspicuous stations of life. In following the impulse of their minds, and properly exerting the talents with which God has blessed them, there is room for ambition to act in a laudable sphere, and to become the instrument of much public good. But this may safely be pronounced, that the bulk of men are ready to over-rate their own abilities, and to imagine themselves equal to higher things than they were ever designed for by nature. Be sober, therefore, in fixing your aims, and planning your destined pursuits. Beware of being led aside from the plain path of sound and moderate conduct, by those false lights

\* Prov. xxx, 8, 9.

which self-flattery is always ready to hang out. By aiming at a mark too high, you may fall short of what it was within your power to have reached. Instead of attaining to eminence, you may expose yourselves to derision; nay, may bring upon your heads manifold disasters. *I say to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly.\**

Whatever your aims be, there is one exercise of moderation which must be enjoined to those of the greatest abilities, as well as to others; that is, never to transgress the bounds of moral duty. Amidst the warmth of pursuit, accustom yourselves to submit to the restraints, which religion and virtue, which propriety and decency, with regard to reputation and character, impose. Think not, that there are no barriers which ought to stop your progress. It is from a violent and impetuous spirit that all the evils spring, which are so often found to accompany ambition. Hence, in private life, the laws of truth and honour are violated. Hence, in public contests, the peace and welfare of nations have been so often sacrificed to the ambitious projects of the great. The man of moderation, as he is temperate in his wishes, so in his pursuits he is regulated by virtue. A good conscience is to him more valuable than any success. He is not so much bent on the accomplishment of any design, as to take a dishonourable step, in order to compass it. He can have patience. He can brook disappointments. He can yield to unsurmountable obstacles; and, by gentle and gradual progress, is more likely to succeed in the end, than others are, by violence and impetuosity. In his highest enterprise, he wishes not to have the appearance of a meteor, which fires the atmosphere; or of a comet, which astonishes the public by its blazing eccentric course; but rather to resemble those steady luminaries of Heaven, which advance in their orbits, with a silent and regular motion. He approves himself thereby to the virtuous, the wise, and discerning; and, by a temperate and unexceptionable conduct, escapes those dangers which persons of an opposite description are perpetually ready to incur.

III. BE moderate in your expectations. When your state is flourishing, and the course of events proceeds according to your wish, suffer not your minds to be vainly lifted up. Flatter not yourselves with high prospects of the increasing favours of the world, and the continuing applause of men. Say not within your hearts, *my mountain stands strong, and shall never be moved, I shall never see adversity. To-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundantly.*—You are betraying yourselves; you are laying a sure foundation of disappointment and misery

when you allow your fancy to soar to such lofty pinnacles of confident hope. By building your house in this airy region, you are preparing for yourselves a great and cruel fall. *Your trust is the spider's web. You may lean on your house: but it shall not stand. You may hold it fast; but it shall not endure.* For, to man on earth it was never granted, to gratify all his hopes; or to preserve in one tract of uninterrupted prosperity, Unpleasing vicissitudes never fail to succeed those that were grateful. *The fashion of the world, how gay or smiling soever, passeth, and often passeth suddenly, away.*

By want of moderation in our hopes, we not only increase dejection when disappointment comes, but we accelerate disappointment; we bring forward, with greater speed, disagreeable changes in our state. For the natural consequence of presumptuous expectation, is rashness in conduct. He who indulges confident security, of course neglects due precautions against the dangers that threaten him; and his fall will be foreseen and predicted. He not only exposes himself unguarded to dangers, but he multiplies them against himself. By presumption and vanity, he either provokes enmity or incurs contempt.

The arrogant mind, and the proud hope, are equally contrary to religion, and to prudence. The world cannot bear such a spirit; and Providence seldom fails to check it. The Almighty beholds with displeasure those who, intoxicated with prosperity forget their dependence on that Supreme Power which raised them up. His awful government of the world has been in nothing more conspicuous than in *bringing low the lofty looks of man, and scattering the proud in the imaginations of their minds.*—*Is not this the great Babylon which I have built by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?\** Thus exclaimed the presumptuous monarch in the pride of his heart. But lo! when the word was yet in his mouth, the visitation from Heaven came, and the voice was heard; *Oh Nebuchadnezzar! to thee it is spoken; thy kingdom is departed from thee.—He that exalteth himself, shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted.†* A temperate spirit, and moderate expectations, are the best safeguard of the mind in this uncertain and changing state. They enable us to pass through life with most comfort. When we rise in the world, they contribute to our elevation; and if we must fall, they render our fall the lighter.

IV. MODERATION in our pleasures is an important exercise of the virtue which we are now considering. It is an invariable law of our present condition, that every pleasure which is pursued to excess, converts itself into poison. What was intended for the cordial and refreshment of human life, through

\* Daniel, iv. 30, 31.

† Luke, xiv. 11.

want of moderation, we turn to its bane. In all the pleasures of sense, it is apparent, that, only when indulged within certain limits, they confer satisfaction. No sooner do we pass the line which temperance has drawn, than pernicious effects come forward and show themselves. Could I lay open to your view the monuments of death, they would read a lecture in favour of moderation, much more powerful than any that the most eloquent preacher can give. You would behold the graves peopled with the victims of intemperance. You would behold those chambers of darkness hung round, on every side, with the trophies of luxury, drunkenness, and sensuality. So numerous would you find those martyrs of iniquity, that it may safely be asserted, where war or pestilence have slain their thousands, intemperate pleasure has slain its ten thousands.

While the want of moderation in pleasure brings men to an untimely grave, at the same time, until they arrive there, it pursues and afflicts them with evils innumerable. To what cause so much as to this, are owing, faded youth, and premature old age; an enervated body, and an enfeebled mind; together with all that long train of diseases, which the indulgence of appetite and sense have introduced into the world? Health, cheerfulness, and vigour, are known to be the offspring of temperance. The man of moderation brings to all the natural and innocent pleasures of life, that sound, uncorrupted relish, which gives him a much fuller enjoyment of them, than the pallid and vitiated appetite of the voluptuary allows him to know. He culls the flower of every allowable gratification, without dwelling upon it until the flavour be lost. He tastes the sweet of every pleasure, without pursuing it till the bitter dregs rise. Whereas, the man of opposite character dips so deep, that he never fails to stir an impure and noxious sediment, which lies at the bottom of the cup.—In the pleasures, besides, which are regulated by moderation, there is always that dignity which goes along with innocence. No man needs to be ashamed of them. They are consistent with honour; with the favour of God, and of man. But the sensualist, who disdains all restraint in his pleasures, is odious in the public eye. His vices become gross; his character contemptible; and he ends in being a burden both to himself and to society. Let me exhort you once more,

V. To moderation in all your passions. This exercise of the virtue is the more requisite, because there is no passion in human nature but what has, of itself, a tendency to run into excess. For all passion implies a violent emotion of mind. Of course it is apt to derange the regular course of our ideas; and to produce confusion within. Nothing, at the same time, is more seducing than passion. During the time when it grows and swells, it constantly justifies to our apprehension, the tu-

mult which it creates, by means of a thousand false arguments which it forms, and brings to its aid. Of some passions, such as anger and resentment, the excess is so obviously dangerous, as loudly to call for moderation. He who gives himself up to the impetuosity of such passions, without restraint, is universally condemned by the world; and hardly accounted a man of sound mind. But, what is less apt to be attended to, some even of those passions which are reckoned innocent, or whose tendency to disorder and evil is not apparent, stand, nevertheless, in need of moderation and restraint, as well as others. For such is the feebleness of our nature, that every passion which has for its object any worldly good, is in hazard of attaching us too strongly, and of transporting us beyond the bounds of reason. If allowed to acquire the full and unrestrained dominion of the heart, it is sufficient, in various situations, to render us miserable; and almost in every situation, by its engrossing power, to render us negligent of duties which, as men or Christians, we are bound to perform.

Of the insidious growth of passion, therefore, we have great reason to beware. We ought always to have at hand considerations, which may assist us in tempering its warmth and in regaining possession of our souls. Let us be persuaded, that moments of passion are always moments of delusion; that nothing truly is, what it then seems to be; that all the opinions which we then form, are erroneous; and all the judgments which we pass, are extravagant. Let moderation accustom us to wait until the fumes of passion be spent; until the mist which it has raised begin to be dissipated. We shall then be able to see where truth and right lie; and reason shall, by degrees, resume the ascendant. On no occasion let us imagine, that strength of mind is shown by violence of passion. This is not the strength of men, but the impetuosity of children. It is the strength of one who is in the delirium of a fever, or under the disease of madness. The strength of such a person is indeed increased. But it is an unnatural strength; which being under no proper guidance, is directed towards objects that occasion his destruction. True strength of mind is shown in governing and resisting passion; not in giving it scope; in restraining the wild beast within; and acting on the most trying occasions, according to the dictates of conscience, and temperate reason.

Thus I have pointed out, in several instances, how moderation ought to be displayed: moderation in our wishes; moderation in our pursuits; moderation in our hopes; moderation in our pleasures; moderation in our passions. It is a principle which should habitually influence our conduct, and form the reigning temperature of the soul.

The great motive to this virtue is suggested by the words immediately following the text; *the Lord is at hand*. The Judge is coming, who is to close this temporary scene of things, and to introduce a higher state of existence. The day is at hand, which will place the great concerns of men in a point of view very different from that in which they are at present beheld; will strip the world of its false glory; will detect the vanity of earthly pursuits; and disclose objects which have the proper title to interest a rational mind. Objects acquire power to engage our passions only in proportion as they are conceived to be great. But great, or little, are no more than terms of comparison. Those things which appear great to one who knows nothing greater, will sink into a diminutive size, when he becomes acquainted with objects of a higher nature. Were it oftener in our thoughts, that *the Lord is at hand*, none of those things which now discompose and agitate worldly men, would appear of sufficient magnitude to raise commotion in our breasts. Enlarged views of the future destination of man, and of the place which he may hope to possess in an eternal world, naturally give birth to moderation of mind. They tend to cool all misplaced ardour about the advantages of this state; and to produce that calm and temperate frame of spirit, which becomes men and Christians. They give no ground for entire disregard of earthly concerns. While we are men, we must feel and act as such. But they afford a good reason why they who believe *the Lord to be at hand*, should let their *moderation* appear and be *known unto all men*.



## SERMON XLIII.

ON THE JOY, AND THE BITTERNESS OF THE HEART.

---

*The heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.*—PROVERBS, xiv. 10.

IT is well known, that men have always been much inclined to place their happiness in the advantages of fortune, and the distinctions of rank. Hence these have been pursued by the multitude with such avidity, that every principle of honour, probity, and virtue, have been sacrificed to the attainment of them. At the same time, many circumstances might have convinced men, that supposing them to be successful in the pursuit, it by no means followed that happiness was to be the reward. For if happiness be, in truth, essentially connected with splendid fortune, or exalted rank, how comes it to pass, that many, in the inferior stations of life, visibly spend their days with more comfort, than they who occupy the higher departments of the world? Why does the beggar sing, while the king is sad? A small measure of reflection on our nature might satisfy us, that there are other principles of happiness or misery, too often overlooked by the world, which immediately affect the heart, and operate there with greater force and power than any circumstances of rank or fortune. This is the observation of the wise man in the text; and what I now purpose to illustrate. I shall take a view of the chief sources of that *bitterness which the heart knoweth*, and of that *joy with which a stranger doth not intermeddle*; and then shall point out the proper improvements to be made of the subject.

If we enquire carefully into the sources of the joy or bitterness of the heart, we shall find that they are chiefly two: that they arise either from a man's own mind and temper; or, from the connection in which he stands with some of his fellow-creatures. In other words, the circumstances which most essen-

tially affect every man's happiness, are, his personal character and his social feelings.

I. EVERY man's own mind and temper is necessarily to himself a source of much inward joy or bitterness. For every man, if we may be allowed the expression, is more connected with himself, than with any external object. He is constantly a companion to himself in his own thoughts: and what he meets with there, must, of all things, contribute most to his happiness, or his disquiet. Whatever his condition in the world be, whether high or low, if he find no cause to upbraid himself for his behaviour; if he be satisfied that his conduct proceeds upon a rational plan; if, amidst the failings incident to humanity, his conscience be, in the main, free from reproach, and his mind undisturbed by any dismal presages of futurity; the foundation is laid for a placid and agreeable tenour of life. If to this you add a calm and cheerful temper, not easily fretted or disturbed, not subject to envy, nor prone to violent passion, much of that joy will be produced, which, it is said in the text, *a stranger intermeddleth not with*. For this is an intrinsic joy, independent of all foreign causes. *The upright man*, as it is written, *is satisfied from himself*. Undisturbed by the vexations of folly, or the remorse of guilt, his nights will be peaceful, and his days serene. His mind is a kingdom to itself. A good conscience, and good temper, prepare, even in the midst of poverty, *a continual feast*.

But how sadly will the scene be reversed, if the first thoughts which occur to a man concerning himself, shall be of a gloomy and threatening kind; if his temper, instead of calmness and self-enjoyment, shall yield him nothing but disquiet and painful agitation! In any situation of fortune, is it possible for him to be happy, whose mind is in this troubled state? *The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear?* Vigour of mind may enable a man to sustain many shocks of adversity. In his spirit, as long as it is sound, he can find a resource, when other auxiliaries fail. But if that which should sustain him be enfeebled and broken; if that to which he has recourse for the cure of other sorrows, become itself the wounded part; to what quarter can he turn for relief?

The wounds which the spirit suffers are owing chiefly to three causes: to folly, to passion, or to guilt. They frequently originate from folly; that is, from vain and improper pursuits, which, though not directly criminal, are unsuitable to a man's age, character, or condition, in the world. In consequence of these he beholds himself degraded and exposed; and suffers the pain of many a mortifying reflection, and many a humbling comparison of himself with others. The distress occasioned by a sense of folly, is aggravated by any violent passion being al-

lowed to take possession of the heart. Even though it be of the class of those which are reckoned innocent, yet if it have entirely seized and overpowered a man, it destroys his tranquillity, and brings his mind into a perturbed state. But if it be a passion of the black and vicious kind, it is sufficient to blast the most flourishing condition, and to poison all his joys. If to those wounds inflicted by folly, or by passion, you add the wound of guilt, the remorse and fear produced by criminal deeds, you fill up the measure of pain and bitterness of heart. Often have the terrors of conscience occasioned inward paroxysms, or violent agitations of mind. A dark and threatening cloud seems, to the conscious sinner, to be hanging over his head. He who believes himself despised, or hated, by men, and who dreads at the same time an avenging God, can derive little pleasure from the external comforts of life. The bitterness of his heart infuses itself into every draught which pleasure offers to his lips.

The external misfortunes of life, disappointments, poverty, and sickness, are nothing in comparison of those inward distresses of mind, occasioned by folly, by passion, and by guilt. They may indeed prevail in different degrees, according as one or other of those principles of bitterness is predominant. But they are seldom parted far asunder from one another; and when, as it too often happens, all the three are complicated, they complete the misery of man. The disorders of the mind, having then arisen to their height, become of all things the most dreadful. The shame of folly, the violence of passion, and the remorse of guilt, acting in conjunction, have too frequently driven men to the last and abhorred refuge, of seeking relief in death from a life too embittered to be any longer endured. I proceed to consider,

II. OTHER troubles and other joys of the heart, arising from sources different from those that I have now described; founded in the relations or connections which we have with others, and springing from the feelings which these occasion. Such causes of sorrow or joy are of an external nature. Religion does not teach that all the sources of inward pleasure or pain are derived from our temper and moral behaviour. These are indeed the principal springs of bitterness or joy. In one way or other, they affect all the pleasures and pains of life; but they include not, within themselves, the whole of them. Our Creator did not intend, that the happiness of each individual should have no dependence on those who are around him. Having connected us in society by many ties, it is his decree, that these ties should prove, both during their subsistence, and in their dissolution, causes of pleasure or pain, immediately, and often deeply, affecting the human heart. My doctrine, therefore, is not, that *the*

*bitterness which the heart knoweth as its own, and the joy with which a stranger intermeddleth not*, is independent of every thing external. What I assert is, that this *bitterness* and this *joy* depend much more on other causes, than on riches or poverty, on high or low stations in the world ; that equally in the conditions of elevated fortune and of private life, the most material circumstances of trouble or felicity, next to the state of our own mind and temper, are the sensations and affections which arise from the connections we have with others.

IN order to make this appear, let us suppose a man in any rank or condition of life, happy in his family and his friends ; soothed by the cordial intercourse of kind affections which he partakes with them ; enjoying the comfort of doing them good offices, and receiving in return their sincerest gratitude ; experiencing no jealousy nor envy, no disquiet or alienation of affection, among those with whom he is connected ;—how many, and how copious sources of inward joy open to such a man ! How smooth is the tenor of a life that proceeds in such a course ! What a smiling aspect does the love of parents and children, of brothers and sisters, of friends and relations, give to every surrounding object, and every returning day ! With what a lustre does it gild even the small habitation where such placid intercourse dwells ; where such scenes of heartfelt satisfaction succeed uninterruptedly to one another !

But let us suppose this joyful intercourse to be broken off, in an untimely hour, by the cruel hand of the last foe ; let us imagine the family, once so happy among themselves, to behold the parent, the child, or the spouse, to whom their hearts were attached by the tenderest ties, stretched on the cold bed of death ; then what bitterness does the heart know ! This, in the strictest sense, is its *own bitterness* ; from which it is not in the power of any external circumstance whatever to afford it relief. Amidst those piercing griefs of the heart, all ranks of life are levelled ; all distinctions of fortune are forgotten. Unavailing are the trophies of splendid woe with which riches deck the fatal couch, to give the least comfort to the mourner. The prince, and the peasant, then equally feel their own bitterness. Dwelling on the melancholy remembrance of joys that are past and gone, the one forgets his poverty, the other despises the gilded trappings of his state ; both, in that sad hour, are fully sensible, that on the favours of fortune it depends not to make man happy in this world.

But it is not only the death of friends, which, in the midst of a seemingly prosperous state, is able to bring distress home to the heart. From various failures in their conduct when living, arises much of the inward uneasiness we suffer. It will, in general, be found, that the behaviour of those among whom we

live in near connection, is, next to personal character and temper, the chief source either of the pleasures, or of the disquietudes, of every man's life. As when their behaviour is cordial and satisfactory, it is of all external things the most soothing to the mind; so, on the other hand, their levity, their inattention, or occasional harshness, even though it proceed to no decided breach of friendship, yet ruffles and frets the temper. Social life, harrassed with those petty vexations, resembles a road which a man is doomed daily to travel; but finds it rugged, and stony, and painful to be trod.

The case becomes much worse, if the base and criminal conduct of persons whom we have once loved, dissolve all the bonds of amity, and show that our confidence has been abused. Then are opened some of the deepest springs of bitterness in the human heart.—Behold the heart of the parent, torn by the unworthy behaviour and cruel ingratitude of the child, whom he had trained up with the fondest hopes; on whom he had lavished his whole affection; and for whose sake he had laboured and toiled, through the course of a long life. Behold the endearments of the conjugal state changed into black suspicion, and mistrust; the affectionate spouse, or the virtuous husband, left to mourn, with a broken heart, the infidelity of the once-beloved partner of their life. Behold the unsuspecting friend betrayed in the hour of danger, by the friend in whom he trusted; or in the midst of severe misfortune, meeting nothing but cold indifference, perhaps scorn and contempt, where he had expected to find the kindest sympathy.—Are these, let me ask, uncommon scenes in the world? Are such distresses peculiar to any rank or station? Do they chiefly befall persons in humble life, and have the great and prerogative which affords them exemption? When the heart is sorely wounded by the ingratitude or faithlessness of those on whom it had leaned with the whole weight of affection, where shall it turn for relief? Will it find comfort in the recollection of honours and titles, or in the contemplation of surrounding treasures!—Talk not of the honours of a court. Talk not of the wealth of the east. These, in the hours of heart-bitterness, are spurned, as contemptible and vile; perhaps cursed, as indirect causes of the present distress. The dart has made its way to the heart. There, there it is fixed. The very seat of feeling is assailed; and in proportion to the sensibility of the sufferer's heart, and the tenderness of his affections, such unfortunately, will be his degree of anguish. A good conscience, and hope in God, may indeed bring him consolation. But under such distresses of the heart, as I have described, fortune, be it as flourishing as you will, is no more than an empty pageant. It is a feeble reed, which affords no support. It is a house of straw, which is scattered before the wind.

THUS, you see this doctrine meeting us, from many quarters, that the heart knows a bitterness and joy of its own, altogether distinct from the uneasiness or the pleasure that is produced by the circumstances of external fortune; arising either from personal character, and the state of a man's own mind; or from the affections excited by the relations in which he stands to others. This joy and this bitterness are, each of them, of so much greater consequence than any distinctions of fortune, that, blessed with the former, one may be happy, as far as human happiness goes, in a cottage; and afflicted with the latter, he must be miserable in a palace.—Let us now proceed to an important part of the subject, the practical improvement to which this doctrine leads.

FIRST, Let it serve to moderate our passion for riches, and high situations in the world. It is well known, that the eager pursuit of these is the chief incentive to the crimes that fill the world. Hence, among the middle and lower ranks of men, all the fraud, falsehood, and treachery, with which the competition for gain infests society. Hence, in the higher stations of the world, all the atrocious crimes flowing from ambition, and the love of power, by which the peace of mankind has so often been broken, and the earth stained with blood. Had these coveted advantages the power, when obtained, of insuring joy to the heart, and rendering it a stranger to bitterness, some apology might be offered for the violence to which they have given occasion. The prize might be supposed worthy of being acquired at a high expense, when so much depended on the attainment. But I have shown, I hope with satisfactory evidence, that the contrary is the truth. I say not, that the advantages of fortune deserve no regard from a wise or a good man. Poverty is always distressing. Opulence and rank are both attended with many comforts, and may be rendered subservient to the most valuable purposes. But what I say is, that it is a great error to rate them beyond their just value. Secondary advantages, inferior assistances to felicity, they are, and no more. They rank below every thing that immediately affects the heart, and that is a native source of joy or bitterness there. If a man be either unhappy in his dispositions, or unhappy in all his connections, you heap upon him, in vain, all the treasures, and all the honours which kings can bestow. Divest these things, then, of that false glare which the opinions of the multitude throw around them. Contemplate them with a more impartial eye. Pursue them with less eagerness. Above all, never sacrifice to the pursuit any degree of probity or moral worth, of candour or good affection; if you would not lay a foundation for that bitterness of heart, which none of the goods of fortune can either compensate or cure.

SECONDLY, Let the observations which have been made, correct our mistakes, and check our complaints, concerning a supposed promiscuous distribution of happiness in this world. The charge of injustice, which so often, on this account, hath been brought against Providence, rests entirely on this ground, that the happiness and misery of men may be estimated by the degree of their external prosperity. This is the delusion under which the multitude have always laboured; but which a just consideration of the invisible springs of happiness that effect the heart is sufficient to correct. If you would judge whether a man be really happy, it is not solely to his houses and his lands, to his equipage and his retinue, you are to look. Unless you could see farther, and discern what joy, or what bitterness, his heart feels, you can pronounce nothing concerning him.— That proud and wicked man whom you behold surrounded with state and splendour, and upon whom you think the favours of Heaven so improperly lavished, may be a wretch, pining away in secret, with a thousand griefs unknown to the world. That poor man, who appears neglected and overlooked, may, in his humble station, be partaking of all the moral and all the social joys that exhilarate the heart; may be living cheerful, contented and happy. Cease then to murmur against dispensations of Providence, which are, to us, so imperfectly known. Envy not the prosperity of sinners. Judge not of the real condition of men, from what floats merely on the surface of their state. Let us rather,

THIRDLY, Turn our attention to those internal sources of happiness or misery, on which it hath been shown that so much depends. As far as the bitterness or joy of the heart arises from the first of those great springs which I assigned to it, our own conduct and temper, so far our happiness is placed, in some measure, in our own hands. What is amiss or disordered within, in consequence of folly, of passion, or guilt, may be rectified by due care, under the assistance of Divine grace. He who thereby attains to a tranquil and composed state of heart, free from ill humour and disgust, from violent passions, and from vexing remorse, is laying a foundation for enjoyment of himself, much surer and broader than if he were amassing thousands to increase his estate.

With regard to the other spring of joy or bitterness of heart, arising from our connections with others, here, indeed, we are more dependent on things not within our power. These connections are not always of our own forming; and even when they have been formed by choice, the wisest are liable to be disappointed in their expectations. Yet here to it will be found, that the proper regulation of the heart is of the utmost impor-

tance, both for improving the joys which our situation affords, and for mitigating the griefs which our connections may render unavoidable. As far as the choice of friends or relatives depends on ourselves, let their virtue and worth ever direct that choice, if we look for any lasting felicity from it. In all the habits and attachments of social life, after they are formed, let it be our study, to fulfil properly our own part. Let nothing be wanting on our side, to nourish that mutual harmony and affectionate friendship which, in every situation of life, has been shown, is of so great consequence to our peace and satisfaction. It is not, indeed, in our power to preserve always alive those friends, in whom our hearts delight. It is often not in our power to prevent the ingratitude and unworthy behaviour of other friends, from whom we once expected comfort. But under those afflictive incidents of life, much may be done by proper employment of the thoughts, and direction of the affections, for obtaining relief. To a purified and well regulated heart, reason and religion can bring many aids for healing its wounds and restoring its peace; aids which, to the negligent and vicious, are wholly unknown. The greater experience we have of the vicissitudes of human life, with more weight will that precept of the wise man always come home to our remembrance; *keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*\*—Hence arises,

IN the fourth and last place, another instruction, that is, of the utmost importance to us all, frequently to look up to Him who made the human heart; and to implore his assistance in the regulation and government of it. Known to him are all the sources of bitterness and joy by which it is affected. On him it depends, to let them forth, or to shut them up; to increase, or to diminish them at his pleasure. In a study so infinitely important to happiness, as that of the preservation of inward peace, we cannot be too earnest in beseeching aid from the great Father of Spirits, to enable us to keep our hearts free from distress and trouble.—Besides the assistance which we may hope to derive from Divine grace, the employments of devotion themselves form one of the most powerful means of composing and tranquillising the heart. On various occasions, when the sources of heart-bitterness have been most overflowing, devotion has been found the only refuge of the sufferer. Devotion opens a sanctuary, to which they whose hearts have been most deeply wounded, can always fly. Within that quiet and sacred retreat, they have often found a healing balsam prepared. when grieved by men, they have derived, from the ascent of the mind towards God and celestial objects, much to sooth them at present, and much to hope

\* Prov. iv. 23.



for in future. Let us, therefore, neglect no mean with which religion can furnish us, for promoting the joys, and assuaging the bitterness, of the heart. Amidst the frailties of our nature, the inconstancy of men, and the frequent changes of human life, we shall find every assistance that can be procured, little enough, for enabling us to pass our few days with tolerable comfort and peace.

## SERMON XLIV.

### ON CHARACTERS OF IMPERFECT GOODNESS

---

*Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him.*—MARK, x. 21.

THE characters of men which the world presents to us are infinitely diversified. In some, either the good or the bad qualities are so predominant as strongly to mark the character; to discriminate one person as a virtuous, another as a vicious man. In others these qualities are so mixed together, as to leave the character doubtful. The light and the shade are so much blended, the colours of virtue and vice run in such a manner into one another, that we can hardly distinguish where the one ends, and the other begins; and we remain in suspense whether to blame or to praise. While we admire those who are thoroughly good, and detest the grossly wicked, it is proper also to bestow attention on those imperfect characters, where there may be much to praise, and somewhat to blame; and where regard to the commendable part shall not hinder us from remarking what is defective or faulty. Such attentions will be found the more useful, as characters of this mixed sort are, more frequently than any other, exhibited to us in the commerce of society.

It was one of this sort, which gave occasion to the incident recorded in the text. The incident seems to have been considered as remarkable, since it is recounted by three of the evangelical writers; and by them all, with nearly the same circumstances. The person to whom the history relates was a *ruler*; one of higher rank and station than those who usually resorted to Jesus. He was a *rich man*: He was a *young man*. His whole behaviour was prepossessing and engaging. He appears to have conceived a high opinion of our Lord. He addressed him with the utmost respect; and the question which he put to him was proper and important. *He kneeled to him, and said,*

*good master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?* His conduct in the world had been regular and decent. He could protest, that he had hitherto kept himself free from any gross vice; and in his dealings with others, had observed the precepts of God. Our Lord, *beholding him*, is said to have *loved him*; whence we have reason to conclude, that he was not hypocritical in his professions; and that his countenance carried the expression of good dispositions, as his speech and his manners were altogether complacent and gentle. Yet this person, amiable as he was, when his virtue was put to the test, disappointed the hopes which he had given reason to form. Attached, in all probability, to the indulgence of ease and pleasure, he wanted fortitude of mind to part with the advantages of the world, for the sake of religion. When our Lord required him to fulfil his good intentions, by relinquishing his fortune, becoming one of his followers, and preparing himself to encounter sufferings, the sacrifice appeared to him too great. Impressions of virtue, however, still remained on his mind. He was sensible of what he ought to have done; and regretted his want of courage to do it. *He was sorrowful: He was grieved: Yet he went away.*

PERSONS of a character somewhat resembling this, all of us may have met with; especially among the young; among those who have been liberally educated, and polished by a good society. They abhor open vice, and crimes that disturb the world. They have a respect for religion. They are willing to receive instruction for their conduct. They are modest and unassuming; respectful to their superiors in age or station; gentle in their address; inoffensive and courteous in their whole behaviour. They are fond of obliging every one; unwilling to hurt or displease any.—Such persons we cannot but love. We gladly promise well of them; and are disposed to forward and assist them; yet such is the weakness of our nature, that at the bottom of this character there may lie, as we see exemplified in the instance before us, some secret and material defects. That vigour of mind, that firmness of principle, may be wanting, which is requisite for enabling them to act with propriety, when their virtue is put to a decisive trial. The softness of their nature is unfavourable to a steady perseverance in the course of integrity. They possess the amiable qualities; but there is ground to suspect, that in the estimable ones they are deficient. While, therefore, we by no means class them among the bad, we dare not give them the full praise of virtue. When they set out in the world, we cannot pronounce with confidence, what confirmed features their character will assume; nor how far they can be depended upon in future life. Allow me now to point out the dangers which such persons are most likely to incur; and to

shew what is requisite for them farther to study, in order to their fulfilling the part of good men and true Christians.

I. PERSONS of this description are not qualified for discharging aright many duties, to which their situation in life may call them. In certain circumstances, they behave with abundance of propriety. When all is calm and smooth around them; when nothing occurs to agitate the mind, or to disturb the tenor of placid life, none of their defects come forward. They are beloved, and they are useful. They promote the comfort of human society; and, by gentleness and courtesy of manners, serve to cement men together in agreeable union. But to sail on the tranquil surface of an unruffled lake, and to steer a safe course through a troubled and stormy ocean, require different talents: and alas! human life oftener resembles the stormy ocean, than the unruffled lake. We shall not have been long embarked, without finding the resemblance to hold too closely.

Amidst the bustle of the world, amidst the open contentions and secret enmities which prevail, in every society, mildness and gentleness alone are not sufficient to carry us with honour through the duties of our different stations; as heads of families, citizens, subjects, magistrates, or as engaged in the pursuits of our several callings. Disturbances and trials arise, which demand vigorous exertions of all the moral powers; of patience, vigilance, and self-denial; of constancy and fortitude, to support us under danger and reproach; of temperance, to restrain us from being carried away by pleasure; of firm and determined principle, to make us despise the bribes of sin. These manly dispositions of mind are indispensably necessary to prepare one for surmounting the discouragements of virtue, and for struggling honourably through the hardships of life. Unless he be thus armed and fortified, whatever good intentions have been in his heart, they are likely to be frustrated in action. Nothing that is great, can be undertaken. Nothing that is difficult or hazardous, can be accomplished. Nor are we to imagine, that it is only in times of persecution or war, or civil commotions, that there is occasion for those stronger efforts, those masculine virtues of the soul, to be displayed. The private, and seemingly quiet stations of life, often call men forth, in the days of peace, to severe trial of firmness and constancy. The life of very few proceeds in so uniform a train, as not to oblige them to discover, in some situation or other, what proportion they possess of the estimable qualities of man. Hence it sometimes happens, that persons whose manners were much less promising and engaging than those of others, have, nevertheless, when brought to act a part in critical circumstances, performed that part with more unsullied honour and firmer integrity than they.

II. PERSONS of the character I have described are ill fitted, not only for discharging the higher duties of life, but also for resisting the common temptations to vice. With good dispositions in their mind, with a desire, like the young ruler, in the text, to know what they shall do in order *to inherit eternal life* ; yet when the terms required of them interfere with any favourite enjoyment, like him, they *are sorrowful, and go away*. The particular trial to which he was put, may appear to be a hard one, and to exceed the ordinary rate of virtue. Our Lord, who discerned his heart, saw it to be necessary, in his case, for bringing his character to the test. But in cases, where trials of much less difficulty present themselves, they who partake of a character similar to his, are often found to give way. The good qualities which they possess, border on certain weaknesses of the mind ; and these weaknesses are apt to betray them insensibly into vices with which they are connected.

Good nature, for instance, is in danger of running into that unlimited complaisance, which assimilates men to the loose manners of those whom they find around them. Pliant and yielding in their temper, they have not force to stand by the decisions of their own minds, with regard to right and wrong. Like the animal which is said to assume the colour of every object to which it is applied, they lose all proper character of their own ; and are formed by the characters of those with whom they chance to associate. The mild are apt to sink into habits of indolence and sloth. The cheerful and gay, when warmed by pleasure and mirth, lose that sobriety and self-denial, which is essential to the support of virtue.—Even modesty and submission, qualities so valuable in themselves, and so highly ornamental to youth, sometimes degenerate into a vicious timidity ; a timidity which restrains men from doing their duty with firmness ; which cannot stand the frown of the great, the reproach of the multitude, or even the ridicule and sneer of the scorner.

Nothing can be more amiable than a constant desire to please, and an unwillingness to offend or hurt. Yet in characters where this is a predominant feature, defects are often found. Fond always to oblige, and afraid to utter any disagreeable truth, such persons are sometimes led to dissemble. Their love of truth is sacrificed to their love of pleasing. Their speech, and their manners assume a studied courtesy. You cannot always depend on their smile ; nor, when they promise, be sure of the performance. They mean and intend well. But the good intention is temporary. Like wax, they yield easily to every impression ; and the transient friendship contracted with one person, is effaced by the next. Undistinguishing desire to oblige, often proves, in the present state of human things, a dangerous habit. They who cannot, on many occasions, give a firm and steady denial, or

who cannot break off a connection which has been hastily and improperly formed, stand on the brink of many mischiefs. They will be seduced by the corrupting, ensnared by the artful, betrayed by those in whom they had placed their trust. Unsuspicious themselves, they were flattered with the belief of having many friends around them. Elated with sanguine hopes, and cheerful spirits, they reckoned, that *to-morrow would be as this day, and more abundant*. Injudicious liberality, and thoughtless profusion, are the consequence; until in the end, the straits to which they are reduced, bring them into mean or dishonourable courses. Through innocent, but unguarded weakness, and from want of the severer virtues, they are, in process of time, betrayed into downright crimes. Such may be the conclusion of those, who, like the young ruler before us, with many amiable and promising dispositions, had begun their career in life.

III. SUCH persons are not prepared for sustaining, with propriety and dignity, the distresses to which our state is liable. They were equipped for the season of sunshine and serenity; but when the sky is overcast, and the days of darkness come, their feeble minds are destitute of shelter, and ill provided for defence. Then is the time, when more hardy qualities are required; when courage must face danger, constancy support pain, patience possess itself in the midst of discouragements, magnanimity display itself in contempt of threatenings. If those high virtues be altogether strangers to the mind, the mild and gentle will certainly sink under the torrent of disasters.—The ruler in the text could plead, that his behaviour to others, in the course of social life, had been unexceptionable. So far, the reflection on his conduct would afford him comfort amidst adversity. But no man is without failings. In the dejecting season of trouble it will occur to every one, that he has been guilty of frequent transgression; that much of what ought to have been done, was neglected; and that much of what has been done, had better have been omitted. In such situations, when a thousand apprehensions arise to alarm conscience, nothing is able to quiet its uneasiness, except a well-grounded trust in the mercy and acceptance of Heaven. It is firm religious principle, acting upon a manly and enlightened mind, that gives dignity to the character, and composure to the heart, under all the troubles of the world. This enables the brave and virtuous man, with success to buffet the storm. While he, who had once sparkled in society with all the charms of gay vivacity and had been the delight of every circle in which he was engaged, remains dispirited, overwhelmed, and annihilated, in the evil day.

SUCH are the failings incident to persons of mixed and imperfect goodness; such the defects of a character formed merely of the amiable, without the estimable qualities of man.

It appears from this, that we must not place too much trust in the fair appearances, which a character may at first exhibit. In judging of others, let us always think the best, and employ the spirit of charity and candour. But in judging of ourselves, we ought to be more severe. Let us remember him whom our Lord beheld, and *loved*; and who yet fell short of the kingdom of Heaven. Let us not forget, that something more than gentleness and modesty, than complacency of temper and affability of manners, is requisite to form a worthy man or a true Christian. To a high place in our esteem, these qualities are justly entitled. They enter essentially into every good man's character. They form some of its most favourable distinctions. But they constitute a part of it; not the whole. Let us not, therefore, rest on them entirely, when we conceive an idea of what manner of persons we ought to be.

LET piety form the basis of firm and established virtue. If this be wanting, the character cannot be sound and entire. Moral virtue will always be endangered, often be overthrown, when it is separated from its surest support. Confidence in God, strengthened by faith in the great Redeemer of mankind, not only amidst the severer trials of virtue, gives constancy to the mind; but, by nourishing the hope of immortality, adds warmth and elevation to the affections. They whose conduct is not animated by religious principle, are deprived of the most powerful incentive to worthy and honourable deeds.

Let such discipline, next, be studied as may form us to the active and manly virtues. To natural good affections, we can never entirely trust our conduct. These, as has been shewn, may sometimes be warped into what is wrong; and often will prove insufficient for carrying us rightly through all the duties of life. Good affections are highly valuable; but they must be supported by fixed principles, cultivated in the understanding, and rooted in the heart. Habits must be acquired of temperance and self-denial, that we may be able to resist pleasure, and endure pain, when either of them interfere with our duty, that we may be prepared to make a sacrifice of any worldly interest, when the voice of God and conscience demand it. Let us always remember, that without fortitude of mind, there is no manhood; there can be no perseverance in virtue. Let a sacred and inviolable regard for truth reign in our whole behaviour. Let us be distinguished for fidelity to every promise we have made; and for constancy in every worthy friendship we have formed. Let no weak complaisance, no undue regard to the opinions of men, ever make us betray the rights of conscience. What we have once, upon due consideration, adopted as rules of conduct, to these let us adhere unshaken. However the world may change around us, let it find us the same in prosperity and adversity;

faithful to God and virtue; faithful to the convictions of our own heart. What our lot in the world may be, is not ours to foresee or determine. But it is ours to resolve, that, whatever it shall be, it shall find us persevering in one line of uprightness and honour.

By such discipline, such attentions as these, we are to guard against those failings, which are sometimes found to stain the most engaging characters. Joining in proper union the aimable and the estimable qualities, by the one we shall attract the good, and by the other, command respect from the bad. We shall both secure our own integrity, and shall exhibit to others a proper view of what virtue is, in its native grace and majesty. In one part of our character, we shall resemble the flower that smiles in spring; in another, the firmly rooted tree, that braves the winter storm. For, remember we must, that there is a season of winter, as well as of spring and summer, in human life; and it concerns us to be equally prepared for both.

A HIGHER and more perfect example of such a character as I now recommend, cannot be found, than what is presented to us in the life of Jesus Christ. In him we behold all that is gentle, united with all that it is respectable. It is a remarkable expression, which the Apostle Paul employs concerning him; *I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.*\* Well might these qualities be singled out, as those for which he was known and distinguished. We see him in his whole behaviour affable, courteous, and easy of access. He conversed familiarly with all who presented themselves; and despised not the meanest. With all the infirmities of his disciples he calmly bore; and his rebukes were mild, when their provocations were great. He wept over the calamities of his country, which persecuted him; and apologised and prayed for them who put him to death. Yet the same Jesus we behold, awful in the strictness of his virtue, inflexible in the cause of truth; uncomplying with prevailing manners, when he found them corrupt; setting his face boldly against the hypocritical leaders of the people; overawed by none of their threatenings; in the most indignant terms reproving their vices and stigmatizing their characters. We behold him gentle, without being tame; firm, without being stern; courageous without being violent. *Let this mind be in us which was also in Jesus Christ*; and we shall attain to honour, both with God and with man.

\* 2 Cor. x 1.



## SERMON XLV.

### ON THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER, AS A PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

---

*But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*—MATTHEW., xxvi. 29.

With these words of our blessed Lord the Evangelist concludes his account of the institution of the Sacrament of the Supper. It is an institution which, solemn and venerable in itself, is rendered still more so by the circumstances which accompanied it. Our Lord had now, for about three years, continued to appear in his public character, in the land of Judea. He had, all along, been watched with a jealous eye, by his enemies; and the time was come, when they were to prevail against him. A few friends he had, from the beginning, selected, who, in every vicissitude of his state, remained faithfully attached to him. With these friends he was now meeting for the last time on the very evening in which he was betrayed and seized. He perfectly knew all that was to befall him. He knew that this was the last meal in which he was to join with those who had been the companions of all his labours, the confidants of all his griefs; among whom he had passed all the quiet and private moments of his life. He knew that within a few hours he was to be torn from this loved society, by a band of ruffians; and by to-morrow, was to be publicly arraigned as a malefactor. With a heart melting with tenderness, he said to the twelve Apostles, as he sat down with them at table, *With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.\** And then, having gratified himself for the

\* Luke, xxii. 15.

last time in their society, and having instituted that commemoration of his death, which was to continue in the Christian church until the end of ages, he took a solemn and affectionate farewell of his friends, in the words of the text; *I say unto you, that I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*

As these words were uttered by our Lord, in the prospect of his sufferings; when preparing himself for death, and looking forward to a future meeting with his friends in Heaven; let us, under this view, consider the sacrament, which he then instituted, as a preparation for all the sufferings of life, and, especially, a preparation for death. It is fit and proper, that such solemn prospects should enter into the service which we are this day to perform. We have no reason to imagine, that they will render it a gloomy service. A good and wise man is often disposed to look forward to the termination of life. The number of our days is determined by God; and certainly it will not tend to shorten their number, that we employ ourselves in preparing for death. On the contrary, while our days last, it will tend to make us pass them more comfortably, and more wisely. Let us now, then, as for the last time we were to partake of this sacrament, consider how it may serve to prepare us for the dying hour.

I. IT is a high exercise of all those dispositions and affections, in which a good man would wish to die. He would surely wish to leave this world, in the spirit of devotion towards God, and of fellowship and charity with all his brethren on earth. Now these are the very sentiments which the sacrament of the Lord's Supper inspires into the heart of every pious communicant. It includes the highest acts of devotion of which human nature is capable. It imports a lively sense of the infinite mercies of Heaven; of the gratitude we owe to that God who, by the death of his Son, hath restored the forfeited happiness and hopes of the human race. It imports the consecration of the soul to God; the entire resignation of ourselves, and all our concerns, into his hands; as to the God whom we serve and love; the guardian in whom we confide. *To thee, Oh Lord, do I lift up my soul. I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy. I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy; and in thy fear I will worship towards thy holy temple.\**

These devout affections towards God are, on this occasion, necessarily accompanied with benevolent dispositions towards men. Our communion is not only with God, but with one another. In this solemn service, the distinction of ranks is abolished. We assemble in common before our great Lord, professing

\* Psalm xliii. 4. v. 7.

ourselves to be all members of his family, and children of the same Father. No feud, nor strife, nor enmity is permitted to approach the sacred table. All within that hallowed space breathes peace, and concord, and love. *If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.\** What can be more becoming men and Christians, than such sentiments of piety to the great Father of the universe; gratitude to the merciful Redeemer of mankind; and charity and forgiveness towards all our brethren? Is not this the temper in which a good man would wish to live; more especially is not this the frame of mind which will give both dignity and peace to his last moments? How discomposed and embittered will these important moments prove, if, with a mind soured by the remembrance of unforgiven injuries, with a breast rankled by enmity, with a heart alienated from God, and insensible to devotion, one be forced away from life?

CONTEMPLATE the manner in which our blessed Lord died; which the service of this day brings particularly into your view. You behold him, amidst the extremity of pain, calm and collected within himself; possessing his spirit with all the serenity which sublime devotion and exalted benevolence inspire. You hear him, first, lamenting the fate of his unhappy country; next, when he was fastened to the cross, addressing words of consolation to his afflicted parent; and, lastly, sending up prayers mixed with compassionate apologies for those who were shedding his blood. After all those exercises of charity, you behold him, in an act of devout adoration and trust, resigning his breath: *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*—Can any death be pronounced unhappy, how distressful soever its circumstances may be, which is thus supported and dignified? What could we wish for more in our last moments, than with this peaceful frame of mind, this calm of all the affections, this exaltation of heart towards God, this diffusion of benevolence towards men, to bid adieu to the world?

If, in such a spirit as this, we would all wish to die, let us think that now is the time to prepare for it, by seasonably cultivating this spirit while we live; by imbibing, in particular, from the holy sacrament, those dispositions and affections which we would wish to possess at our latest period. It is altogether vain to imagine, that when the hour of death approaches, we shall be able to form ourselves into the frame of mind which is then most proper and decent. Amidst the struggles of nature, and under the load of sickness or pain, it is not time for unac-

\* Matthew, v. 23, 24.

customed exertions to be made, or for new reformations to be begun. *Sufficient*, and more than sufficient. *for that day is the evil thereof.* It will be too late to assume then the hero, or the saint, if we have been totally unacquainted with the character before. The sentiments we would display, and the language we would utter, will be alien and strange to us. They will be forced and foreign to the heart. It is only in consequence of habits acquired in former and better days, that a temper of piety and charity can grow up into such strength as to confer peace and unanimity on the concluding hours of life. Peculiarly favourable to the acquisition of such a temper, are the devotions of this day. In this view let us perform them; and study to be, at the table of the Lord, what we would wish to be when the summons of death shall come.

II. THIS sacrament becomes a preparation for death, by laying a foundation for peace with God. What is important at the close of life, is not only the temper in which we leave the world, but the situation in which we stand with respect to that great Judge before whom we are about to appear. This view of our situation is apt to escape us during the ordinary course of life. Occupied with the affairs and concerns of this world; flattered by those illusive colours of innocence and virtue, in which self-love dresses up our character, apprehensions of guilt create little uneasiness to the multitude of men. But, on the approach of death, their ideas change. As the inquisition of the Supreme Judge draws nigh, remembered transgressions crowd upon the mind. Guilt becomes strongly realized to the imagination; and alarms, before unknown, begin to arise. Hence that anxiety in the prospect of a future invisible world, which is so often seen to attend the bed of death. Hence these various methods which superstition has devised for quieting this anxiety; the trembling mind eagerly grasping every feeble plank on which it can lay hold, and flying for protection to the most unavailing aid. The stoutest spirits have been then known to bend; the proudest hearts to be humbled. They who are now most thoughtless about their spiritual concerns, may, perhaps, be in this state before they die.

The dispensation of grace discovered in the Gospel, affords the only remedy against those terrors, by the promise of pardon, extended to the penitent, through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the very essence of this sacrament, to exhibit this promised grace to mankind; *My body which was broken for you; my blood shed for many, for the remission of sins.* Here shines from above, the ray of hope. Divine justice, we are assured, is not inexorable. Divine mercy is accessible to all who believe and repent. The participation of this sacrament therefore, naturally imparts comfort to the worthy communicant; as

it supposes, on his part, a cordial compliance with those terms, on which pardon is offered by the Gospel to mankind.

I mean not to say, that the participation of this sacrament how pious and proper soever our dispositions at that time may be, is, of itself, sufficient to insure us of comfort at death. It were unwarrantable to flatter Christians with hopes to this extent. No single act of the most fervent devotion can afford assured hopes of peace with Heaven, until these hopes be confirmed by the succeeding tenor of a good life. But what may safely be asserted is, that communicating in a proper manner makes way for such hopes. It is an introduction to that state of reconciliation with God, which will give you peace in death. It is the beginning of a good course, which, if duly pursued, will make your latter end blessed. It is the entrance of *the path of the just*; the morning of that *light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day*. For this holy sacrament is a professed renunciation of the vices and corruptions of the world. It is a professed dereliction of former evil habits; a solemn return, on our part, to God and virtue, under the firm trust that God will, through Jesus Christ, shew mercy to the frailties of the penitent. If you continue to support the character which you this day assume, the invisible world will no longer present to you a scene of terrors. You will be comforted with the view of goodness and compassion, as predominant in the administration of the universe. After having finished a virtuous course, you will be able to look up to that God whom you have worshipped, and to say, *I know in whom I have trusted. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff shall comfort me.*

III. THIS sacrament prepares us for a happy death, by strengthening the connection between Christians and Christ their Saviour. This is a connection which, in various ways, redounds to their benefit; and will be found particularly consolatory at the hour of death. The awful Majesty of Heaven is in danger of overwhelming the mind, in the feeble moment of departing life. The reverence it inspires is mingled with sensations of dread, which might be too strong for us then to bear. When we look up to it, through a Mediator and Intercessor, that Majesty assumes a milder aspect, and appears to invite our approach. Whatever, therefore, forms a connection with this great Mediator, this powerful friend and patron of the human race, must be most desirable to every one, especially to the dying man. Now, this sacrament unites us closely with him. It is the oath of our allegiance. It is the act of enlisting ourselves under the banner of this Divine Leader. Of course it strengthens our faith in him, as our guide through life, and our guardian and protector in death. It gives us a title to look up to

him under the confidence of that reciprocal engagement, which fidelity on the one hand is always understood to imply, of protection on the other.

His participation of our nature conveys a degree of encouragement, which we could derive from no being altogether celestial, how gracious or benign soever. In our utmost extremity, we can have recourse to his sympathizing aid, who had experience both of the distresses of life, and of the terrors of death.— We behold in the text, with what firm tranquillity he looked forward to his approaching sufferings. Sincere attachment to our great Master, may be expected to infuse into us some degree of the same happy composition of mind. It is owing to our losing out of view this perfect model; to our following the crowd, and adopting the common spirit of the world, that we become mean spirited and base; servilely attached to life, and afraid to die. Did we, according to our engagements at the Lord's table, keep our eye fixed on our Divine Leader, and study to follow his steps, a portion of his spirit would descend upon us at the hour of death. It would be as the mantle of Elijah, falling on a chosen disciple; and would enable us, as it did Elisha of old, to smite and divide the waters.— We believe our Saviour now to rule in the world of spirits. The grave, therefore, bars not his followers from access to him. In the grave, for our sake, he once lay down, that he might dispel the gloom which appears to us to cover that formidable mansion. In a short time, he rose from it, in order to assure us, that the dark and narrow house was not to confine his followers for ever. By his death, he conquered death, and him that had the power of it; and his voice to us is, *Because I live, ye shall live also.* Hence, as long as we preserve that attachment to him which we this day profess, we are furnished with a variety, of considerations proper for supporting us in the prospect of our dissolution. This leads me to observe,

IV. THAT the sacrament of which we are to partake, prepares us for death, by confirming and enlivening our hope of immortality. In this sacrament, my friends, you act for both worlds. As inhabitants of the earth, you are on this day to look forward, with care to your future behaviour in it. For you are not, by any means, disengaging yourselves totally from this life and its concerns. On the contrary, you are forming, and even strengthening, those connections, which virtue requires you to maintain with your friends and fellow-creatures around you.— At the same time, you are not to consider yourselves as citizens of earth only, but also as citizens of Heaven. You are to recognize, on this occasion, your relation to a higher and better country, with which you are connected by the most sacred ties; and from which you derive those comforts and hopes that will both

purify your life, and render your death happy. The sacrament of the supper is, in this view, an ascent of the mind above terrestrial things. At the Lord's table we associate ourselves, in some degree, with spirits of a more exalted order. We declare, that we are tending towards their society; and have fixed our final rest within the veil. This view of the institution, so comfortable to the last period of life, is plainly given us in the words of the text. For it is worthy of particular observation, that as soon as our Lord had instituted this sacrament, he straightway leads the thoughts of his disciples to a state of future existence. Employing that metaphorical style, which the occasion naturally suggested, he tells them, that though he was not henceforth to drink of the fruit of the vine on earth, yet a day was coming, when he was again to drink it *with them*; to drink it, *in his Father's kingdom*. Two distinct ideas are, in these words, presented unto us. One is, the abode into which our Saviour was to remove; *his Father's kingdom*. The other, the society which he was there to enjoy; *with you in my Father's kingdom*. These correspond to the two views under which death is most formidable to men; both of which he intended to banish, by the institution of this sacrament: first, that death is a transition to a new and unknown world; and next, that it is a final separation from all the friends whom we have loved on earth.

FIRST: if death terminates our existence here, the abode to which it translates the faithful followers of Christ, is the kingdom of his Father. The institution of this sacrament dispels all the gloomy ideas of annihilation, of non-existence, of total darkness, which our imagination is ready to associate with the grave. We are here assured, that to good men, death is not the close of being, but a change of state; a removal, from a distant and obscure province of the universe, into the city of God, the chief seat of their Father's kingdom. They have every reason to believe, that the objects which are to meet them there, how new and unknown soever, shall all be propitious and friendly. For into the kingdom of his Father, their Lord has declared that he has entered as their *forerunner*. *I go to my Father, and your Father; to my God and your God. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.* What reasonings, what speculations, can have power to impart so much peace to the dying man, as a promise so direct and explicit, coming from him, who is truth itself, and cannot lie. *If it were not so, I would have told you.\** The prospect becomes still more cheering and relieving, when we include,

\* John, xiv. 2.

THE other circumstances mentioned in the text; the society to be enjoyed in that future state of being. *With you I shall drink of the fruit of the vine in my Father's kingdom.*— In how amiable a light does our Saviour here appear, looking forward to a future re-union with those beloved friends, whom he was now leaving, as to a circumstance which should increase both his own felicity and theirs, when they met again in a happier world! Thus, in the most affectionate manner, cheering their drooping and dejected spirits; and by a similar prospect providing for the comfort of his followers in future generations, when they shall be about to leave the world.

The expressions in the text plainly suggest a joyful intercourse among friends, who had been separated by death, and therefore seem to give much confirmation, to what has always been a favourite hope of good men; that friends shall know and recognize each other, and renew their former connections, in a future state of existence. How many pleasing prospects does such an intimation open to the mind! How much does it tend to compensate the vanity of life, and to mitigate the sorrows of death! For it is not to be denied, that one of the most bitter circumstances attending death is, the final separation from beloved friends. This is apt equally to wring the hearts of the dying, and the surviving; and it is an anguish of that sort, which descends most deeply into the virtuous and worthy breast. When surrounded with an affectionate family, and weeping friends, a good man is taking his last adieu of all whom he held most dear on earth; when, with a feeble voice, he is giving them his blessing, before he leaves them for ever; when, for the last time, he beholds the countenance, he touches the hand, he hears the voice, of the person nearest his heart; who could bear this bitterness of grief, if no support were to be ministered by religious hope? If there were no voice to whisper to our spirits, that hereafter we, and those whom we love, shall meet again in a more blissful land?—What higher view can possibly be given, of the benefit redounding from this divine institution, than its affording us consolation in such situations of extreme distress, by realizing to our souls the belief of an immortal state, in which all the virtuous and worthy shall be re-united in the presence of their common Lord?

THUS I have set before you many considerations, arising from the sacrament of our Lord's supper, which render it a proper preparation not only for a good life, but for a comfortable and happy death. The great improvement to be made of the subject is, to bring to the altar of God such dispositions of heart, as may give us ground to hope for this blessed effect. Let us approach to the sacrament with the same seriousness of frame,



as if it were the last time we were ever to partake of it; as if we were now making provision for a journey to that land whence none return; as if we were never to *drink*, in this manner, *of the fruit of the vine, until that day when we drink it* with those whom we have loved *in our Father's kingdom*.—God only knows to whom this may be truly spoken! God knows who, of this assembly, shall never have opportunity to approach again to the sacred table, and to meet with their brethren, on such an occasion, in the courts of the Lord's house!—Whatever our doom is to be, whether we are appointed for life or for death, such is the frame of mind which now best becomes, and will most improve us in partaking of the holy sacrament.

LET me caution you, before I conclude, against judging of the propriety of your disposition in this solemn act of worship, solely by the warmth of your affections and the fervour of your devotion. This state of heart, how desirable soever it may be, cannot be at all times possessed. It depends in some measure on natural sensibility. All are not equally endowed with warm and tender feelings. Even they who are susceptible of the highest degrees of pious and virtuous sensibility, cannot, on every occasion, command that happy temperature of mind. We are not, therefore, to judge unfavourably of ourselves, if this be not always the privilege of our devotions. It is chiefly a sedate and composed frame of spirit, that we must study to cultivate; arising from grave and sober thoughts; from serious and penitent recollection of past errors; from good purposes for the future; and from a deep sense of the approaching events of death and immortality. Penetrated with such dispositions, you have ground to come to the altar of God with humble trust and joy; under the belief, that you are approaching, through the great Redeemer, to that merciful Creator, to whom, *in the high and holy place of eternity*, the devout aspirations of his servants on earth are ever acceptable and pleasing.

## SERMON XLVI.

ON THE USE AND ABUSE OF THE WORLD

—*They that use this world, as not abusing it.*  
I CORINTHIANS, vii. 31.

THE world is always represented in Scripture as the great scene of trial to a Christian. It sets before him a variety of duties, which are incumbent on him to perform and, at the same time, surrounds him with many dangers, against which he has to guard. The part which is proper for him to act, may be comprised in these two expressive words of the text; *using the world, and not abusing it*; the significancy and extent of which, I propose now to explain. The subject is of the highest importance, as in the world we must live: and according as we use, or abuse it, it will prove either our friend or our greatest foe.

It is natural to begin with observing, that the Christian is here supposed to *use the world*; by which we must certainly understand the Apostle to mean, maintaining intercourse and connection with the world; living in it, as one of the members of human society; assuming that rank which belongs to his station. No one can be said to *use the world* who lives not thus. Hence it follows, that sequestration from the world is no part of Christian duty; and it appears strange, that even among those who approve not of monastic confinement, seclusion from the pleasures of society should have been sometimes considered, as belonging to the character of a religious man. They have been supposed to be the best servants of God, who, consecrating their time to the exercises of devotion, mingle least in the ordinary commerce of the world; and especially who abstain most rigidly from all that has the appearance of amusement. But how pious and sincere soever the intentions of such persons may be, they certainly take not the properest method, either for improv-

ing themselves, or for advancing religion among others. For, this is not using the world, but relinquishing it. Instead of making the light of a good example shine with useful splendour throughout the circle of society, they confine it within a narrow compass. According to the metaphor employed by our Saviour, after the *candle is lighted, they put it under a bushel*. Instead of recommending religion to the world, they exhibit it under the forbidding aspect of unnecessary austerity. Instead of employing their influence to regulate and temper the pleasures of the world, by a moderate participation of those that are innocent, they deliver up all the entertainments of society into the hands of the loose and giddy.

The various dangers which the world presents to one who is desirous of maintaining his piety and integrity, have given rise to this scrupulous caution concerning the use of the world; and, so far, the principle is commendable. But we must remember, that the virtue of a Christian is to be shown, in surmounting dangers which he is called to encounter. Into the post of danger we were ordered by Providence when we were brought into this world. We were placed as soldiers, on the field of battle. It is there that our fidelity to our great commander must appear. The most signal virtues which adorn and improve the human character, are displayed in active life. There, the strength of the mind is brought forth and put to the test. There, all the amiable dispositions of the heart find their proper exercise: humanity is cultivated; patience, fortitude, and self-denial, come forward in all their forms: and the light of good men's works so shine before others as to lead them to *glorify their Father which is in Heaven*.

It may be assumed, therefore, as a principle justified by the text, and by the whole strain of Scripture, that to *use*, and in a certain degree to enjoy, *the world*, is altogether consistent with religion. According to the rank which men possess in society, according to their age, their employment, and connections, their intercourse with the world will be more or less extended. In private life, they use the world with propriety, who are active and industrious in their callings; just and upright in their dealings; sober, contented, and cheerful in their station. When the circumstances of men allow them a wider command of the enjoyments of the world, of those enjoyments they may freely partake, within the bounds of temperance, moderation, and decency. The highest situations of rank and opulence ought to be distinguished by dignity of character; by extensive beneficence, usefulness, and public spirit; by magnificence, without ostentation, and generous hospitality, without profusion.

We shall have a clearer view of the proper use of the world, when we contrast it with that abuse of the world, which we too

often observe. Those abuses manifest themselves in various forms; but in general may be classed under three great heads.

I. THEY are abusers of the world, who intemperately give themselves up to its pleasures, and lead a life of licentiousness, riot, and dissipation. Amidst the wealth and luxury of the present age, it will be admitted, that persons of this description are not unfrequent, who, being opulent in fortune, and perhaps high in rank, think themselves entitled to pass their days in a careless manner, without any other object in view, than the gratification of their senses and passions. It shall be granted, that they are not obliged to that exact œconomy and attention in their manner of living, which the state of fortune may require of others. Gaiety shall be permitted to them; change of scene, and variety of amusements. But let them not forget that as men and members of society, not to say professors of the Christian faith, they are bound to stop short in their career of pleasure, as soon as it becomes disgraceful to themselves and hurtful to the world. By the train of life which they lead, they defeat every purpose for which Providence bestowed on them the blessings of prosperity. They sink every talent which they possess, into useless insignificancy. They corrupt the public manners by their example, and diffuse among others the spirit of extravagance and folly. They behave in a manner altogether unsuitable to the condition of the world in which we live; where we are exposed to so much change, surrounded with so much distress, and daily behold so many affecting scenes, as ought to awaken serious reflection, and chasten dissolute mirth.

With indignant eyes, the sober and thinking part of mankind view the luxury and riot of those abusers of the world. To them are owing the discontents of the poor, their disaffection to their superiors, their proneness to disturb the peace of the world. When the poor behold wealth properly used, they look up with respect to them who possess it. They rest contented in their station, and bless the just and the generous, from whose munificence they receive employment and reward. But when they behold those men of pleasure dissipating, in vice and folly, the fortune which their forefathers had honourably earned; when they behold them oppressing all their dependants merely that they may level in luxurious extravagance, then their hearts swell within them; with murmurs of sullen grief, they eye their own mean habitation and needy family; and become prepared for robbery, tumult, sedition, and every evil work.

The conduct of such abusers of the world is not only pernicious to the welfare of society, and to the interests of virtue; it is equally ruinous to themselves. I shall not insist on the loss of reputation, the waste of fortune, the broken health, and debilitated frame, which are the well-known consequences of a life

of intemperate pleasure. I shall not recount all the better and more substantial enjoyments which they forfeit. Amidst the turbulence of riot, and the fumes of intoxication, unknown to them are the rational entertainments of regular life; the enjoyment of the face of nature; the pleasures of knowledge, and an improved mind; the pleasures of private friendship, and domestic society; the conscious satisfaction which accompanies honourable labours, and the justly acquired esteem of those who surround them. All these they have thrown away; and in their room have substituted, what they think more high and vivid pleasures. But of what nature are those pleasures? *Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.\**

At the bottom of the hearts of all men, there lies a secret sense of propriety, virtue, and honour. This sense may be so far blunted, as to lose its influence in guiding men to what is right, while yet it retains its power of making them feel that they are acting wrong. Hence remorse often gnaws the heart, which affects to appear light and gay before the world. Among the crowd of amusements, the voluptuary may endeavour to stifle his uneasiness; but through all his defences it will penetrate. A conscious sense of his own insignificance, when he sees others distinguished for acting a manly and worthy part; reflection on the time he has wasted, and the contempt he has incurred; the galling remembrance of his earlier and better days, when he gave the fair promise of accomplishments, which now are blasted; have frequently been found to sadden the festive hour. The noise of merriment may be heard; but heaviness lies at the heart. While the tabret and the viol play, a melancholy voice sounds in his ears. The wasted estate, the neglected halls, and ruined mansions of his father, rise to view. The angry countenances of his friends seem to stare him in the face. A hand appears to come forth on the wall, and to write his doom.

Retreat, then, from your dishonourable courses, ye who by licentiousness, extravagance, and vice, are abusers of the world! You are degrading, you are ruining yourselves. You are grossly misemploying the gifts of God; and the giver will not fail to punish. Awake to the pursuits of men of virtue and honour. Break loose from that magic circle, within which you are at present held. Reject the poisoned cup which the enchantress Pleasure holds up to your lips. Draw aside the veil which she throws over your eyes. You will then see other objects than you now behold. You will see a dark abyss opening below your feet. You will see virtue and temperance marking out the road which conducts to true felicity. You will be enabled to discern,

\* Prov. xiv. 13.

that the world is enjoyed to advantage, by none but such as follow those divine guides; and who consider pleasure as the seasoning, but not as the business of life.

II. THE world is abused, not only by an intemperate pursuit of its pleasures, but by a sordid attachment to its gains. This respects a set of men of very different description from the former, more decent in their carriage, and less flagrant in their vices; but corrupted by the world in no less a degree. For the world is often abused by the men of business, as much as by the men of pleasure. When worldly success becomes the sole object of their life; when the accumulation of fortune so engrosses them as to harden their heart against every feeling of moral obligation; when it renders them insensible to the calls of affection, and to the impressions of piety and religion; they then come under the class of the covetous, whom, it is said, *the Lord abhorreth*.\*

The world, with its advantages, is a lawful object of pursuit to a Christian. He may seek, by far industry, to render his circumstances affluent. Without reproof, he may aim at distinction and consideration in the world. He may bestow a considerable portion of his time and attention on the successful management of his worldly interest. All this is within the limits of that allowable use of the world, to which religion gives its sanction. But to a wise and good man, the world is only a secondary object. He remembers there is an eternity beyond it. His care is, not merely to amass and possess, but to use his possessions well, as one who is accountable to God. He is not a slave, either to the hopes or the fears of the world. He would rather forfeit any present advantage, than obtain it at the expense of violating the divine law, or neglecting his duty. This is using the world like a good man. This is living in it, as a subject of God, and a member of the great community of mankind. To such a man, riches are a blessing. He may enjoy them with magnificence, but he will use them with liberality. They open a wide field to the exercise of his virtue, and allow it to shine with diffusive lustre.

Very opposite to this, is the character of the worldly-minded. To them, the mere attainment of earthly possessions is an ultimate aim. They cannot be said to *use the world*; for, to possess, not to use or enjoy, is their object. They are emphatically said in Scripture, to *load themselves with thick clay*.† Some sort of apology may be framed for them who seek to extract from the world, pleasure of one kind or other. But for those who know no pleasure, farther than *adding house to house and field to field*, and calling them their own, it is hardly possible to frame

\* Psalm x. 3

† Habakuk, ii. 6.

any apology. Such persons are idolaters of the worst kind; for they have made the world their God. They daily worship and bow down before it; and hold nothing to be mean or base, which can promote the enlargement of their fortune.—He is an abuser of the world, let his possession of it be ever so ample, who knows nothing higher than the gains of the world. He is an abuser of the world, who sacrifices probity, virtue, or humanity, to its interests. He is an abuser of the world, who cannot occasionally retreat from it, to consider what character he bears in the sight of God; and to what issue his conduct will bring him at last. In a word, the world is then properly used, when it is generously and beneficially enjoyed; neither hoarded up by avarice, nor squandered by ostentation.

III. THE world is abused, by those who employ its advantages to the injury or oppression of their brethren. Under this class are included the worst and most criminal abusers of the world; who turn against their fellow-creatures, those advantages with which it has pleased Heaven to distinguish them. It is a class which comprehends the sovereign who tyrannises over his people; the great man who depresses his dependants: the master who is cruel to his servants; every one, in fine, who renuers his superiority of any kind, whether of wealth or power, unnecessarily greivous so those who are his inferiors: Whose supercitiousness dejects the modest; whose insolence tramples on the poor; whose rigour makes the widow and the orphan weep. Persons of this character, while thus abusing the advantages of the world, may, for a while, enjoy their triumph. But let them not think their triumph is always to last. Their turn shall come to be humbled as low as those whom they now oppress. For there is a vigilant eye in the Heavens, attentive to observe their procedure. There is an impartial ear which listens to every just complaint preferred against them. There is an irresistible arm stretched over their heads, whose weight they shall one day feel. The sovereign of the universe characterises himself in the sacred writings, as peculiarly an adversary to the insolent and haughty. *For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.\* I will come near to you in judgment; and I will be a swift witness against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right.† He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his maker.‡ The Lord will plead their cause; and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.§*

After hearing these awful words, is it not strange, Oh men! at once infatuated and cruel! that you cannot use the world with-

\* Psalm xii. 5. † Malachi, iii. 5. ‡ Prov. xiv. 31. § Prov. xxii. 23.

out abusing it to the distress of your brethren? Even supposing no punishment to be threatened, no arm to be lifted up against you, is there nothing within you that relents at the circumstances of those below you in the world? Is it not enough, that they suffer their own hard fate, without its being aggravated, by your severity and oppression? Why must the aged, the poor, and the friendless, tremble at your greatness? Cannot you be happy, unless you make them eat their scanty morsel in bitterness of heart?—You happy!—profane not the word—what is such happiness as yours, compared with that of him who could say, *When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me; because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. I was a father to the poor. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me; and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.\** How properly did such a man use the world, and with what just honour did he flourish in it! *Unto me men gave ear; they kept silence, and waited for my counsel. The princes refrained talking. The aged rose and stood up. My root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay upon my branch.*—Not only unknown to you are such pleasures of virtuous prosperity: but even previous to prepared punishment, be assured, that remorse is approaching to wring your hearts. Of the world, which you now abuse, in a short time nothing shall remain, but the horror arising from remembered crimes. The wages you have detained, the wealth you have squeezed from the needy, shall lie heavy on your souls. The stately buildings which your pride has erected, by means of violence and oppression, shall seem haunted by injured ghosts. *The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.†* When you lie on the bed of death, the poor, whom you have oppressed, shall appear to you as gathered together; stretching forth their hands, and lifting up their voices against you, at the tribunal of Heaven. *I have seen the wicked great in power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. But he passed away, and was not. I sought him, but he could not be found. They are brought down to desolation in a moment, and utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.‡*

Thus I have shown what it is to use and what to abuse the world. When, according to our different stations, we enjoy the advantages of the world with propriety and decency; temperate in our pleasures; moderate in our pursuits of interest; mindful of our duty to God, and at the same time, just, humane, and generous to our brethren; then, and then only, we use the world,

\* Job. xxiv. 9—21.

† Habak. ii. 11

= Psalm xxvii. 35. lxxiii. 19.



as becomes men, and Christians. Within these limits, we may safely enjoy all the comforts which the world affords, and our station allows. But if we pass beyond these boundaries, into the regions of disorderly and vicious pleasure, of debasing covetousness or of oppressive insolence, the world will then serve only to corrupt our minds, and to accelerate our ruin. The licentious, the avaricious, and the insolent, form the three great classes of abusers of the world.

Let not those who are in wealthy and flourishing circumstances, complain of the restraints which religious doctrine attempts to impose on their enjoyments. For, to what do these restraints amount? To no more than this, that, by their pleasures, they would neither injure themselves, nor injure others. We call not on the young, to relinquish their gaiety; nor on the rich, to forego their opulence; nor on the great, to lay aside their state. We only call on them, not to convert gaiety into licentiousness; nor to employ opulence in mere extravagance; nor to abuse greatness for the oppression of their inferiors: While they enjoy the world, not to forget that they are the subjects of God, and are soon to pass into another state. Let the motive by which the Apostle enforces the exhortation in the text, present itself to their thought; *Use this world as not abusing it; for the fashion of the world passeth away.* Its pomp and its pleasures, its riches, magnificence, and glory, are no more than a transient show. Every thing that we here enjoy, changes, decays, and comes to an end. All floats on the surface of a river, which, with swift current, is running towards a boundless ocean. Beyond this present scene of things, above those sublunary regions, we are to look for what is permanent and stable. The world passes away; but God, and Heaven, and virtue, continue unchangeably the same. We are soon to enter into eternal habitations; and into these, our works shall follow us. The consequences shall for ever remain of the part which we have acted as good or bad men; as faithful subjects of God, or as servants of a vain world.

## SERMON XLVII.

ON EXTREMES IN RELIGIOUS AND MORAL CONDUCT.

---

*Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left.*—PROVERBS, iv. 27.

*I WILL behave myself wisely* said the Psalmist David, *in a perfect way.*\* Wisdom is no less necessary in religious, and moral, than in civil conduct. Unless there be a proper degree of light in the understanding, it will not be enough that there are good dispositions in the heart. Without regular guidance, they will often err from the right scope. They will be always wavering and unsteady; nay, on some occasions, they may betray us into evil. This is too much verified by that propensity to run into extremes, which so often appears in the behaviour of men. How many have originally set out with good principles and intentions, who, through want of discretion in the application of their principles, have in the end injured themselves, and brought discredit on religion? There is a certain temperate mean, in the observance of which piety and virtue consist. On each side there lies a dangerous extreme. Bewildering paths open; by deviating into which, men are apt to forfeit all the praise of their good intentions; and to finish with reproach, what they had begun with honour. This is the ground of the wise man's exhortation in the text. *Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eye-lids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left; remove thy foot from evil.* In discoursing from these words, I propose to point out some of the extremes into which men are apt to run in religion and morals; and to suggest directions for guarding against them.

\* Psalm ci. 2.

WITH regard to religious principle in general, it may perhaps be expected, that I should warn you of the danger of being, on one hand, too rigid in adhering to it, and on the other hand, too easy in relaxing it. But the distinction between these supposed extremes, I conceive to have no foundation. No man can be too strict, in his adherence to a principle of duty. Here, there is no extreme. All relaxation of principle is criminal. What conscience dictates is to be ever obeyed. Its commands are universally sacred. Even though it should be misled, yet as long as we conceive it to utter the voice of God, in disobeying it we sin. The error, therefore, to be here avoided, is not too scrupulous or tender regard to conscience, but too little care to have conscience properly enlightened, with respect to what is matter of duty and of sin.—Receive not without examination, whatever human tradition has consecrated as sacred. Recur, on every occasion, to those great fountains of light and knowledge, which are opened to you in the pure word of God. Distinguish, with care, between the superstitious fancies of men, and the everlasting commandments of God. Exhaust not on trifles that zeal, which ought to be reserved for the weightier matters of the law. Overload not conscience, with what is frivolous and unnecessary. But when you have once drawn the line with intelligence and precision, between duty and sin, that line you ought on no occasion to transgress.

THOUGH there is no extreme in the reverence due to conscience, there may undoubtedly be an extreme in laying too much stress, either on mere principle, or on mere practice. Here we must take particular care not to *turn to the right hand, nor to the left*; but to *hold faith and a good conscience* united, as the scripture, with great propriety, exhorts us.\* The error of resting wholly on faith, or wholly on works, is one of those seductions, which most easily mislead men; under the semblance of piety on the one hand, and of virtue on the other. This is not an error peculiar to our times. It has obtained in every age of the Christian church. It has run through all the different modes of false religion. It forms the chief distinction of all the various sects which have divided, and which still continue to divide, the church; according as they have leaned most to the side of belief, or to the side of morality.

Did we listen candidly to the voice of scripture, it would guard us against either extreme. The Apostle Paul every where testifies, that by no works of our own we can be justified; and that *without faith it is impossible to please God*. The Apostle James as clearly shews, that faith, if it be unproductive of good

\* 1 Timothy, i. 19.

works, justifies no man. Between those sentiments there is no opposition. Faith without works, is nugatory and insignificant. It is a foundation, without any superstructure raised upon it. It is a fountain which sends forth no stream; a tree which neither bears fruit, nor affords shade. Good works, again, without good principles, are a fair but airy structure; without firmness or stability. They resemble the house built on the sand; the reed which shakes with every wind. You must join the two in full union, if you would exhibit the character of a real Christian. He who sets faith in opposition to morals, or morals in opposition to faith, is equally an enemy to the interest of religion. He holds up to view an imperfect and disfigured form, in the room of what ought to command respect from all beholders. By leaning to one extreme, he is in danger of falling into vice; by the other, of running into impiety.

WHATEVER the belief of men be, they generally pride themselves in the possession of some good moral qualities. The sense of duty is deeply rooted in the human heart. Without some pretence to virtue, there is no self-esteem; and no man wishes to appear, in his own view, as entirely worthless. But as there is a constant strife between the lower and higher parts of our nature, between inclination and principle, this produces much contradiction and inconsistency in conduct. Hence arise most of the extremes, into which men run in their moral behaviour; resting their whole worth on that good quality, to which, by constitution or temper, they are most inclined.

ONE of the first and most common of those extremes is that of placing all virtue, either in justice, on the one hand; or in generosity, on the other. The opposition between these is most discernible among two different classes of men in society. They who have earned their fortune by a laborious and industrious life, are naturally tenacious of what they have painfully acquired. To justice they consider themselves as obliged; but to go beyond it in acts of kindness, they consider as superfluous and extravagant. They will not take any advantage of others, which conscience tells them is iniquitous; but neither will they make any allowance for their necessities and wants. They contend, with rigorous exactness, for what is due to themselves. They are satisfied, if no man suffer unjustly by them. That no one is benefited by them, gives them little concern.—Another set of men place their whole merit in generosity and mercy; while to justice and integrity they pay small regard. These are persons generally of higher rank, and of easy fortune. To them, justice appears a sort of vulgar virtue, requisite chiefly in the petty transactions which those of inferior station carry on with one another. But humanity and liberality, they consider as

more refined virtues, which dignify their character, and cover all their failings. They can relent at representations of distress; can bestow with ostentatious generosity; can even occasionally share their wealth with a companion of whom they are fond; while, at the same time, they withhold from others what is due to them; are negligent of their family and their relations; and to the just demands of their creditors give no attention.

Both these classes of men run to a faulty extreme. They divide moral virtue between them. Each takes that part of it only which suits his temper. Without justice, there is no virtue. But without humanity and mercy, no virtuous character is complete. The one man leans to the extreme of parsimony. The other to that of profusion. The temper of the one is unfeeling. The sensibility of the other is thoughtless. The one you may in some degree respect; but you cannot love. The other may be loved; but cannot be respected: and it is difficult to say, which character is most defective.—We must undoubtedly begin with being just, before we attempt to be generous. At the same time, he who goes no farther than to bare justice, stops at the beginning of virtue. We are commanded to do *justly*, but to *love mercy*. The one virtue regulates our actions; the other improves our heart and affections. Each is equally necessary to the happiness of the world. Justice is the pillar, that upholds the whole fabric of human society. Mercy is the genial ray, which cheers and warms the habitations of men. The perfection of our social character consists, in properly tempering the two with one another; in holding that middle course, which admits of our being just, without being rigid; and allows us to be generous, without being unjust.

WE must next guard against either too great severity, or too great facility of manners. These are extremes of which we every day behold instances in the world. He who leans to the side of severity, is harsh in his censures, and narrow in his opinions. He cannot condescend to others in things indifferent. He has no allowance to make for human frailty; or for the difference of age, rank, or temper among mankind. With him, all gaiety is sinful levity; and every amusement is a crime. To this extreme, the admonition of Solomon may be understood to belong: *Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise. Why shouldest thou destroy thyself?*\* When the severity of manners is hypocritical, and assumed as a cloak to secret indulgence, it is one of the worst prostitutions of religion. But I now consider it, not as the effect of design, but of natural austerity of temper, and of contracting maxims of conduct. Its in-

\* Eccles. vii. 16.

fluence upon the person himself, is to render him gloomy and sour; upon others, to alienate them both from his society, and his counsels; upon religion, to set it forth as a morose and forbidding principle.—The opposite extreme to this is, perhaps, still more dangerous; that of too great facility, and accommodation to the ways of others. The man of this character, partly from indolent weakness, and partly from softness of temper, is disposed to a tame and universal assent. Averse either to contradiction or to blame, he goes along with the manners that prevail. He views every character with indulgent eye; and with good dispositions in his breast, and a natural reluctance to profligacy and vice; he is enticed to the commissions of evils which he condemns, merely through want of fortitude to oppose others.

Nothing, it must be confessed, in moral conduct, is more difficult, than to avoid turning here, either *to the right hand, or to the left*. One of the greatest trials both of wisdom and virtue is, to preserve a just medium between that harshness of austerity, which disgusts and alienates mankind, and that weakness of good nature, which opens the door to sinful excess. The one separates us too much from the world. The other connects us too closely with it; and seduces us to *follow the multitude in doing evil*. One who is of the former character, studies too little to be agreeable, in order to render himself useful. He who is of the latter, by studying too much to be agreeable, forfeits his innocence. If the one hurt religion, by clothing it in the garb of unnecessary strictness; the other, by unwarrantable compliance, strengthens the power of corruption in the world. The one borders on the character of the Pharisee; the other, on that of the Sadducee. True religion enjoins us to stand at an equal distance from both; and to pursue the difficult, but honourable aim, of uniting good nature with fixed religious principle; affable manners, with untainted virtue.

FARTHER; we run to one extreme, when we condemn altogether the opinions of mankind; to another, when we court their praise too eagerly. The former discovers a high degree of pride and self-conceit. The latter betrays servility of spirit. We are formed by nature and Providence, to be connected with one another. No man can stand entirely alone, and independent of all his fellow-creatures. A reasonable regard, therefore, for their esteem and good opinion, is a commendable principle. It flows from humanity, and coincides with the desire of being mutually useful. But if that regard be carried too far, it becomes the source of much corruption. For, in the present state of mankind, the praise of the world often interferes with our acting that steady and conscientious part which gains the approbation.

of God. Hence arises the difficulty of drawing a proper line, between the allowable regard for reputation, and the excessive desire of praise. On the one side, and on the other, danger meets us; and either extreme will be pernicious to virtue.

He who extinguishes all regard to the sentiments of mankind, suppresses one incentive to honourable deeds; nay, he removes one of the strongest checks on vice. For where there is no desire of praise, there will be also no sense of reproach and shame; and when this sense is destroyed, the way is paved to open profligacy. On the other hand, he who is actuated solely by the love of human praise, encroaches on the higher respect which he owes to conscience, and to God. Hence, virtue is often counterfeited; and many a splendid appearance has been exhibited to the world, which had no basis in real principle, or inward affection. Hence religious truths have been disguised, or unfairly represented, in order to be suited to popular taste. Hence the Scribes and Pharisees rejected our blessed Lord *because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*—Turn, therefore, neither to the right hand nor to the left. Affect not to despise what the world thinks of your conduct and character; and yet, let not the sentiments of the world entirely rule you. Let a desire of esteem be one motive of your conduct; but let it hold a subordinate place. Measure the regard that is due to the opinions of men, by the degree in which these coincide with the law of God.

ALLOW me next to suggest the danger of running to the extreme of anxiety about worldly interests on the one hand and of negligence on the other. It is hard to say which of these extremes is fraught with most vice and most misery. Industry and diligence are unquestionable duties, strictly enforced on all Christians; and he who fails in making suitable provision for his household and family, is pronounced to be *worse than an infidel*. But there are bounds, within which our concern for worldly success must be confined. For anxiety is the certain poison of human life. It debases the mind; and sharpens all the passions. It involves men in perpetual distractions, and tormenting cares; and leads them aside from what ought to be the great scope of human action. Anxiety is in general the effect of a covetous temper. Negligence is commonly the offspring of licentiousness, and always the parent of universal disorder. By anxiety you render yourselves miserable. By negligence, you too often occasion the ruin of others. The anxious man is the votary of riches; the negligent man the votary of pleasure. Each offers his mistaken worship, at the shrine of a false deity; and each shall reap only such rewards as an idol can bestow; the one sacrificing the enjoyment and improvement of the present to vain cares about futurity, the other so totally taken up in en-

joying the present as to store the future with certain misery.— True virtue holds a temperate course between these extremes; neither careless of to-morrow, nor taking too much thought for it; diligent, but not anxious; prudent, but not covetous; attentive to provide comfortable accommodation on earth, but chiefly concerned to *lay up treasures in Heaven*.

I SHALL only warn you farther against the extreme of engaging in a course of life too busy and hurried, or of devoting yourselves to one too retired and unemployed. We are formed for a mixture of action, and retreat. Our connections with society, and the performance of duties which we owe to one another, necessarily engage us in active life. What we owe to ourselves requires occasional retirement. For he who lives always in the bustle of the world, cannot it is to be feared, always preserve his virtue pure. Sentiments of piety will be deprived of that nourishment and support which they would derive from meditation and devotion. His temper will be often ruffled and disturbed. His passions will be kept too much on the stretch. From the contagious manners which every where abound, he will not be able to avoid contracting some dangerous infection.—On the other hand, he who flies to total retreat, in order either to enjoy ease, or to escape from the temptations of the world, will often find disquiet meeting him in solitude, and the worst temptations arising from within himself. Unoccupied by active and honourable pursuits, unable to devote his whole time to improving thoughts, many an evil passion will start up, and occupy the vacant hour. Sullenness and gloom will be in danger of overwhelming him. Peevish displeasure, and suspicions of mankind, are apt to persecute those who withdraw themselves altogether from the haunts of men.—Steer, therefore, a middle course, between a life oppressed with business on the one hand, and burdened, for the burden is no less, with idleness on the other. Provide for yourselves matter of fair and honest pursuit, to afford a proper object to the active powers of the mind. Temper business with serious meditation; and enliven retreat by returns of action and industry

THUS, I have pointed out some of those extremes into which men are apt to run, by forsaking the line which religion and wisdom have drawn. Many more, I am sensible, might be suggested; for the field is wide, and hardly is there any appearance of piety, virtue, or good conduct, but what the folly of men is apt to push into undue excess, on one or other side. What I have mentioned, will be sufficient to show the necessity of prudent circumspection, in order to escape the dangers which beset us in this state of trial. Let us study to attain a regular, uniform, consistent character; where nothing that is excessive or



disproportioned shall come forward to view; which shall not plume itself with a fair show on one side only, while in other quarters it remains unadorned and blemished; but where the different parts of worth and goodness shall appear united, and each shall exert its proper influence on conduct. Thus, *turning neither to the right hand nor to the left*, we shall as far as our frailty permits, approach to the perfection of the human character; and shall have reason *not to be ashamed when we have equal respect to all God's commandments.*

## SERMON XLVIII.

### ON SCOFFING AT RELIGION

---

—*There shall come in the last days scoffers.*—2 PETER, iii. 3.

AS the Christian religion is adverse to the inclinations and passions of the corrupted part of mankind, it has been its fate, in every age, to encounter the opposition of various foes. Sometimes, it has undergone the storms of violence and persecution. Sometimes, it has been attacked by the arms of false reasoning and sophistry. When these have failed of success, it has at other times been exposed to the scoffs of the petulant. Men of light and frivolous minds, who had no comprehension of thought for discerning what is great, and no solidity of judgment for deciding on what is true, have taken upon them to treat religion with contempt, as if it were of no consequence to the world. They have affected to represent the whole of that venerable fabric which has so long commanded the respect of mankind, which for ages the learned have supported, and the wise have admired, as having no better foundation than the gloomy imagination of fanatics and visionaries. Of this character were those *scoffers*, predicted by the Apostle to arise *in the last days*; a prediction which we have seen too often fulfilled. As the false colours which such men throw on religion, are apt to impose on the weak and unwary, let us now examine, whether religion affords any just grounds for the contempt or ridicule of the scoffer. They must be either the doctrines, or the precepts of religion, which he endeavours to hold forth to contempt.

THE doctrines of the Christian religion are rational and pure. All that it has revealed concerning the perfections of God, his moral government and laws, the destination of man, and the rewards and punishments of a future state, is perfectly consonant to the most enlightened reason. In some articles which

transcend the limits of our present faculties, as in what relates to the essence of the Godhead, the fallen state of mankind, and their redemption by Jesus Christ, its doctrines may appear mysterious and dark. Against these the scoffer has often directed his attacks, as if whatever could not be explained by us, ought upon that account to be exploded as absurd.

It is unnecessary to enter at present, on any particular defence of these doctrines, as there is one observation which, if duly weighed, is sufficient to silence the cavils of the scoffer. Is he not compelled to admit, that the whole system of nature around him is full of mystery? What reason, then, had he to suppose, that the doctrines of revelation, proceeding from the same author, were to contain no mysterious obscurity? All that is requisite for the conduct of life, both in nature and in religion, Divine wisdom has rendered obvious to all. As nature has afforded us sufficient information concerning what is necessary for our food, our accommodation, and our safety; so religion has plainly instructed us in our duty towards God and our neighbour. But as soon as we attempt to rise towards objects that lie beyond our immediate sphere of action, our curiosity is checked; and darkness meets us on every side. What the essence is of those material bodies which we see and handle; how a seed grows up into a tree; how man is formed in the womb; or how the mind acts upon the body, after it is formed; are mysteries of which we can give no more account, than of the most obscure and difficult parts of revelation. We are obliged to admit the existence of the fact, though the explanation of it exceeds our faculties.

After the same manner in natural religion, questions arise concerning the creation of the world from nothing, the origin of evil under the government of a perfect Being, and the consistency of human liberty with Divine prescience, which are of as intricate nature, and of as difficult solution as any questions in Christian theology. We may plainly see, that we are not admitted into the secrets of Providence, any more than into the mysteries of the Godhead. In all his ways, the Almighty is a *God that hideth himself. He maketh darkness his pavilion. He holdeth back the face of his throne; and spreadeth a thick cloud upon it;*—Instead of its being any objection to revelation that some of its doctrines are mysterious, it would be much more strange and unaccountable, if no such doctrines were found in it. Had every thing in the Christian system been perfectly level to our capacities, this might rather have given ground to a suspicion of its not proceeding from God; since it would have been then so unlike to what we find both in the system of the universe, and in the system of natural religion. Whereas, according as matters now stand, the Gospel has the same features, the same general character, with the other two, which are

acknowledged to be of Divine origin; plain and comprehensible, in what relates to practice; dark and mysterious, in what relates to speculation and belief.\* The cavils of the scoffer, therefore, on this head, are so far from having any just foundation, that they only discover his ignorance and the narrowness of his views.

LET us next proceed to what relates to practice, or the preceptive part of religion. The duties which religion enjoins us to perform towards God, are those which have oftenest furnished matter to the scoffs of the licentious. They attempt to represent these as so idle and superfluous, that they could owe their birth to nothing but enthusiasm.—For is not the Deity so far exalted above us, as to receive neither advantage nor pleasure from our worship? What are our prayers, or our praises, to that infinite mind, who, resting in the full enjoyment of his own beatitude, beholds all his creatures passing before him, only as the insects of a day? What but superstitious terrors could have dictated those forms of homage, and those distinctions of sacred days, in which vulgar minds delight, but which the liberal and enlarged look upon with scorn?

Now, in return to such insults of the scoffer, it might be sufficient to observe, that the united sentiments of mankind, in every age and nation, are against him. Thoughtless as the bulk of men are, and attached only to objects which they see around them; this principle has never been extinguished in their breasts, that to the great Parent of the human race, the universal, though invisible, Benefactor of the world, not only internal reverence, but external homage, is due. Whether he need that homage or not, is not the question. It is what, on our part, we undoubtedly owe; and the heart is, with reason, held to be base, which stifles the emotions of gratitude to a benefactor, how independent soever he may be of any returns. True virtue always prompts a public declaration of the grateful sentiments which it feels; and glories in expressing them. Accordingly, over all the earth, crowds of worshippers have assembled to adore, in various forms, the Ruler of the world. In these adorations, the philosopher, the savage, and the saint, have equally joined. None but the cold and unfeeling can look up to that beneficent Being, who is at the head of the universe, without some inclination to pray, or to praise. In vain, therefore, would the scoffer deride, what the loud voice of nature demands and justifies. He erects himself against the general and declared sense of the human race.

But, apart from this consideration, I must call on him to attend to one of a still more serious and awful nature. By his

\* See this argument fully pursued, and placed in a strong light, by the masterly hand of Bishop Butler, in his *Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion*.

licentious ridicule of the duties of piety, and of the institutions of Divine worship, he is weakening the power of conscience over men; he is undermining the great pillars of society; he is giving a mortal blow to public order and public happiness. All these rest on nothing so much, as on the general belief of an all-seeing Witness, and the general veneration of an Almighty Governor. On this belief and this veneration, is founded the whole obligation of an oath; without which government could not be administered, nor courts of justice act; controversies could not be determined, nor private property to be preserved safe. Our only security against innumerable crimes, to which the restraints of human life cannot reach, is the dread of an invisible Avenger, and of those future punishments which he hath prepared for the guilty. Remove this dread from the minds of men, and you strengthen the hands of the wicked, and endanger the safety of human society.

But how could impressions so necessary to the public welfare be preserved, if there were no religious assemblies, no sacred institutions, no days set apart for Divine worship, in order to be solemn remembrances to men of the existence and the dominion of God, and of the future account they have to give of their actions to him? To all ranks of men, the sentiments which public religion tends to awaken, are salutary and beneficial. But with respect to the inferior classes, it is well known, that the only principles which restrain them from evil are acquired in the religious assemblies which they frequent. Destitute of the advantages of regular education; ignorant, in great measure, of public laws; unacquainted with those refined ideas of honour and propriety, to which others of more knowledge have been trained; were those sacred temples deserted to which they now resort, they would be in danger of degenerating into a ferocious race, from whom lawless violence was perpetually to be dreaded.

He, therefore, who treats sacred things with any degree of levity and scorn, is acting the part, perhaps without his seeing or knowing it, of a public enemy to society. He is precisely the *madman* described in the Book of Proverbs,\* *who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death; and saith, Am I not in sport?* We shall hear him, at times, complain loudly of the undutifulness of children, of the dishonesty of servants, of the tumults and insolence of the lower ranks; while he himself is, in a great measure, responsible for the disorders of which he complains. By the example which he sets of contempt for religion, he becomes accessory to the manifold crimes, which that contempt occasions among others. By his scoffing at sacred institutions, he is encouraging the rabble to uproar and violence; he is emboldening

\* Prov. xxvi. 18.

the false witness to take the name of God in vain ; he is, in effect, putting arms into the hands of the highwayman, and letting loose the robber on the streets by night.

WE come next to consider that great class of duties which respect our conduct towards our fellow-creatures. The absolute necessity of these to general welfare is so apparent, as to have secured them, in a great degree, from the attacks of the scoffer. He who would attempt to turn justice, truth, or honesty, into ridicule, would be avoided by every one. To those who had any remains of principle, he would be odious. To those who attended only to their interest, he would appear a dangerous man. But though the social virtues are treated in general as respectable and sacred, there are certain forms and degrees of them which have not been exempted from the scorn of the unthinking.—That extensive generosity and high public spirit, which prompt a man to sacrifice his own interest, in order to promote some great general good ; and that strict and scrupulous integrity, which will not allow one, on any occasion, to depart from the truth, have often been treated with contempt by those who are called men of the world. They who will not stoop to flatter the great, who disdain to comply with prevailing manners, when they judge them to be evil ; who refuse to take the smallest advantage of others, in order to procure the greatest benefit for themselves ; are represented as persons of romantic character, and visionary notions, unacquainted with the world, and unfit to live in it.

Such persons are so far from being liable to any just ridicule, that they are entitled to a degree of respect, which approaches to veneration. For they are, in truth, the great supporters and guardians of public order. The authority of their character overawes the giddy multitude. The weight of their example retards the progress of corruption ; checks that relaxation of morals, which is always too apt to gain ground insensibly, and to make encroachments on every department of society. Accordingly, it is this high generosity of spirit, this inflexible virtue, this regard to principle, superior to all opinion, which has ever marked the characters of those who have eminently distinguished themselves in public life ; who have patronised the cause of justice against powerful oppressors ; who in critical times have supported the falling rights and liberties of men : and have reflected honour on their nation and country. Such persons may have been scoffed at by some among whom they lived ; but posterity has done them ample justice ; and they are the persons whose names are recorded to future ages, and who are thought and spoken of with admiration.

The mere temporizer, the man of accomodating principles, and inferior virtue, may support a plausible character for a

while among his friends and followers ; but as soon as the holiness of his principles is detected, he sinks into contempt.—They who are prone to deride men of inflexible integrity, only betray the littleness of their minds. They show that they understand not the sublime of virtue ; that they have no discernment of the true excellence of man. By affecting to throw any discouragement on purity and strictness of morals, they not only expose themselves to just contempt, but propagate sentiments very dangerous to society. For, if we loosen the regard due to virtue in any of its parts, we begin to sap the whole of it. No man, as it has been often said, becomes entirely profligacy at once. He deviates, step by step, from conscience. If the loose easuistry of the scoffer were to prevail, open dishonesty, falsehood, and treachery, would speedily grow out of those complying principles, those relaxations of virtue, which he would represent to be necessary for every man who knows the world.

THE last class of virtues I am to mention, are those which are of a personal nature, and which respect the government to be exercised over our pleasures and passions. Here, the scoffer has always considered himself as having an ample field. Often, and often, have such virtues as sobriety, temperance, modesty, and, chastity, been made the subject of ridicule, as monkish habits which exclude men from the company of the fashionable and the gay ; habits, which are the effect of low education, or of mean spirits, or of mere feebleness of constitution ; while scoffers, *walking*, as it is too truly said of them by the Apostle, *after their lusts*, boast of their own manners as liberal and free, as manly and spirited. They fancy themselves raised thereby much above the crowd ; and hold all those in contempt, who confine themselves within the vulgar bounds of regular and orderly life.

Infatuated men ! who see not that the virtues of which they make sport, not only derive their authority from the laws of God, but are moreover essentially requisite both to public and to private happiness. By the indulgence of their licentious pleasures for a while, as long as youth and vigour remain, a few passing gratifications may be obtained. But what are the consequences ? Suppose any individual to preserve unrestrained in this course, it is certainly to be followed by disrepute in his character, and disorder in his affairs ; by a wasted and broken constitution ; and a speedy and miserable old age. Suppose a society to be wholly formed of such persons as the scoffers applaud ; suppose it to be filled with none but those whom they call the sons of pleasure ; that is, with the intemperate, the riotous, and dissolute, among whom all regard to sobriety, decency, and private virtue, was abolished ; what an odious scene would such a society exhibit ? How unlike any civilized or well-ordered state, in which mankind have chosen to dwell ? What turbulence and

uproar, what contests and quarrels, would perpetually reign in it? What man of common understanding would not rather chuse to dwell in a desert, than to be associated for life with such companions? shall, then, the scoffer presume to make light of those virtues, without which there could be neither peace, nor comfort, nor good order, among mankind?

Let him be desired to think of his domestic situation and connections. Is he a father, a husband, or a brother? Has he any friend or relation, male or female, in whose happiness he is interested?—Let us put the question to him, whether he be willing that intemperance, unchastity, or dissipation of any kind, should mark their character? Would he recommend to them such excess? Would he chuse in their presence, openly, and without disguise, to scoff at the opposite virtues, as of no consequence to their welfare.—If even the most licentious shudder at the thought; if in the midst of his loose pleasures, he be desirous that his own family should remain untainted; let this teach him the value of those private virtues, which in the hours of dissipation, in the giddiness of his mind, he is ready to contemn. Banish sobriety, temperance, and purity, and you tear up the foundations of all public order, and all domestic quiet. You render every house a divided and miserable abode, resounding with terms of shame, and mutual reproaches of infamy. You leave nothing respectable in the human character. You change the man into a brute.

THE conclusion from all the reasoning which we have now pursued is, that religion and virtue, in all their forms, either of doctrine or of precept; of piety towards God, integrity towards men, or regularity in private conduct; are so far from affording any grounds of ridicule to the petulant, that they are entitled to our highest veneration; they are names which should never be mentioned, but with the utmost honour. It is said in Scripture, *Fools make a mock at sin*;\* they had better make a mock at pestilence, at war, or famine. With one who should chuse these public calamities for the subject of his sport, you would not be inclined to associate. You would fly from him, as worse than a fool; as a man of distempered mind, from whom you might be in hazard of receiving a sudden blow. Yet certain it is, that, to the great society of mankind, sin is a greater calamity, than either pestilence, or famine, or war. These operate only as occasional causes of misery. But the sins and vices of men are perpetual scourges of the world. Impiety and injustice, fraud and falsehood, intemperance and profligacy; are daily producing mischief and disorder; bringing ruin on individuals; tearing families and communities in pieces; giving rise to a thousand

\* Prov. xiv. 9.



tragical scenes on this unhappy theatre. In proportion as manners are vicious, mankind are unhappy. The perfection of virtue which reigns in the world above, is the chief source of the perfect blessedness which prevails there.

When, therefore, we observe any tendency to treat religion or morals with disrespect and levity, let us hold it to be a sure indication of a perverted understanding, or a depraved heart. *In the seat of the scorner* let us never sit. Let us account that wit contaminated, which attempts to sport itself on sacred subjects. When the scoffer arises, let us maintain the honour of our God, and our Redeemer; and resolutely adhere to the cause of virtue and goodness. *The lips of the wise utter knowledge; but the mouth of the foolish is near to destruction. He that honoureth God, God will honour. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and he that keepeth the commandment, keepeth his own soul.*

## SERMON XLIX

### ON THE CREATION OF THE WORLD

---

*In the beginning God created the heaven, and the earth.*  
GENESIS, i. 1.

SUCH is the commencement of the history of mankind ; an æra, to which we must ever look back with solemn awe and veneration. Before the sun and the moon had begun their course ; before the sound of the human voice was heard, or the name of man was known ; *in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*——To a beginning of the world, we are led back by every thing that now exists ; by all history, all records, all monuments of antiquity. In tracing the transactions of past ages, we arrive at a period, which clearly indicates the infancy of the human race. We behold the world peopled by degrees. We ascend to the origin of all those useful and necessary arts, without the knowledge of which mankind could hardly subsist. We discern society and civilization arising from rude beginnings in every corner of the earth ; and gradually advancing to the state in which we now find them : All which afford plain evidence, that there was a period, when mankind began to inhabit and cultivate the earth. What is very remarkable, the most authentic chronology and history of most nations, coincides with the account of Scripture ; and makes the period during which the world has been inhabited by the race of men, not to extend beyond six thousand years.

To the ancient philosophers, creation from nothing appeared an unintelligible idea. They maintained the eternal existence of matter, which they supposed to be modelled by the sovereign mind of the universe into the form which the earth now exhibits. But there is nothing in this opinion which give it any title to be opposed to the authority of revelation. The doctrine of

two self-existent, independent principles, God and matter the one, active, the other passive, is an hypothesis which presents difficulties to human reason at least as great as the creation of matter from nothing. Adhering then to the testimony of Scripture, we believe, that *in the beginning God created*, or from non-existence brought into being, *the heaven and the earth*.

But though there was a period when this globe, with all that we see upon it, did not exist, we have no reason to think that the wisdom and power of the Almighty were then without exercise or employment. Boundless is the extent of his dominion. Other globes and worlds, enlightened by other suns, may then have occupied, they still appear to occupy, the immense regions of space. Numberless orders of beings, to us unknown, people the wide extent of the universe, and afford an endless variety of objects to the ruling care of the great Father of all. At length, in the course and progress of his government, there arrived a period, when this earth was to be called into existence. When the signal moment, predestined from all eternity, was come, the Deity arose in his might; and with a word created the world. —What an illustrious moment was that, when, from non-existence there sprang at once into being this mighty globe, on which so many millions of creatures now dwell?—No preparatory measures were required. No long circuit of means was employed. *He spake; and it was done. He commanded; and it stood fast.* The earth was, at first, *without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.* The Almighty surveyed the dark abyss; and fixed bounds to the several divisions of nature. He said, *Let there be light; and there was light.* Then appeared the sea and the dry land. The mountains rose; and the rivers flowed. The sun and moon began their course in the skies. Herbs and plants clothed the ground. The air, the earth, and the waters, were stored with their respective inhabitants. At last, man was made after the image of God. He appeared, walking with countenance erect; and received his Creator's benediction, as the Lord of this new world. The Almighty beheld his work when it was finished; and pronounced it good. Superior beings saw with wonder this new accession to existence. *The morning stars sang together; and all the sons of God shouted for joy.\**

But on this great work of Creation, let us not merely gaze with astonishment. Let us consider how it should effect our conduct, by presenting the Divine perfections in a light which is at once edifying, and comforting to man. It displays the Creator as supreme in power, in wisdom, and in goodness.

\* Job. xxxviii. 7.

I. As supreme in power. When we consider with how much labour and difficulty human power performs its inconsiderable works; what time it costs to rear them; and how easily, when reared, they are destroyed; the very idea of creating power overwhelms the mind with awe. Let us look around, and survey this stupendous edifice, which we have been admitted to inhabit. Let us think of the extent of the different climates and regions of the earth; of the magnitude of the mountains, and of the expanse of the ocean. Let us conceive that immense globe which contains them, launched at once from the hand of the Almighty; made to revolve incessantly on its axis, that it might produce the vicissitudes of day and night; thrown forth, at the same time, to run its annual course in perpetual circuit through the heavens: After such a meditation, where is the greatness, where is the pride of man? Into what total annihilation do we sink before an Omnipotent Being? Who is not disposed to exclaim, *Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him; or the son of man, that thou shouldst visit him! When compared with thee, all men are vanity; their works are nothing.*—Reverence, and humble adoration, ought spontaneously to arise. He who feels no propensity to worship and adore, is dead to all sense of grandeur and majesty; has extinguished one of the most natural feelings of the human heart. *Know the Lord that he is God, we are all his people; the workmanship of his hands. Let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.*

Of all titles to legislation and rule, none is so evident and direct as that of a Creator. The conviction is felt in every breast, that he who gave us being hath an absolute right to regulate our conduct. This gives a sanction to the precepts of God, which the most hardened dare not controvert. When it is a Creator and a Father that speaks, who would not listen and obey? Are justice and humanity his declared laws; and shall we, whom but yesterday he called from the dust, and whom to-morrow he can reduce into dust again, presume, in contempt of him, to be unjust or inhuman? Are there any little interests of our own, which we dare to erect, in opposition to the pleasure of him who made us? *Fear ye not me? saith the Lord; will ye not tremble at my presence, who have placed the sand for the bound of sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it; who stretch forth my hand over the earth, and none hindereth?*

At the same time, the power of a Creator is encouraging, as well as awful. While it enforces duty, it inspires confidence under affliction. It brings to view a relation, which imports tenderness and comfort; for it suggests the compassion of a Father. In the time of trouble, mankind are led, by a natural impulse,

to fly for aid to Him, who knows the weakness of the frame he has made: *who remembers we are dust*; and sees the dangers with which we are environed. “I am thine, for thou hast made me: forsake not the work of thine own hands,” is one of the most natural ejaculations of the distressed mind.—How blessed are the virtuous, who can rest under the protection of that powerful arm, which made the earth and the heaven? The omnipotence which renders God so awful is to them a source of joy. In the whole compass of nature, nothing is formidable to them, who firmly repose their trust in the Creator. To them every noxious power can be rendered harmless; every threatened evil, if not averted, can be transformed into good. In the Author of nature, they find not only the author of their being, but their protector and defender, the lifter up of their heads. *Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help; whose hope is in the Lord his God; which made heaven and earth; the sea and all that therein is; which keepeth truth for ever.\**

II. THE work of creation is the display of supreme wisdom. It carries no character more conspicuous than this. If, from the structure and mechanism of some of the most complicated works of human art, we are led to high admiration of the wisdom of the contriver, what astonishment may fill our minds, when we think of the structure of the universe! It is not only the stupendous building itself which excites admiration, but the exquisite skill with which the endless variety of its parts are adapted to their respective purposes: Insomuch that the study of nature, which, for ages, has employed the lives of so many learned men, and which is still so far from being exhausted, is no other than the study of Divine wisdom displayed in the creation. The farther our researches are carried, more striking proofs of it every where meet us. The provision made for the constant regularity of the universe, in the disposition of the heavenly bodies, so that in the course of several thousand years, nature should ever exhibit the same useful and grateful variety in the returns of light and darkness, of summer and winter; and ever furnish food and habitation to all the animals that people the earth; must be a lasting theme of wonder to every reflecting mind.

But they are not only the heavens that *declare the glory of God and the firmament that sheweth forth his handy-work*. In the most inconsiderable, as well as in the most illustrious works of the Creator, consummate art and design appear. There is not a creature that moves, nor a vegetable that grows, but when minutely examined furnishes materials of the highest admiration. The same wisdom that placed the sun in the centre of the sys-

\* Psalm cxlvi. 5, 6.

tem, and arranged the several planets around him in their order, has no less shown itself in the provision made for the food and dwelling of every bird that roams the air, and every beast that wanders in the desert; equally great, in the smallest, and in the most magnificent objects; in the star, and in the insect; in the elephant, and in the fly; in the beam that shines from heaven, and in the grass that clothes the ground. Nothing is overlooked. Nothing is carelessly performed. Every thing that exists is adapted, with perfect symmetry, to the end for which it was designed. All this infinite variety of particulars must have been present to the mind of the Creator; all beheld with one glance of his eye; all fixed and arranged, from the beginning, in his great design, when he formed the heavens and the earth. Justly may we exclaim with the Psalmist, *How excellent, O Lord, is thy name in all the earth! How manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all. No man can find out the work that God maketh, from the beginning to the end. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us. It is high; we cannot attain unto it.*

This wisdom displayed by the Almighty in the creation, was not intended merely to gratify curiosity, and to raise wonder. It ought to beget profound submission, and pious trust in every heart. It is not uncommon for many who speak with rapture of creating wisdom, to be guilty, at the same time, of arraigning the conduct of Providence. In the structure of the universe, they confess that all is goodly and beautiful. But in the government of human affairs, they can see nothing but disorder and confusion.—Have they forgotten, that both the one and the other proceed from the same author? Have they forgotten, that he who balanced all the heavenly bodies, and adjusted the proportions and limits of nature, is the same who hath allotted them their condition in the world, who distributes the measures of their prosperity and adversity, and *fixes the bounds of their habitation?* If their lot appear to them ill-sorted, and their condition hard and unequal, let them only put the question to their own minds, Whether it be most probable that the great and wise Creator hath erred in his distribution of human things, or that they have erred in the judgment which they form concerning the lot assigned to them? Can they believe, that the Divine Artist, after he had contrived and finished this earth, the habitation of men, with such admirable wisdom, would then throw it out of his hands as a neglected work; would suffer the affairs of its inhabitants to proceed by chance; and would behold them, without concern, run into misrule and disorder? Where were then that consistency of conduct, which we discover in all the works of nature, and which we cannot but ascribe to a perfect Being?—My brother! when thy plans are disappointed, and thy heart is ready to despair; when virtue is oppressed, and the

wicked prosper around thee; in those moments of disturbance, look up to Him who created the heaven and the earth; and confide, that He who made light to spring from primæval darkness, will make order at last to arise from the seeming confusion of the world.

Had any one beheld the earth in its state of chaos; when the elements lay mixed and confused; when the earth *was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep*; would he have believed, that it was presently to become so fair and well-ordered a globe as we now behold; illumined with the splendour of the sun, and decorated with all the beauty of nature? The same powerful hand, which perfected the work of creation, shall, in due time, disembroil the plans of Providence. Of creation, we can judge more clearly, because it stood forth at once; it was perfect from the beginning. But the course of Providence is progressive. Time is required for the progression to advance, and before it is finished, we can form no judgment, or at least a very imperfect one, concerning it. We must wait until the great æra arrive, when the secrets of the universe shall be unfolded; when the Divine designs shall be consummated; when Providence shall be brought to the same completion which creation has already attained. Then we have reason to believe, that the wise Creator shall appear, in the end, to have been the wise and just Ruler of the world. Until that period come, let us be contented and patient; let us submit and adore. *Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him: therefore trust thou him.*\* This exhortation will receive more force, when we,

III. CONSIDER creation as a display of supreme goodness, no less than of wisdom and power. It is the communication of numberless benefits to all who live, together with existence. Justly is the earth said to be *full of the goodness of the Lord*. Throughout the whole system of things we behold a manifest tendency to promote the benefit either of the rational, or the animal creation. In some parts of nature this tendency may be less obvious than in others. Objects, which to us seem useless or hurtful, may sometimes occur; and strange it were, if in so vast and complicated a system, difficulties of this kind should not occasionally present themselves to beings, whose views are so narrow and limited as ours. It is well known, that in proportion as the knowledge of nature has increased among men, these difficulties have diminished. Satisfactory accounts have been given of many perplexing appearances, Useful and proper purposes have been found to be promoted by objects which were, at first, thought unprofitable or noxious.

\* Job, xxxv. 14.

Malignant must be the mind of that person; with a distorted eye he must have contemplated creation, who can suspect, that it is not the production of infinite benignity and goodness. How many clear marks of benevolent intention appear every where around us? What a profusion of beauty and ornament is poured forth on the face of nature? What a magnificent spectacle presented to the view of man? What supply contrived for his wants? What a variety of objects set before him, to gratify his senses, to employ his understanding, to entertain his imagination, to cheer and gladden his heart? Indeed, the very existence of the universe is a standing memorial of the goodness of the Creator. For nothing except goodness could originally prompt creation. The Supreme Being, self-existent, and all-sufficient, had no wants which he could seek to supply. No new accession of felicity or glory was to result to him from creatures whom he made. It was goodness communicating and pouring itself forth, goodness delighting to impart happiness in all its forms, which in the beginning created the heaven and the earth. Hence those innumerable orders of living creatures with which the earth is peopled; from the lowest class of sensitive being, to the highest rank of reason and intelligence. Wherever there is life, there is some degree of happiness; there are enjoyments suited to the different powers of feeling; and earth, and air, and water, are, with magnificent liberality, made to teem with life.

Let those striking displays of creating goodness call forth on our part, responsive love, gratitude, and veneration. To this great Father of all existence and life, to Him who hath raised us up to behold the light of day, and to enjoy all the comforts which his world presents, let our hearts send forth a perpetual hymn of praise. Evening and morning let us celebrate Him, who maketh the morning and the evening to rejoice over our heads; *who openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing.* Let us rejoice, that we are brought into a world, which is the production of infinite goodness, over which a supreme intelligence presides; and where nothing happens, that was not planned and arranged, from the beginning, in his decree. Convinced that he hateth not the works which he hath made, nor hath brought creatures into existence merely to suffer unnecessary pain, let us, even in the midst of sorrow, receive with calm submission whatever he is pleased to send; thankful for what he bestows; and satisfied, that without good reason he takes nothing away.

SUCH, in general, are the effects which meditation on the creation of the world ought to produce. It presents such an astonishing conjunction of power, wisdom, and goodness, as cannot be beheld without religious veneration. Accordingly, among all nations of the earth, it has given rise to religious



belief and worship. The most ignorant and savage tribes, when they looked round on the earth and the heavens, could not avoid ascribing their origin to some invisible designing cause, and feeling a propensity to adore. They are, indeed, the awful appearances of the Creator's power, by which, chiefly, they have been impressed, and which have introduced into their worship so many rites of dark superstition. When the usual course of nature seemed to be interrupted, when loud thunder rolled above them in the clouds, or earthquakes shook the ground, the multitude fell on their knees, and, with trembling horror, brought forth the bloody sacrifice to appease the angry divinity. But it is not in those tremendous appearances of power merely, that a good and well-instructed man beholds the Creator of the world. In the constant and regular working of his hands, in the silent operations of his wisdom and goodness, ever going on throughout nature, he delights to contemplate and adore him.

This is one of the chief fruits to be derived from that more perfect knowledge of the Creator, which is imparted to us by the Christian revelation. Impressing our minds with a just sense of his attributes, as not wise and great only, but as gracious and merciful, let it lead us to view every object of a calm and undisturbed nature, with perpetual reference to its Author. We shall then behold all the scenes which the heavens and the earth present, with more refined feelings, and sublimer emotions, than they who regard them solely as objects of curiosity or amusement. Nature will appear animated and enlivened, by the presence of its Author. When the sun rises or sets in the heavens, when spring paints the earth, when summer shines in its glory, when autumn pours forth its fruits, or winter returns in its awful forms, we shall view the Creator manifesting himself in his works. We shall meet his presence in the fields. We shall feel his influence in the cheering beam. We shall hear his voice in the wind. We shall behold ourselves every where surrounded with the glory of that universal spirit, who fills, pervades and upholds all. We shall live in the world as in a great and august temple, where the presence of the divinity, who inhabits it, inspires devotion.

Magnificent as the fabric of the world is, it was not, however, intended for perpetual duration. It was erected as a temporary habitation for a race of beings, who, after acting there a probationary part, were to be removed into a higher state of existence. As there was an hour fixed from all eternity for its creation, so there is an hour fixed for its dissolution; when the heavens and the earth shall pass away, and their place shall know them no more. The consideration of this great event, as the counterpart to the work of creation, shall be the subject of the following Discourse.

## SERMON L.

ON THE DISSOLUTION OF THE WORLD.

---

*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night ; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat ; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.—2 PETER, iii. 10.*

THESE words present to us an awful view of the final catastrophe of the world. Having treated, in the preceding Discourse, of the commencement, let us now contemplate the close, of all human things. The dissolution of the material system is an article of our faith, often alluded to in the Old Testament, clearly predicted in the New. It is an article of faith so far from being incredible, that many appearances in nature lead to the belief of it. We see all terrestrial substances changing their form. Nothing that consists of matter, is formed for perpetual duration. Every thing around us is impaired and consumed by time, waxes old by degrees, and tends to decay. There is reason, therefore, to believe, that a structure so complex as the world must be liable to the same law ; and shall, at some period, undergo the same fate. Through many changes, the earth has already passed ; many shocks it has received, and is still often receiving. A great portion of what is now dry land appears, from various tokens, to have been once covered with water. Continents bears the marks of having been violently rent, and torn asunder from one another. New islands have risen from the bottom of the ocean ; thrown up by the force of subterraneous fire. Formidable earthquakes have, in divers quarters, shaken the globe ; and at this hour terrify with their alarms many parts of it. Burning mountains have, for ages, been discharging torrents of flame ; and from time to time renew their explosions in various regions. All these circumstances show, that in the bowels of the earth the instruments of its dis-

solution are formed. To our view, who behold only its surface, it may appear firm and unshaken; while its destruction is preparing in secret. The ground on which we tread is undermined. Combustible materials are stored. The train is laid. When the mine is to spring, none of us can foresee.

Accustomed to behold the course of nature proceeding in regular order, we indulge meanwhile our pleasures and pursuits with full security; and such awful scenes as the convulsion of the elements, and the dissolution of the world, are foreign to our thoughts. Yet as it is certain that some generation of men must witness this great catastrophe, it is fit and proper that we should sometimes look forward to it. Such prospects may not, indeed, be alluring to the bulk of men. But they carry a grandeur and solemnity which are congenial to some of the most dignified feelings in our nature; and tend to produce elevation of thought. Amidst the circle of levities and follies, of little pleasures and little cares which fill up the ordinary round of life, it is necessary that we be occasionally excited to attend to what is serious and great. Such events as are now to be the subject of our meditation, awake the slumbering mind; check the licentiousness of idle thought; and bring home our recollection to what most concerns us, as men and Christians.

Let us think what astonishment would have filled our minds, and what devout emotions would have swelled our hearts, if we could have been spectators of the creation of the world; if we had seen the earth when it arose at first, *without form and void*, and beheld its parts arranged by the Divine word; if we had heard the voice of the Almighty, calling light to spring forth from the *darkness that was on the face of the deep*; if we had seen the sun rising, for the first time, in the east, with majestic glory; and all nature instantly beginning to teem with life. This wonderful scene, it was impossible that any human eye could behold. It was a spectacle afforded only to angels, and superior spirits. But to a spectacle no less astonishing, the final dissolution of the world, we know there shall be many human witnesses. The race of men living in that last age, shall see the presages of the approaching fatal day. There shall be *signs in the sun*, as the Scripture informs us, *and signs in the moon and stars; upon the earth, distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring*.<sup>\*</sup> They shall clearly perceive that universal nature is tending to ruin. They shall feel the globe shake; shall behold their cities fall; and the final conflagration begin to kindle around them.—Realising then this awful scene; imagining ourselves to be already spectators of it; let us,

\* Luke xxi. 25.

I. CONTEMPLATE the Supreme Being directing the dissolution as he directed the original formation of the world. He is the great agent in this wonderful transaction. It was by him foreseen. It was by him intended; it entered into his plan from the moment of creation. This world was destined from the beginning to fulfill a certain period; and then its duration was to terminate. Not that it is any pleasure to the Almighty to display his omnipotence in destroying the works which he has made; but as for wise and good purposes the earth was formed, so for wise and good ends it is dissolved, when the time most proper for its termination is come. He who, in the counsels of his Providence, brings about so many revolutions among mankind; who *changeth the times and the seasons*; who raises up empires to rule in succession among the nations, and at his pleasure puts an end to their glory; hath also fixed a term for the earth itself, the seat of all human greatness. He saw it meet, that after the probationary course was finished, which the generations of men were to accomplish, their present habitation should be made to pass away. Of the seasonableness of the period when this change should take place, no being can judge except the Lord of the universe. These are counsels, into which it is not ours to penetrate. But, amidst this great revolution of nature, our comfort is, that it is a revolution brought about by Him, the measures of whose government are all founded in goodness.

It is called in the text, *the day of the Lord*: a day peculiarly his, as known to him only; a day in which he shall appear with uncommon and tremendous majesty. But though it be the day of the terrors of the Lord, yet from these terrors, his upright and faithful subjects shall have nothing to apprehend. They may remain safe and quiet spectators of the threatening scene. For it is not to be a scene of blind confusion; of universal ruin, brought about by undesigning chance. Over the shock of the elements, and the wreck of matter, Eternal wisdom presides. According to its direction the conflagration advances which is to consume the earth. Amidst every convulsion of the world, God shall continue to be as he was from the beginning, *the dwelling place of his servants to all generations*. The world may be lost to them; but the Ruler of the world is ever the same, unchangeably good and just. This is the *high tower* to which they can fly, and be safe. *The righteous Lord loveth righteousness*; and, under every period of his government *his countenance beholdeth the upright*.

II. LET us contemplate the dissolution of the world as the end of all human glory. This earth has been the theatre of many a great spectacle, and many a high achievement. There, the

wise have ruled, the mighty have fought, and conquerors have triumphed. Its surface has been covered with proud and stately cities. Its temples and palaces have raised their heads to the skies. Its kings and potentates, glorying in their magnificence, have erected pyramids, constructed towers, founded monuments, which they imagined were to defy all the assaults of time. *Their inward thought was, that their houses were to continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations.* Its philosophers have explored the secrets of nature; and flattered themselves, that the fame of their discoveries was to be immortal.—Alas! all this was to be no more than a transient show. Not only *the fashion of the world*, but the world itself, *passeth away.* The day cometh, when all the glory of this world shall be remembered only as *a dream when one awaketh.* No longer shall the earth exhibit any of those scenes which now delight our eyes. The whole beautiful fabric is thrown down, never more to arise. As soon as the destroying angel has sounded the last trumpet, the everlasting mountains fall; the foundations of the world are shaken; the beauties of nature, the decorations of art, the labours of industry, perish in one common flame. The globe itself shall either return into his ancient chaos, *without form and void*; or, like a star fallen from the heavens, shall be effaced from the universe, and *its place shall know it no more.*

THIS day of the Lord, it is foretold in the text, *will come as a thief in the night*; that is, sudden and unexpected. Mankind, notwithstanding the presages given them, shall continue to the last in their wonted security. Our Saviour tells us, that *as in the days of Noah, before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the flood came, and took them all away, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.*\*—How many projects and designs shall that day suddenly confound? What long contrived schemes of pleasure shall it overthrow? What plans of cunning and ambition shall it utterly blast? How miserable they, whom it shall overtake in the midst of dark conspiracies, of criminal deeds, or profligate pleasures? In what strong colours is their dismay painted, when they are represented, in the book of Revelations, as calling *to the hills and mountains to fall on them and cover them?*—Such descriptions are apt to be considered as exaggerated. The impression of those awful events is weakened by the great distance of time at which our imagination places them. But have we not had a striking image set before us, in our own age, of the terrors which the day of the Lord shall produce, by those partial runs of the world, which the visitation of God has brought on countries well known, and not removed very far from ourselves?

\* Matthew, xxiv. 32.

When, in the midst of peace, opulence, and security, suddenly the earth was felt by the terrified inhabitants to tremble, with violent agitation, below them; when their houses began to shake over their heads, and to overwhelm them with ruins; the flood, at the same time, to rise from its bed, and to swell around them; when encompassed with universal desolation, no friend could aid another; no prospect of escape appeared; no place of refuge remained; how similar were such scenes of destruction to the terrors of the last day? What similar sensations of dread and remorse, and too late repentance, must they have excited among the guilty and profane?

To such formidable convulsions of nature, we, in these happy islands, through the blessing of heaven, are strangers; and strangers to them may we long continue! But, however we may escape partial ruins of the globe, in its general and final ruin we also must be involved. To us must come at last that awful day when the sun shall for the last time arise, to perform his concluding circuit round the world. They how blest, whom that day shall find employed in religious acts, or virtuous deeds; in the conscientious discharge of the duties of life; in the exercise of due preparation for the conclusion of human things, and for appearing before the great Judge of the world! Let us now,

III. CONTEMPLATE the soul of man, as remaining unhurt in the midst of this general desolation, when the whole animal creation perishes, and the whole frame of nature falls into ruins. What a high idea does this present, of the dignity pertaining to the rational spirit! The world may fall back into chaos; but, superior to matter, and independent of all the changes of material things, the soul continues the same. When *the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat*, the soul of man, stamped for immortality, retains its state unimpaired; and is capable of flourishing in undecaying youth and vigour. Very different indeed the condition of human spirits is to be, according as their different qualities have marked, and prepared them, for different future mansions. But for futurity they are all destined. Existence, still, is theirs. The capacity of permanent felicity they all possess; and if they enjoy it not, it is owing to themselves.

Here, then, let us behold what is the true honour and excellence of man. It consists not in his body; which, beautiful or vigorous as it may now seem, is no other than a fabric of dust, quickly to return to dust again. It is not derived from any connection he can form with earthly things; which, as we have seen, are all doomed to perish. It consists in that thinking part which is susceptible of intellectual improvement and moral worth, which was formed after the image of God; which is capable of

perpetual progress in drawing nearer to his nature; and shall partake of the Divine eternity when time and the world shall be no more. This is all that is respectable in man. By this alone he is raised above perishable substances, and allied to those that are celestial and immortal. This part of our nature, then, let us cultivate with care; and, on its improvement, rest our self-estimation. If, on the contrary, suffering ourselves to be wholly immersed in matter, plunged in the dregs of sensuality, we behave as if we were only made for the body and its animal pleasures, how degenerate and base do we become? Destined to survive this whole material system, sent forth to run the race of immortality and glory, shall we thus abuse our Maker's goodness, degrade our original honour, and sink ourselves into deserved misery? It remains, that,

IV. WE contemplate the dissolution of the world, as the introduction to a greater and nobler system, in the government of God. *We, according to his promise, look for new heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.\** Temporal things are now to give place to things eternal. To this earthly habitation is to succeed the city of the living God. The earth had completed the purpose for which it was created. It had been employed as a theatre on which the human generations were successively to come forth, and fulfil their term of trial. As long as the period of trial continued, much obscurity was of course to cover the counsels of Providence. It was appointed that *all things* should appear as *coming alike to all*; that the righteous should seem often neglected by Heaven, and the wicked be allowed externally to prosper, in order that virtue and piety might undergo a proper test; that it might be shewn who were sincere adherents to conscience, and who were mere followers of fortune. The day which terminates the duration of the world, terminates all those seeming disorders. The time of trial is concluded. The final discrimination of characters is made. When the righteous go into everlasting happiness, and the wicked are dismissed into the regions of punishment, the whole mystery of human affairs is unravelled, and the conduct of Providence is justified to man.

Suited to a condition of trial was the state and form of the world, which we now inhabit. It was not designed to be a mansion for innocent and happy spirits; but a dwelling for creatures of fallen nature and of mixed characters. Hence, those mixtures of pleasure and pain, of disorder and beauty, with which it abounds. Hence some regions of the earth, presenting gay and pleasing scenes; others, exhibiting nothing but ruggedness and deformity; the face of nature, sometimes bright-

\* 2 Peter, iii. 13.

ened by a serene atmosphere and a splendid sun; sometimes disfigured by jarring elements, and overcast with troubled skies.

But far unlike shall be the everlasting habitations of the just. Though how they are formed, or what objects they contain, is not given us now to conceive; nor, in all probability, would our faculties be equal to the conception; the emblematical descriptions of them in Scripture are calculated to excite high ideas of magnificence and glory. This one particular we know with certainty, that *therein dwelleth righteousness*; that is complete virtue and eternal order; and wherever these are found, the most perfect sources are opened of joy and bliss. This earth was never intended for more than outer court, the porch, through which the righteous were to pass into the temple and sanctuary of the Divinity. *When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.*

THE inference which follows from what has been said on this subject, cannot be so well expressed as in the words of the Apostle, in the verse immediately following the text; *Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?* Ought not the important discoveries which have been made to us of the designs of the almighty, and of the destiny of man, to exalt our sentiments, and to purify our life from what is vicious or vain? While we pursue the business and cares of our present station, and partake of the innocent pleasures which the world affords, let us maintain that dignity of character, which becomes immortal beings; let us act with that circumspection which becomes those who know they are soon to stand before the judgment-seat of the Son of God: in a word, let us study to be what we would wish to be found, if to us the day of the Lord should come.

I KNOW it will occur, that the prospect of that day cannot be expected to have much influence on the present age. The events of which I have treated, must needs, it will be said, belong to some future race of men. Many prophecies yet remain to be fulfilled. Many preparatory events must take place, before the world is ripe for final judgment. Whether this be the case or not, none of us with certainty know.—But allow me to remind you, that to each of us an event is approaching, and not far distant, which shall prove of the same effect with the coming of the day of the Lord. The day of death is, to every individual, the same as the day of the dissolution of the world. The sun may continue to shine; but to them who are laid in the grave, his light is finally extinguished. The world may remain active, busy, and noisy; but to them all is silence. The voice which gives the mandate, *Return again to your dust*, is the same with the sound of the last trumpet. Death fixes the doom of every



one, finally and irrevocably. This surely is an event which none of us can remove in our thoughts to a remote age. To-morrow, to-day, the fatal mandate may be issued. *Watch therefore; be sober, be vigilant; ye know not at what hour the Son of Man cometh.*

HAVING now treated both of the creation and dissolution of the world, I cannot conclude without calling your thoughts to the magnificent view which these events give us, of the kingdom and dominion of the Almighty. With reverence we contemplate his hand in the signal dispensations of Providence among men; deciding the fate of battles; raising up, or overthrowing empires; casting down the proud, and lifting the low from the dust. But what are such occurrences to the power and wisdom which He displays in the higher revolutions of the universe; by his word forming or dissolving worlds; at his pleasure, transplanting his creatures from one world to another, that he may carry on new plans of wisdom and goodness, and fill all space with the wonders of creation? Successive generations of men have arisen to possess the earth. By turns they have passed away and gone into regions unknown. Us he hath raised up, to occupy their room. We too shall shortly disappear. But human existence never perishes. Life only changes its form, and is renewed. Creation is ever filling, but never full. When the whole intended course of the generations of men shall be finished, then as a shepherd leads his flock from one pasture to another, so the great Creator leads forth the souls which he hath made, into new and prepared abodes of life. They go from this earth to a new earth, and new heavens; and still they remove, only from one province of the Divine dominion to another.—Amidst all those changes of nature, the great Ruler himself remains *without variableness or shadow of turning.* To him, these successive revolutions of being but *as yesterday when it is past.* From this eternal throne, he beholds worlds rising and passing away; measures out, to the creatures who inhabit them, powers and faculties suited to their state; and distributes among them rewards and punishments, proportioned to their actions.—What an astonishing view do such meditations afford of the kingdom of God; infinite in its extent; everlasting in its duration; exhibiting, in every period, the reign of perfect righteousness and wisdom! *Who by searching can find out God? who can find out the Almighty to perfection? Great and marvellous are all thy works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are all thy ways, thou King of saints!*

## SERMON LI.

ON THE CAUSES OF MEN'S BEING WEARY OF LIFE.

---

*My soul is weary of my life*—JOB, x. 1.

JOB, in the first part of his days, was *the greatest of all the men of the East*. His possessions were large; his family was numerous and flourishing; his own character was fair and blameless. Yet this man it pleased God to visit with extraordinary reverses of fortune. He was robbed of his whole substance. His sons and daughters all perished: and he himself, fallen from his high estate, childless, and reduced to poverty, was smitten with sore disease. His friends came about him, seemingly with the purpose of administering comfort. But from a harsh and ill-founded construction of the intention of Providence in his disasters, they only added to his sorrows by unjust upbraiding. Hence those many pathetic lamentations with which this Book abounds, poured forth in the most beautiful and touching strain of Oriental poetry. In one of those hours of lamentation, the sentiment in the text was uttered; *My soul is weary of my life*; a sentiment, which surely, if any situation can justify it, was allowable in the case of Job.

In situations very different from that of Job, under calamities far less severe, it is not uncommon to find such a sentiment working in the heart, and sometimes breaking forth from the lips of men. Many, very many there are, who, on one occasion or other, have experienced this weariness of life, and been tempted to wish that it would come to a close. Let us now examine in what circumstances this feeling may be deemed excusable; in what it is to be held sinful; and under what restrictions we may, on any occasion, be permitted to say, *My soul is weary of my life*.

I SHALL consider the words of the text in three lights: as expressing, *First*, The sentiment of a discontented man: *Secondly*,

The sentiment of an afflicted man : *Thirdly*, The sentiment of a devout man.

I. Let us consider the text as expressing the sentiment of a discontented man ; with whom it is the effusion of spleen, vexation, and dissatisfaction with life, arising from causes neither laudable nor justifiable. There are chiefly three classes of men who are liable to this disease of the mind ; the idle ; the luxurious ; the criminal.

*First.* THIS weariness of life is often found among the idle ; persons commonly in easy circumstances of fortune, who are not engaged in any of the laborious occupations of the world, and who at the same time, without energy of mind to call them forth into any other line of active exertion. In this languid, or rather torpid state, they have so many vacant hours, and are so much at a loss how to fill up their time, that their spirits utterly sink ; they become burdensome to themselves, and to every one around them ; and drag with pain the load of existence. What a convincing proof is hereby afforded, that man was designed by his Creator to be an active being, whose happiness is to be found not merely in rest, but in occupation and pursuit ! The idle are doomed to suffer the natural punishment of their inactivity and folly ; and from their complaints of the tiresomeness of life there is no remedy but to awake from the dream of sloth, and to fill up with proper employment the miserable vacancies of their days. Let them study to become useful to the world, and they shall soon become less burdensome to themselves. They shall begin to enjoy existence ; they shall reap the rewards which Providence has annexed to virtuous activity ; and have no more cause to say, *My soul is weary of life.*

*Next.* THE luxurious and the dissipated form another class of men, among whom such complaints are still more frequent. With them they are not the fruit of idleness. These are men who have been busied enough ; they have run the whole race of pleasure ; but they have run it with such inconsiderate speed, that it terminates in weariness and vexation of spirit. By the perpetual course of dissipation in which they are engaged ; by the excesses which they indulge ; by the riotous revel, and the midnight, or rather morning hours to which they belong their festivity ; they have debilitated their bodies, and worn out their spirits. Satiated with the repetition of their accustomed pleasures, and yet unable to find any new ones in their places ; wandering round and round their former haunts of joy, and ever returning disappointed ; weary of themselves, and of all things about them, their spirits are oppressed with a deadly gloom, and the complaint bursts forth of odious life and a miserable world. Never are these complaints more frequent than at the close of rounds of amusement, and after a long repetition of festal plea-

tures; when the spirits, which had been forced up, as by some intoxicating drug, to an unnatural height, subside into profound dejection. What increases the evil is, that it is not among the infirm, and the aged, but among the young, the gay, and the prosperous, who ought to be reputed the happiest men, that this distaste of life most frequently prevails.

When persons of this description, in their peevish and splenic hours, exclaim, *My soul is weary of my life*, let them know, let them be assured, that this is no other than the judgment of God overtaking them for their vices and follies. Their complaints of misery are entitled to no compassion; nay, they are sinful, because they arise from a sinful cause; from a mind broken and debased by luxury and corruption. They are the authors of their own misery, by having thrown away on the follies of the world those powers which God had bestowed on them for nobler ends.—Let them return to the duties of men and Christians. Let them retreat from frivolity, and abstain from excess. Let them study temperance, moderation, and self-command. By entering on a virtuous and manly course of action, and applying to the honourable discharge of the functions of their station, they will acquire different views. They will obtain more real enjoyment of life, and become more willing to prolong it.—But, after the warnings which God has given them of their misbehaviour by the inward misery they suffer, if they still continue to run the same intemperate round, and to drain pleasure to the last dregs, it shall come to pass, that they who now condemn life, and are impatient of its continuance, shall be the persons most eager to prolong it. When they behold it in reality drawing towards a close, and are obliged to look forward to what is to come after it, they shall be rendered awfully sensible of its value. They will then grasp eagerly at the flying hours; anxious to stop them if they could, and to employ every moment that remains in repairing their past errors, and in making their peace, if possible, with God and heaven. According as *they have sown*, they now *reap*. They are reduced to *eat the fruit of their own ways, and to be filled with their own devices*.

THERE remains still a third class of those who from discontent are become weary of life; such as have embittered it to themselves by the consciousness of criminal deeds. They have been, perhaps, unnatural to their parents, or treacherous to their friends; they have violated their fidelity, have ensnared and ruined the innocent; or have occasioned the death of others. There is no wonder that such persons should lose their relish for life. To whatever arts they may have recourse for procuring a deceitful peace, conscience will at times exert its native power, and shake over them its terrific scourge. The internal misery they endure has sometimes arisen to such a height, as had made them

terminate, with their own hands, an existence which they felt to be insupportable.—To the complaints of such persons no remedy can be furnished, except what arises from the bitterness of sincere and deep repentance. We can do no more than exhort them to atone as much as in their power for the evils they have committed; and to fly to the divine mercy through Jesus Christ for pardon and forgiveness. Let us now,

II. TURN to persons of another description, and consider the sentiment in the text as exhorted by situations of distress, These are so variously multiplied in the world, and often so oppressive and heavy, that assuredly it is not uncommon to here the afflicted complain that they are weary of life. The complaints, if not always allowable, yet certainly are more excusable than those which flow from the sources of dissatisfaction already mentioned. They are sufferers, not so much through their own misconduct, as through the appointment of Providence; and therefore to persons in this situation it may seem more needful to offer consolation, than to give admonition. However, as the evils which produce this impatience of life are of different sorts, a distinction must be made as to the situations which can most excuse it.

SOMETIMES, the exclamation in the text may be occasioned by deep and overwhelming grief. When they whom we had most affectionately loved, and in whom we had placed the felicity of our days, are taken away, our connection with life appears to be dissolved. “Why should we survive those to whom our souls were tied? Would to God we had died before them! Now when they are gone, all pleasure and hope is gone as to us. To us the sun no longer shines with its usual brightness. No longer cheerfulness invests the face of nature. On every object a sad gloom appears to rest; and every employment of life has become an oppressive burden.” With the feelings of those who are thus distressed we naturally sympathise. They are frequently the feelings of the most virtuous and amiable minds: and yet such persons must be told, that grief may be indulged so far as to become immoderate and improper. There are bounds which are prescribed to it both by reason and by religion. A Christian ought not to *mourn like those who have no hope*. While he feels his sorrows as a man, he should also study to bear them like a man, with fortitude; and not abandon himself to feeble and fruitless melancholy. Let him have recourse to a strenuous discharge of the duties of his station, and consider it as incumbent on him to make the best improvement that he can of those comforts which Providence has still left in his possession.

AGAIN; it sometimes happens that, apart from grief, great reverses of worldly fortune give rise to the lamentation in the

text. This was the case with Job himself. A sudden fall from opulence into indigence and want; some undeserved disgrace incurred, or some unexpected cloud thrown over former reputation and fame; the unkindness and desertion of friends, or the insolent triumph of enemies, are apt to overwhelm the minds of men with gloom, and to reduce them to be weary of life. To persons under such calamities sympathy is due. That sympathy, however, will be proportioned to the degree in which we consider them as free from blame in the misfortunes which they suffer. As far as, through their own misconduct and vice, they have been the authors to themselves, of those misfortunes, we withdraw our pity. The burden which they have brought on themselves, we leave them to bear as they can; and with little concern we hear them exclaim that their *souls are weary of life*. — Not only so, but even in cases where calamities have fallen on the innocent, to the pity which we feel for them will be joined a secret contempt, if we perceive that together with their prosperity, their courage and fortitude have also forsaken them. To abandon themselves to dejection, carries no mark of a great or a worthy mind. Instead of declaring that his *soul is weary of his life*, it becomes a brave and a good man, in the evil day, with firmness to maintain his post; to bear up against the storm; to have recourse to those advantages which, in the worst of times, are always left to integrity and virtue; and never to give up the hope that better days may yet arise.

It is good for persons in such situations to remark that, though Job was for a long while severely tried by a variety of distresses, yet his condition was not left finally unhappy. On the contrary, the goodness of that God whom he had served, returned at last to shine upon him with greater brightness than ever. His riches were restored to him twofold. The losses in his family were repaired by a new offspring. His name became again renowned in the east; and *the latter end of Job*, we are told, *was more blessed than the beginning*.

BUT still, it may be asked, will not the continuance of long and severe disease justify the exclamation in the text, *My soul is weary of my life*? To persons who are forsaken by all the blessings of health, and who have no prospect left, but that of lingering under sickness or pain, Job's complaint may assuredly be forgiven more than to any others. Though it might be suggested to them, that even in old age and sickness, except in very extreme cases, some resources are always left of which they may avail themselves for relief; yet it must be admitted, that lawfully they may wish their sufferings to be brought to an end. Still, however, they must remember, that resignation to the pleasure of Heaven continues to be their duty to the last. As long as any part remains to be acted, as long as their conti-

nance in the world can serve any valuable purpose, it is more honourable to bear the load with magnanimity, than to give way to a querulous and dejected spirit. It remains,

III. To address myself to another order of men, among whom, though more rarely than among those whom I have described, the sentiment of the text is to be found. They are persons who have no particular complaint to make of the injustice of the world, or the afflictions of their state. But they are tired of the vanity of the world, of its insipid enjoyments, and its perpetually revolving circle of trifles and follies. They feel themselves made for something greater and nobler. They are disgusted and hurt with the scenes of wickedness that are often passing before their eyes. Their hearts are warmed with the thoughts of a purer and more perfect existence designed for man; and in the moments of aspiration after it, the exclamation breaks forth, *My soul is weary of my life,—Oh! that I had wings like a dove! for then I would fly away and be at rest. Lo! then I would wander afar off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest. For I have seen violence and strife in the city. Wickedness is in the midst thereof; deceit and guile depart not from her streets.\** In this view the sentiment in the text may sometimes be that of a devout man. But such persons I must admonish, that their devotion, however sincere, is not altogether of a rational and chastened kind. It was from this temper that, in former ages of the church, the numerous race sprung of anchorets, hermits, and all the various orders who voluntarily abandoned the world, to people the lonely deserts and the monastic retreat. The ordinary course of things seemed below them as candidates for heaven. The concerns of the world appeared unworthy of their attention, and dangerous to their virtue. Breathing after a higher state, they imagined that they could not abstract themselves too much from every earthly amusement, as long as they were forced to remain in this place of exile.

Let us beware of all such imaginary refinements as produce a total disrelish of our present condition. They are, for the most part grafted, either on disappointed pursuits, or on a melancholy and splenetic cast of mind. They are far from contributing to happiness, and are inconsistent with all the active virtues of man. This life deserves not indeed to be put in competition with that blessed immortality to which God has raised our hopes. But such as it is, it is the gift of God. It is the sphere in which his wisdom has placed us, and appointed us to act our parts. As long as it lasts, we must neither slight the duties which it requires, nor undervalue the innocent enjoyments which

\* Psalm, lv. 6—11

it offers. It belongs to a man to live among men as his brethren ; which he who declares himself weary of life is not qualified to do with propriety.

THUS I have placed before you, in various views, the sentiments in the text ; and have shown in what circumstances, and from what causes that disrelish of life arises which is often found among mankind. On a review of the whole we cannot but acknowledge, that it is oftner to be ascribed to our own vices and follies, than to any other cause. Among the multitudes in the world, to whom at this day life is burdensome, the far greater number is of those who have rendered it so themselves. Their idleness, their luxury and pleasures, their criminal deeds, their immoderate passions, their timidity and baseness of mind, have dejected them in such a degree, as to make them weary of their existence. Preyed upon by discontent of their own creating, they complain of life when they ought to reprehend themselves.

Various afflictions there doubtless are in the world ; many persons with whom we have cause to sympathize, and whom we might reasonably forgive for wishing death to close their sorrows. But of the evils which embitter life, it must be admitted, that the greater part is such as we have brought on ourselves ; or at least such as, if we were not wanting to ourselves, might be tolerably supported. When we compute the numbers of those who are disposed to say, *My soul is weary of my life*, some there are to whom this sentiment is excusable ; but many more among whom it is in no way unjustifiable. I admit that among the worstiest and the best, there may be dark moments in which some feeling of this nature may be apt to intrude upon their minds. But with them they are only moments of occasional and passing gloom. They soon recall the vigour of their minds ; and return with satisfaction to the discharge of the duties, and to a participation of the enjoyments of life.

One great cause of men's becoming weary of life is grounded on the mistaken views of it which they have formed, and the false hopes which they have entertained from it. They have expected a scene of enjoyment ; and when they meet with disappointments and distresses, they complain of life as if it had cheated and betrayed them. God ordained no such possession for man on earth as continued pleasure. For the wisest purposes he designed our state to be chequered with pleasure and pain. As such let us receive it, and make the best of what is doomed to be our lot. Let us remain persuaded, that simple and moderate pleasures are always the best ; that virtue and a good conscience are the surest foundations of enjoyment ; that he who serves his God and his Saviour with the purest intentions, and governs his passions with the greatest care, is likely



to lead the happiest life. Following these principles, we shall meet with fewer occasions of being weary of life ; we shall always find some satisfactions mixed with its crosses ; and shall be enabled to wait with a humble and contented mind till the Almighty, in his appointed time, finish our state of trial, and remove us to a more blessed abode.

## SERMON LII.

ON CHARITY AS THE END OF THE COMMANDMENT.

---

*Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.—*  
1 TIMOTHY, i. 5.

IT appears from this chapter that one design of the Apostle, in writing to Timothy, was to guard him against certain corrupters of Christian doctrine, who had already arisen in the church. To their false representations of religion he opposes that general view of it which is given in the text. Such summaries of religion frequently occur in the sacred writings; and are extremely useful. By the comprehensive energy with which they express the great lines of our duty, they both imprint them on our memory, and bring them home to our conscience with force. In the progress of this discourse, I hope to make it appear, that the words of the text afford a most enlarged and instructive view of religion in all its chief parts.

The Apostle pronounces charity to be *the end* or scope of *the commandment*, that is, of the law of God. At the same time, in order to prevent mistakes on this most important subject, he subjoins to charity certain adjuncts, as necessary to qualify it, and to render the Christian character complete. These are the *pure heart*, the *good conscience*, and *faith unfeigned*. In treating of these, I shall shew the nature of their connection with charity, and the importance of their being always united with it.

*The end of the commandment is charity.* Charity is the same with benevolence or love; and is the term uniformly employed, in the New Testament, to denote all the good affections which we ought to bear towards one another. It consists not in speculative ideas of general benevolence floating in the head, and leaving the heart, as speculations too often do, untouched and

cold. Neither is it confined to that indolent good-nature, which makes us rest satisfied with being free from inveterate malice, or ill-will to our fellow-creatures, with out prompting us to be of service to any. True charity is an active principle. It is not properly a single virtue; but a disposition residing in the heart, as a fountain whence all the virtues of benignity, candor, forbearance, generosity, compassion, and liberality flow, as so many native streams. From general good-will to all, it extends its influence particularly to those with whom we stand in nearest connexion, and who are directly within the sphere of our good offices. From the country or community to which we belong, it descends to the smaller associations of neighborhood, relations, and friends; and spreads itself over the whole circle of social and domestic life. I mean not that it imports a promiscuous undistinguishing affection, which gives every man an equal title to our love. Charity, if we should endeavour to carry it so far, would be rendered an impracticable virtue, and would resolve itself into mere words, without affecting the heart. True charity attempts not to shut our eyes to the distinction between good and bad men; nor to warm our hearts equally to those who befriend and those who injure us. It reserves our esteem for good men, and our complacency for our friends. Towards our enemies it inspires forgiveness and humanity. It breathes universal candor, and liberality of sentiment. It forms gentleness of temper, and dictates affability of manners. It prompts corresponding sympathies with them who rejoice and them who weep. It teaches us to slight and despise no man. Charity is the comforter of the afflicted, the protector of the oppressed, the reconciler of differences, the intercessor for offenders. It is faithfulness in the friend, public spirit in the magistrate, equity and patience in the judge, moderation in the sovereign, and loyalty in the subject. In parents it is care and attention; in children it is reverence and submission. In a word, it is the soul of social life. It is the sun that enlivens and cheers the abodes of men. It is *like the dew of Hermon*, says the Psalmist, *and the dew that descendeth on the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.*\*

SUCH charity, says the text, is *the end of the commandment*. This assertion of the Apostle is undoubtedly consonant to all that reason can suggest on the subject of religion. For on considering the nature of the Supreme Being, reason gives us much ground to believe, that the chief design of all the commandments which he has given to men, is to promote their happiness. Independent and self-sufficient, that Supreme Being has nothing to exact from us for his own interest or felicity. By our services

\* Psalm. cxxxiii. 3.

he cannot be benefitted, nor by our offences injured. When he created the world it was benevolence that moved him to confer existence. When he made himself known to his creatures, benevolence in like manner moved him to give them laws for their conduct. Benevolence is the spring of legislation in the Deity, as much as it was the motive of creation. He issued his commands on earth on purpose that, by obedience to them, his creatures might be rendered happy among themselves in this life, and be prepared for greater happiness in another. Charity, especially when joined with purity, good conscience, and faith, is obviously the great instrument for this purpose; and therefore must needs possess the chief and primary place in the laws of God.

Accordingly throughout the New Testament, it is uniformly presented to us in the same light in which it is placed by the text. This is known to all who have any acquaintance with the sacred books. Charity is termed *the fulfilling of the law*, and *the bond of perfectness*. It was assumed by our Blessed Lord as the characteristic distinction of his disciples; and in that magnificent eulogium which the Apostle Paul pronounces upon it, in the thirteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, it is expressly preferred by him to *faith* and *hope*. This deserves to be seriously considered by those who are apt to undervalue charity as an appendage of what they contemptuously call Morality; while they confine true religion to some favourite tenets and observances of their own, which they consider as comprehending the sum of what is acceptable to God. Such persons shew themselves profoundly ignorant of the nature of religion, and may too often be suspected of being strangers to its influence. For, as the Apostle John reasons, *He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love that God whom he hath not seen?*\*

AT the same time, while I ascribe to charity that high place in the system of religion, which justly belongs to it, I am not to be understood as confining all religion to this disposition alone. With much wisdom and propriety, the text hath annexed to it certain adjuncts, without which neither the character of a good man can be completed, nor charity itself exercised to advantage. To the consideration of these I now proceed; and I enter the more readily on this branch of the subject, as there is ground to believe, that many pretend to possess charity, without properly understanding its nature and efficacy. There has been always an unhappy tendency among men to run to extremes, on one side or other, in matters of religion. As one set of men, who employ all their zeal on right belief, are prone to undervalue

\* 1. John, iv. 20.

good practice ; so another set, who wish to be esteemed rational Christians, are inclined to rest the whole of their duty on charitable deeds, while they overlook certain dispositions and habits which ought always to accompany them. It is therefore of importance that the mistakes of both these classes of men should be rectified, in order that religion may be held forth to the world in its complete form, and in its full and undiminished lustre,

THE first qualification of charity pointed out in the text is purity ; *charity out of a pure heart.* Purity includes the virtues which belong to the individual, considered in himself, and with respect to the government of his desires and pleasures. It hath its seat in the heart ; but extends its influence over so much of the outward conduct, as to form a great and material part of the character. They are only the *pure in heart*, we are told by our Saviour, *who can see God.\** It is also true, that they are only the *pure in heart* who can properly discharge their duties towards mankind. Inordinate love of pleasure, intemperance, sensuality, and a course of irregular life, are inconsistent, not only with the general character of a good man, but also with the peculiar exercises of charity and benevolence. For nothing is more certain than that habits of licentious indulgence contribute to stifle all the good affections, to harden the heart ; to nourish that selfish attachment to our own vicious pleasures which renders us insensible to the circumstances and wants of others. A profligate man is seldom found to be a good husband, a good father, or a beneficent neighbour. How many young persons have at first set out in the world with excellent dispositions of heart ; generous, charitable, and humane ; kind to their friends, and amiable among all with whom they had intercourse ! And yet how often have we seen all those fair appearances unhappily blasted in the progress of life, merely through the influence of loose and corrupting pleasures ; and those very persons who promised once to be blessings to the world, sunk down in the end, to be the burden and nuisance of society ! The profusion of expense which their pleasures occasion, accounts in a great measure for the fatal reverse that takes place in their character. It not only drains the sources whence the streams of beneficence should flow, but often obliges them to become oppressive and cruel to those whom it was their duty to have patronised and supported.

PURITY of heart and conduct must therefore be held fundamental to charity and love, as well as to general piety and virtue. The licentious, I know, are ready to imagine, that their occasional deeds of bounty and liberality will atone for many of their private disorders. But, besides that such plans of compensation for vices, by some supposed virtues, are always fallacious,

\* Matth. v. 8.

the licentious may be assured, that it is an appearance only of charity, not the reality of it, to which they can lay claim. For that great virtue consists not in occasional actions of humanity, in fits of kindness or compassion, to which bad men may be prompted by natural-instinct; but in the steady and regular exercise of those good affections, and the discharge of those important duties towards others, for which the licentious are in a great measure disqualified. Their criminal propensities direct their inclinations to very different objects and pursuits; and often determine them to sacrifice the just rights of others, sometimes to sacrifice the peace and the reputation of the innocent, to the gratification of their passions. Such is the pernicious influence which the love of pleasure has on the good qualities of its devoted votaries. The impure heart is like the stagnant and putrifying lake which sends forth its poisonous exhalations to corrupt and wither every plant that grows on its banks.

THE second qualification annexed to charity in the text is, that it be *of a good conscience*. By this I understand the Apostle to mean, that charity be in full consistency with justice and integrity; that the *conscience* of the man, who purposes to perform actions of benevolence, be free from the reproach of having neglected the primary duties of equity. For, undoubtedly, justice is a virtue primary to charity; that is, it must go before it in all its exertions. One must first *do justly* before he can pretend that he *loves mercy*.—Religion, my friends, in order to render it useful to mankind, must be brought down by its teachers from the sublimity of speculation to the functions and occupations of ordinary life. It is my duty to admonish you, that you must, in the first place, be fair in all your dealings with others; you must discharge the debts you owe; you must pay the wages due to your servants and dependants; you must provide for your own family, and be just to the claims of relations; then, and then only, you can, *from a good conscience*, as the text enjoins, perform acts of generosity and mercy.

This leads to a reflection which here deserves our attention; that in order to fulfill that *charity which is the end of the commandment*, economy, and good order in private life, ought to be carefully studied by all Christians. This is more closely connected with *a good conscience*, than many seem inclined to admit. Economy, when prudently and temperately conducted, is the safeguard of many virtues, and is in a particular manner favourable to the exertions of benevolence. He who by inconsiderate conduct is injuring his circumstances, will probably in time lose the inclination, and certainly is depriving himself of the means, of being serviceable to his brethren. Some important exertions, indeed, there are of charity, which have no connection with giving or bestowing. Candour, forgiveness, gentle-

ness, and sympathy, are due to our brethren at all times, and in every situation of our own fortune. The poor have opportunities for displaying these virtues, as well as the rich. They who have nothing to give can often afford relief to others, by imparting what they feel. But, as far as beneficence is included in charity, we ought always to remember, that justice must, in the first place be held inviolably sacred.

The wisdom of Scripture remarkably appears, in the connexion pointed out by the text, between *charity* and *good conscience*, or integrity; a connexion which I apprehend is often not attended to so much as it deserves. Among the frugal and industrious, great regard is commonly paid to justice. They will not defraud. They will not take any unlawful advantage in their dealings: And, satisfied with this degree of *good conscience*, they are strangers to that charity which is the *end of the commandment*. They are hard and unfeeling. They are rigid and severe in their demands. They know nothing of humanity, forgiveness, or compassion.—Among another class of men, who have been more liberally educated, and who are generally of a higher rank in life, justice is apt to be considered as a virtue less noble than charity; and which may, on some occasions, be dispensed with. They are humane, perhaps, and tender in their feelings. They are easy to their dependants. They can be liberal, even to profusion. While, at the same time, they are accumulating debts which they know themselves unable to discharge. Their affairs are allowed to run into confusion. Economy and good order are neglected. The innocent, in great numbers, suffer materially through their mismanagement: And all the while they assume to themselves the praise of being generous and good-hearted men. This surely is not that *charity* which the Gospel enjoins; and which in its very essence, involves *good conscience and integrity*. He who pretends to do good to his brethren without first doing them justice, cannot be accounted their real friend. True charity is not a meteor, which occasionally glares; but a luminary, which, in its orderly and regular course, dispenses a benignant influence.

THE third and last adjunct connected in the text with charity, is, that it be *of faith unfeigned*. Faith, in the Scripture sense of it, includes the whole of religious principles respecting God, and respecting Christ. Good principles, without good practice, I confess, are nothing; they are of no avail in the sight of God, nor in the estimation of wise men. But practice not founded on principle, is likely to be always unstable and wavering; and therefore, the faith of religious principles enters, for a very considerable share, into the proper discharge of the duties of charity.

It will be admitted that, without faith, our duties towards God, cannot be properly performed. You may be assured that your

duties towards men will always greatly suffer from the want of it. Faith, when pure and genuine, supplies to every part of virtue, and in particular to the virtue of charity, many motives and assistances, of which the unbeliever is destitute. He who acts from faith, acts upon the high principle of regard to the God who hath made him; and to the Saviour who redeems him; which will often stimulate him to his duty, when other principles of benevolence become faint and languid, or are crossed by opposite interests. When he considers himself as pursuing the approbation of that Divine Being, from whom love descends, a sacred enthusiasm both prompts and consecrates his charitable dispositions. Regardless of men, or of human recompense, he is carried along by a higher impulse. He acts with the spirit of a follower of the Son of God, who not only has enjoined love, but has enforced it by the example of laying down his life for mankind. Whatever he does in behalf of his fellow-creatures, he considers himself as doing, in some degree, to that Divine Person, who hath said, *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*\* Hence charity is with him not only a moral virtue, but a Christian grace. It acquires additional dignity and energy from being connected with the heavenly state and the heavenly inhabitants. He mingles with beings of a higher order, while he is discharging his duty to his fellow-creatures on earth; and, by joining faith and piety to good works, he completes the character of a Christian.

Thus I have endeavoured to explain the full sense of that comprehensive view of religion which is given in the text. I have shewn in what respect *charity*, joined with *the pure heart, the good conscience, and faith unfeigned*, forms *the end of the commandment*. Let us ever keep in view those essential parts of a virtuous character, and preserve them in their proper union. Thus shall our religion rise into a regular and well proportioned edifice, where each part gives firmness and support to another. If any one of those material parts be wanting in the structure; if, out of our system of charity, either purity, or justice, or faith, be left, there will be cracks and flaws in the building which prepare its ruin.

This is indeed one of the greatest and most frequent errors of men, in their moral conduct. They take hold of virtue by pieces and corners only. Few are so depraved as to be without all sense of duty, and all regard to it. To some moral qualities, which appear to them amiable or estimable, almost all men lay claim; and on these they rest their worth, in their own estimation. But these scattered pieces of virtue, not uniting into one

\* Matth. xxv. 40.



whole, nor forming a consistent character, have no powerful influence on their general habits of life. From various unguarded quarters they lie open to temptation. Their lives are full of contradiction, and perpetually fluctuate between good and evil. Virtue can neither rise to its native dignity, nor attain its proper rewards, until all its chief parts be joined together in our character, and exert an equal authority in regulating our conduct.

## SERMON LIII.

ON OUR LIVES BEING IN THE HAND OF GOD.

[Preached at the beginning of a New-Year.\*]

---

*My times are in thy hand.*—PSALM XXXI. 15.

THE sun that rolls over our heads, the food that we receive, the rest that we enjoy, daily admonish us of a superior power, on whom the inhabitants of the earth depend for light, life, and subsistence. But as long as all things proceed in their ordinary course: when day returns after day with perfect similarity; when our life seems stationary, and nothing occurs to warn us of any approaching change, the religious sentiments of dependance are apt to be forgotten. The great revolutions of time, when they come round in their stated order, have a tendency to force some impressions of piety even on the most unthinking minds. They both mark our existence on earth to be advancing towards its close, and exhibit our condition as continually changing: while each returning year brings along with it new events, and at the same time carries us forwards to the conclusion of all. We cannot, on such occasions, avoid perceiving, that there is a Supreme Being, who holds in his hands the line of our existence, and measures out to each of us our allotted portion of that line. Beyond a certain limit, we know that it cannot be extended; and long before it reach that limit, it may be cut asunder by an invisible hand, which is stretched forth over all the inhabitants of the world. Then naturally arises the ejaculation of the text, *My times, O God, are in thy hand.* “My fate depends on thee. The duration of my life, and all the

\* January 6th, 1793

“events which in future days are to fill it, are entirely at thy disposal.”—Let us now, when we have just seen one year close, and another begin, meditate seriously on this sentiment. Let us consider what is implied in *our times being in the hand of God*; and to what improvement this meditation leads.

THE text evidently implies, first, that *our times* are not in our own hand; that, as our continuance in life depends not on ourselves, so the events which are to happen while life remains, are unknown to us, and not under our own direction. Of this we may behold many a proof when we look back on the transactions of the year which is just finished. Recollection will readily present to us a busy period, filled up with a mixture of business and amusement, of anxieties and cares, of joys and sorrows. We have talked, perhaps, and acted much. We have formed many a plan; in public or in private life, we have been engaged in a variety of pursuits. Let me now ask, how small a proportion of all that has happened could have been foreseen or foretold by us? How many things have occurred, of which we had no expectation; some, perhaps, that have succeeded beyond our hopes; many, also, that have befallen us contrary to our wish? How often were each of us admonished that there are secret wheels, which, unseen by us, bring about the revolutions of human affairs; and that while man was devising his way, Providence was directing the event?

That scene is now closed. The tale of that year has been told. We look forward to the year which is beginning; and what do we behold there?—All, my brethren, is a blank to our view: A dark unknown presents itself. We are entering on an untried, undiscovered country, where, as each succeeding month comes forward, new scenes may open; new objects may engage our attention; changes at home or abroad, in public or in private affairs, may alter the whole state of our fortune. New connexions may be at hand to be formed, or old ones just about to be dissolved; perhaps we may have little more to do with this world, or with any of its connexions; we may be standing on the verge of time and life, and on the point of passing into a new region of existence. In short, the prospect before us is full of awful uncertainty. Life and death, prosperity and adversity, health and sickness, joy and trouble, lie in one undistinguishable mass, where our eye can descry nothing through the obscurity that wraps them up.

While it is thus certain that *our times* are not at our own disposal, we are taught by the text, that they are *in the hand of God*. This may be considered in two views. Our times are in the hand of God, as a Supreme Disposer of events. They are in the hand of God, as a Guardian and a Father.

*Our times*, I say, *are in the hand of God* as a supreme irresistible Ruler. All that is to happen to us in this and the succeeding years of our life,—if any succeeding years we shall be allowed to see,—has been foreknown and arranged by God. The first view under which human affairs present themselves to us, is that of confused and irregular succession. The events of the world seem thrown together by chance, like the billows of the sea, tumbling and tossing over each other, without rule or order. All that is apparent to us, is the fluctuation of human caprice, and the operation of human passions. We see the strife of ambition, and the efforts of stratagem, labouring to accomplish their several purposes among the societies of men. But it is no more than the surface, the outside of things that we behold. Higher counsels, than it is in our power to trace, are concerned in the transactions of the world. If we believe in God at all, as the Governor of the universe, we must believe that, without his providence, nothing happens on earth. He over-rules, at his pleasure, the passions of men. He bends all their desigas into subserviency to his decree. *He makes the wrath of man to praise him*; and *restrains*, in what measure he thinks fit, *the remainder of wrath*.\* He brings forth in their course all the generations of men. When the time is come for their entering into light, they appear on the stage; and when the time fixed for their dismissal arrives, he *changes their countenance*, and sends them away. The time of our appearing is now come, after our ancestors had left their place, and gone down to the dust. We are at present permitted to act our part freely and without constraint. No violence is done to our inclination or choice. But assuredly there is not a day in our life, nor an event in that day, but was foreseen by God. That succession of occurrences, which to us is full of obscurity and darkness, is all light and order in his view. He sees from the beginning to the end; and brings forward every thing that happens in its due time and place.

*Our times are altogether in his hand*. Let us take notice, that they are not in the hands either of our enemies, or of our friends. It is not in the power of man to shorten or to prolong our life, more or less than God has decreed. Enemies may employ craft or violence in their attacks; friends may employ skill and vigilance for the preservation of our health and safety; but both the one and the other can have effect only as far as God permits. They work in subserviency to his purpose. By him they are held in invisible bonds. To the exertions of all human agents he says, *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther*.

\* Psalm lxxvi. 10.

WE are to observe next, that *our times are in the hand of God*, not only as an Almighty Disposer, but as a merciful Guardian and Father. We are by no means to imagine, that from race to race, and from year to year, God sports with the lives of succeeding generations of men, or in the mere wantonness of arbitrary power, brings them forth, and sends them away. No; if we have any confidence in what either the light of Nature suggests to all men, or what the revelation of the Gospel has confirmed to Christians, we have full ground to believe that the administration of human affairs is conducted with infinite wisdom and goodness. The counsels of the Almighty are indeed too deep for our limited understandings to trace. *His path* may, often, as to us, be *in the sea, and his footsteps in the mighty waters*; while, nevertheless, *all his paths are mercy and truth*. He who, from the benignity of his nature, erected this world for the abode of men; He who furnished it so richly for our accommodation, and stored it with so much beauty for our entertainment; He who, since first we entered into life, hath followed us with such a variety of mercies, surely can have no pleasure in our disappointment and distress. *He knows our frame; He remembers we are dust*; and looks to frail man, we are assured, with *such pity as a father beareth to his children*.<sup>\*</sup> To him we may safely commit ourselves, and all our concerns, as to one who is best qualified, both to direct the incidents proper to happen to us in this world, and to judge of the time when it is fit for us to be removed from it.

Even that ignorance of our future destiny in life, of which we sometimes complain, is a signal proof of his goodness. He hides from us the view of futurity, because the view would be dangerous and overpowering. It would either dispirit us with visions of terror, or intoxicate us by the disclosure of success. The veil which covers from our sight the events of this and of succeeding years, is a veil woven by the hand of mercy. *Our times are in his hand*; and we have reason to be glad that in his hand they are kept, shut out from our view. Submit to his pleasure as an Almighty Ruler we must, because we cannot resist him. Equal reason there is for trusting in him as a Guardian, under whose disposal we are safe.

SUCH is the import of the text, that *our times are in the hand of God*. Our times are unknown to us, and not under our own direction. They are in the hands of God as a Governor and Ruler; in the hands of God as a Guardian and Father. These separate views of the text require, on our part, separate improvements.

\* Psalm ciii. 13, 14

SEEING our times are not in our own hand, seeing futurity is unknown to us, let us, first, check the vain curiosity of penetrating into what is to come. Conjecture about futurity we often must; but upon all conjectures of what this year is to produce, let us lay a proper restraint. Let us wait till God shall bring forward events in their proper course, without wishing to discover what he has concealed; lest, if the discovery were granted, we should see many things which we would wish not to have seen.

The most common propensity of mankind is to store futurity with whatever is agreeable to them; especially in those periods of life when imagination is lively, and hope is ardent. Looking forward to the year now beginning, they are ready to promise themselves much from the foundations of prosperity which they have laid; from the friendships and connections which they have secured; from the plans of conduct which they have formed. Alas! how deceitful do all these dreams of happiness often prove! While many are saying in secret to their hearts, *To-morrow shall be as this day and more abundantly*, we are obliged in return to say to them, *Boust not thys If of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth*. I do not mean that in the unknown prospect which lies before us, we should forebode to ourselves nothing but misfortunes.—May it be the pleasure of Heaven that this year run on in a placid and tranquil tenor to us all!—But this I say, that in such foresight of futurity as we are allowed to take, we may reckon upon it as certain, that this year shall prove to us, as many past have proved, a chequered scene of some comforts and some troubles. In what proportion one or other of these shall prevail in it; whether, when it ends, it shall leave with us the memory of joys or of sorrows, is to be determined by him in whose hands *our times are*. Our wisdom is to be prepared for whatever the year is to bring; prepared to receive comforts with thankfulness, troubles with fortitude; and to improve both for the great purposes of virtue and eternal life.

ANOTHER important instruction which naturally arises from our times not being in our own hands is, that we ought no longer to trifle with what it is not in our power to prolong: but that we should make haste to live as wise men; not delaying till to-morrow what may be done to-day; *doing now with all our might whatever our hand findeth to do*; before that *night cometh wherein no man can work*.

Amidst the uncertainty of the events which are before us, there is one thing we have too much reason to believe, namely, that of us who are now assembled in this congregation, and who have seen the year begin, there are some who shall not survive

to see it close. Whether it shall be you, or you, or I, who shall be gathered to our fathers before the revolving year has finished its round, God alone knows. *Our times are in his hand!* But to our place, it more than probable that some of us shall have gone. Could we foretel the month, or the day, on which our change was to happen, how dilligent would we be in setting our house in order, and preparing ourselves to appear before our Maker! Surely, that ought to be prepared for with most care, concerning which we are ignorant how soon it is to take place. Let us therefore *walk circumspectly*, and redeem *the time*. Let us dismiss those trival and superfluous cares which burden or corrupt our life, in order to attend to what is of highest importance to us as men and Christians. The beginning of each year should carry to us all a solemn admonition of our folly in neglecting to improve suitably the years that are past. It should call up misspent time into our view; and be like the hand coming forth upon the wall, in the days of Belshazzar, and writing in legible characrers over against us' "O man! thy days are numbered; thou art weighed in the balance, and found wanting; take care lest thy kingdom be on the point of departing from thee."

WHEN we consider, in the next place, that our times, as I before illustrated, are in the hand of God as a Sovereign Disposer, it is an obvious inference from this truth, that we should prepare ourselves to submit patiently to his pleasure, both as to the events which are to fill up our days, and as to the time of our continuing in this world. To contend with him we know to be fruitless. The word that is gone out of his mouth must stand. In the path which he has marked out for us, whether it be short or long, rugged or smooth, we must walk. Is it not then the dictate of wisdom that we should previously reconcile ourselves to this sovereign ordination, and bring our minds to harmonize with what is appointed to be our destiny? Let us mortify this temper, by recalling that reflection of the wise man; *who knoweth what is good for man in this life; all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?\**

To enjoy long life, and see many days, is the universal wish; and, as the wish is prompted by nature, it cannot be in itself unlawful. At the same time, several circumstances concur to temper the eagerness of this wish; and to shew us that it should always be formed under due submission to the wiser judgment of Heaven. Who among us can tell whether, in wishing for the continuance of many years on earth, we may not be only wishing for a prolongation of distress and misery?—You might live, my friends, till you had undergone lingering rounds of severe

\* Eccles. vi. 12.

pain from which death would have proved a seasonable deliverance. You might live till your breasts were pierced with many a wound from public calamities or private sorrows. You might live till you beheld the death of all whom you had loved; till you survived all those who love you; till you were left as desolate strangers on earth in the midst of a new race, who neither knew you, nor cared for you, but who wished you off the stage. —Of a nature so ambiguous are all the prospects which life sets before us, that in every wish we form relating to them, much reason we have to be satisfied that our times are in the hands of God, rather than our own.

THIS consideration is greatly strengthened, when, in the last place, we think of God acting, not as a sovereign only, but as a guardian, in the disposal of our times. This is our great consolation in looking forward to futurity. To God as a wise Ruler, calm submission is due; but it is more than submission that belongs to him as a merciful Father; it is the spirit of cordial and affectionate consent to his will. Unknown to us as the times to come are, it should be sufficient to our full repose that they are known to God. The day and the hour which are fixed in his counsels for our dismissal from life, we ought to be persuaded are fixed for the best; and that any longer we should not wish to remain.

When we see that last hour drawing nigh, though our spirits may be composed on our own account, yet, on account of our friends and families, no little anxiety and sorrow may be sometimes apt to take possession of the mind. Long we have enjoyed the comfort of their society, and been accustomed to consider them as parts of ourselves. To be parted from them forever is, at any rate, a bitter thought; but to the bitterness of this is over and above added the apprehension of their suffering much by our death. We leave many a relation, perhaps may leave young children, and a helpless family, behind us, to be exposed to various dangers, and thrown forth on an unfriendly world. Such virtuous anxieties often oppress the tender and feeling heart at the closing periods of life.—My brethren, look up to that God, in whose hand *the times* of your fathers were; in whose hand *the times* of your posterity shall be. Recollect for your comfort, the experience of ages. When were the righteous utterly forsaken by God in times past? Why should they be forsaken by him in times to come? Well did he govern the world before you had a being in it: Well shall he continue to govern it after you are no more. No cause have you, therefore, to oppress your minds with the load of unknown futurity. Commit your cares to a Father in Heaven. Surrender your life, your friends, and your family, to that God who hath said, *The children of his ser-*



*vants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before him. Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.*†

I HAVE thus shewn what the import is, and what the improvement should be, of the doctrine of the text, that *our times are in the hand of God*. It asserts a fact, the truth of which can be called in question by none; a fact which, whether persons have any sentiments of religion or not, is calculated to make a serious impression on every mind; especially at seasons when the revolution of years gives us warning that our duration on earth is measured, and advances toward its period. To persons who are religiously disposed, who study to improve life to its proper purposes, to do their duty towards God and man, and through the merits of their Redeemer to obtain grace and favor from Heaven, the doctrine of the text is still more important. Among them it tends to awaken impressions which are not only serious, but, as I have shewn, salutary and comforting to the heart.—Thankful that our times are in the hand of a sovereign, who is both wise and gracious, let us prepare ourselves to meet the approaching events of life with becoming resignation, and at the same time with manly constancy and firm trust in God. As long as it shall please him to continue our abode in the world, let us remain faithful to our duty; and when it shall please him to give the command for our removal hence, let us utter only this voice: “In thy hand, O my God, *my times are*. Thou art calling me away. Here I am ready to obey thy call, and at thy signal to go forth. I thank thee that I have been admitted to partake so long of the comforts of life, and to be a spectator of the wisdom and goodness displayed in thy works. I thank thee that thou hast borne so long with my infirmities and provocations; hast allowed me to look up to thy promises in the Gospel, and to hear the words of eternal life uttered by my great Redeemer. With gratitude, faith, and hope, I commit my soul to thee, *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*”—Such are the sentiments with which every pious and good man should conclude his life. Such indeed are the sentiments which he ought to carry through every part of life. With these may we begin, and with these conclude, every succeeding year which God shall think fit to add to our earthly existence.

\* Psalm cii. 28.

† Jeremiah, xlix. 11.

## SERMON LIV.

ON THE MIXTURE OF BAD MEN WITH THE GOOD IN HUMAN SOCIETY.

---

*Let both grow together until the harvest.*—MATTHEW, xiii. 30.

THE parable of which these words are a part, contains a prophetic description of the state of the church. Our Lord predicts that the societies of Christians were to be infected with persons of loose principles and bad dispositions, whom he likens to *tares* springing up among *wheat*. He intimates that there should arise some whose officious zeal would prompt the desire of exterminating immediately all such evil men; but that this were contrary to the designs of Providence, and to the spirit of Christianity; that a complete separation was indeed to be made at last between the good and the bad; but that this separation was to be delayed till the end of the world, when, in the style of the parable, the *tares* should be entirely *gathered out from among the wheat*. *Let both grow together until the harvest.*

When we look around us, nothing is more conspicuous in the state of the world than that broad mixture of the religious and the impious, the virtuous and the wicked, which we find taking place in every society. Strong objections seem hence to arise against either the wisdom or goodness of Divine Providence; especially when we behold bad men not only tolerated in the world, but occasionally exalted in their circumstances, to the depression of the just. Why, it will be said, if a Supreme Being exist, and if his justice rule the universe, does he allow such infamous persons as the records of history often present, to have a place, and even to make a figure in his world? Why sleeps the thunder idle in his hand, when it could so easily blast them? What shall we think of one who, having the power of exterminating them always at his command, permits them to proceed

without disturbance; nay, sometimes appears to look on them with complacency?—It becomes highly worthy of our attention to consider what answer can be made to these objections; to inquire whether any reasons can be given that serve to justify this dispensation of Providence, in allowing a mixture of bad men to continue on the face of the earth until the end of time. This inquiry shall make the subject of the present discourse, together with such reflections as naturally arise from surveying the state of human affairs.

BUT, before entering directly on such inquiry, it may be proper to take notice, that in our estimation of who are the good, who are the bad, we are often in hazard of committing mistakes. The real characters of men are known only to God. They frequently depend on the secret and unseen parts of life. As in judging of themselves men are always partial, so in judging of others they often err, through the imperfect information which they have gathered, or the rash prejudices which they have formed. They are too apt to limit the character of virtue to those who agree with them in sentiment and belief; and to exaggerate the failings of those against whom they have conceived dislike, into great and unpardonable crimes. Were it left to the indiscreet zeal of some to extirpate from the earth all those whom they consider as bad men, there is ground to apprehend that, instead of tares, the wheat would often be rooted out.—At the same time we readily admit the fact, as too manifest to be denied, that a multitude of gross and notorious sinners are now mixed with the followers of God and virtue. Let us proceed then to consider how far this is consistent with the justice and wisdom of the Governor of the world.

IT is a principle in which all serious and reflecting persons have agreed, and which by many arguments is confirmed, that our present state on earth is designed to be a state of discipline and improvement, in order to fit human nature for a higher and better state which it is to attain hereafter. Now, this principle being once admitted, we say, that the mixture of virtue and vice which here prevails, is calculated to answer this purpose better than a more unmixed and perfect state of society would have done.

FOR, in the first place, the crimes of the wicked give occasion to the exercise of many excellent dispositions of heart among the righteous. They bring forth all the suffering virtues, which otherwise would have had no field; and by the exercise of which the human character is tried, and acquires some of its chief honours. Were there no bad men in the world to vex and distress the good, the good might appear in the light of harmless innocence; but could have no opportunity of displaying fidelity, magnanimity, patience, and fortitude. One half of virtue, and

not the least important half would be lost to the world. In our present imperfect state, any virtue which is never exercised is in hazard of becoming extinct in the human breast. If goodness constantly proceeded in a smooth and flowery path; if meeting with no adversary to oppose it, it were surrounded on every hand with acclamation and praise, is there no ground to dread that it might be corrupted by vanity, or might sink into indolence? This dangerous calm must therefore be interrupted. The waters must be troubled, lest they should stagnate and putrify. When you behold wicked men multiplying in number, and increasing in power, imagine not that Providence particularly favours them. No; they are suffered for a time to prosper, that they may fulfill the high designs of Heaven. They are employed as instruments in the hand of God for the improvement of his servants. They are the rods with which he chastens the virtuous, in order to rouse them from a dangerous slumber; to form them for the day of adversity, and to teach them how to suffer honourably.

In the next place, the mixture of the bad among the good serves not only to give exercise to the passive graces, but also, to improve the active powers and virtues of man. It inures the righteous to vigilance and exertion. It obliges them to stand forth, and to act their part with firmness and constancy in evil times. It gives occasion for their virtues to shine with conspicuous lustre; and makes them appear as *the lights of the world* amidst surrounding darkness. Were it not for the dangers that arise from abounding iniquity, there would be no opportunity for courage to act, for wisdom to admonish, for caution to watch, nor for faith to exert itself in *overcoming the world*. It is that mixture of dispositions which now takes place, that renders the theatre on which we act so busy and stirring and so much fitted for giving employment to every part of man's intelligent and moral nature. It affords a complete field for the genuine display of characters; and gives every man the opportunity to stand forth and show what he is. Were the tenor of human conduct altogether regular and uniform, interrupted by no follies and vices, no cross dispositions and irregular passions, many of our active powers would find no exercise. Perhaps even our spirits would languish, and become too still and insipid. Man is not yet ripe for a paradise of innocence, and for the enjoyment of a perfect and faultless society. As in the natural world, he is made for perpetual spring and cloudless skies, but by the winter storm must be called to exert his abilities for procuring shelter and defence; so in the moral world, the intermixture of bad men renders many an exertion necessary, which in a more perfect state of the world would find no place, but which in the present state of trial is proper and useful.—The existence of

vice in the world assuredly testifies our present corruption; and, according to the degree of its prevalence, is always, more or less, the source of misery. It is a standing proof of the fall and degeneracy of man. But as long as that fallen state continues, the wisdom of Providence eminently appears in making the errors and frailties of the wicked subservient to the improvement of the just. *Tares* are for that reason suffered at present to grow up *among the wheat*.

THESE observations on the wisdom of Providence in this dispensation will be farther illustrated, by considering the useful instructions which we receive, or which at least every wise man may receive, from the follies and vices of those among whom we are obliged to live.

*First*, They furnish instruction concerning the snares and dangers against which we ought to be most on our guard. They put it thereby in our power to profit by the errors and misconduct of others. By observing from what small beginnings the greatest crimes have arisen; observing how bad company has seduced this man from his original principles and habits; how a careless indulgence of pleasure has blinded and intoxicated that man; how the neglect of Divine institutions has, in another, gradually paved the way for open profligacy; much salutary instruction is conveyed to the virtuous. Tracing the dangerous and slippery paths by which so many have been insensibly betrayed into ruin, their views of human nature are enlarged; the sense of their own imbecility is strongly impressed upon them; accompanied with the conviction of the necessity of a constant dependance on the grace and assistance of Heaven. All the crimes, which they behold disturbing society around them, serve as signals hung out to them, beacons planted in their view, to prevent their making shipwreck among those rocks on which others have split. It has been justly said, that not only from the advices of his friends, but from the reproaches of his enemies, a wise man may draw instruction. In the same manner, it is not only by the examples of good men, but likewise by those of the wicked, that an attentive mind may be confirmed in virtue.

*Next*, THESE examples of bad men, while they admonish the virtuous of the dangers against which they are apt to guard, are farther profitable by the views which they exhibit of the evil and the deformity of sin. Its odious nature never appears in so strong a light as when displayed in the crimes of the wicked. It is true that when vice is carried only to a certain degree, and disguised by plausible colours, it may pass unreprieved, and even for a while seem popular in the world. But it is no less true that, when it becomes open and flagrant, and is deprived of the shadow of virtue, it never fails to incur general reproach, and

to become the object either of contempt or of hatred. How often, for instance, have the greatest abilities which once drew esteem and admiration, sunk, in a short time, into the most humiliating degradation, merely through the ascendant which corrupted inclinations and low habits had acquired over their possessor? How often have the rising honours of the young been blasted, by their forsaking the path of honour on which they had once entered, for the blind and crooked tracks of depravity and folly? Such spectacles of the infamy of vice, such memorials of the disgrace attending it, are permitted by Providence for general instruction; and assuredly are edifying to the world. It was necessary for moral improvement, that the beauty and excellence of virtue, and the deformity of vice, should be strongly impressed on every intelligent mind. This could never be done with so great advantage as by the striking contrasts of both, which are produced by the living examples of evil men intermixed with the good. It is in this mirror that we clearly contemplate how much the *righteous is more excellent than his neighbour*.

THE same purpose of important instruction is farther promoted by the instances of misery which the state of wicked men on earth affords. I admit that the worldly success which sometimes attends them may blind and seduce the unwary; but a little more reflection enables men to distinguish between apparent success and real happiness. The condition of worthless men, whatever splendor riches may throw around them, is easily discerned to be a restless and miserable one; and the misery which they suffer, to be derived from their vices. In that great corrupted crowd which surrounds us, what incessant bustle and stir, what agitation and tumult take place? What envy and jealousy of one another? How much bitterness of resentment do we behold among them; mutually deceiving and deceived; supplanting and supplanted; ever pursuing, but never satisfied?—These are not matters of rare observation, or which require nice scrutiny to discover them. We need only open our eyes to behold the wicked tormented by their passions, and far removed from that sanctuary of calmness and tranquillity which is the abode of real happiness. Nay, when we appeal to bad men themselves, after they have run the whole round of vicious pleasures, we will often find them obliged to confess that the wretched result of their pursuits has been *vanity and vexation of spirit*; and that the happiest days they have enjoyed were in the times of innocence, before criminal desires and guilty passions had taken possession of their breasts. Such practical demonstrations as these, of the infelicity of sin, are yielded by the examples of evil doers whom we see around us. By attending to their situation, the misery, as well as infamy of guilt, is realised, and rendered sensible to our apprehension.

THUS, upon a fair enquiry, you behold how the ways of God may, in this remarkable case, be justified to man. You behold what important ends are advanced, by permitting *the tares* at present to *grow together with the wheat*. The intermixture of evil men in human society serves to exercise the suffering graces and virtues of the good; by the diversity of characters among those with whom they have intercourse, it serves to bring forth and improve their active powers and virtues, and to enlarge the circle of useful occupations; it serves to instruct them in the temptations against which they are to guard, to reveal to them all the deformity of vice, and to make its miseries pass conspicuously before their eyes. When we consider them as actors on the theatre of the world, they are thereby improved in the part they have to perform. When we consider them as spectators of what is passing on that theatre, their minds are thereby instructed; their views rectified and enlarged by the objects that are set before them.

FROM these important truths, several reflections no less important arise.

We are naturally taught, in the first place, never to be hasty in finding fault with any of the arrangements of Providence. The present permission of moral evil on the earth seemed, on the first view, to furnish a strong objection against either the wisdom or the goodness of the Author of nature. After beholding the useful purposes which are answered by that permission, how cautious should we be in advancing any of our rash speculations against his government and conduct! To our confined and humble station it belongs not to censure, but to submit, trust, and adore; satisfied that the farther we enquire, the rectitude of his ways will appear the more; thankful for the discoveries of them which have been imparted to us; and persuaded that, where our discoveries fail, it is not because there is no more wisdom or goodness to be seen, but because our present condition allows us not to see more.

IN the second place, let us be taught with what eye we are to look upon those bad men whom we find around us in the world. Not surely with an eye of envy. Whatever prosperity they may seem to enjoy, they are still no more than *tares*, the weeds of the field; contemptible in the sight of God, tolerated by his providence for a while on account of the righteous, to whose improvement they are rendered subservient. The parable informs us that, in the end, they are to be *gathered together and burnt*. In this life only they have *their good things*. But their prosperity is transitory. *They are brought into desolation in a moment, and utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh, so, Oh God, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their*

*image.*\*—When we consider their unhappy state, it becomes us to behold them with the eye of pity. Let us remember that, in the midst of their errors, they are by nature still our brethren. Let us not behave to them in the spirit of bitterness. Insult not their follies. Pride not yourselves on superior virtue. Remember that, as bad men are mixed with the good, so, in the best men, vices are not at present mixed with virtues. Your own character, good as you may esteem it, is not free from every evil taint; and in the characters of those whom you reprobate as vicious, there are always some good qualities mixed with the bad ones. Study, as far as you can, to reclaim and amend them; and if, in any degree, you have been profited by their failings, endeavour in return, to profit them by good counsel and advice; by advice not administered with officious zeal, or self-conceited superiority, but with the tenderness of compassion and real friendship.

In the third place, in whatever proportion the admixture of vice may seem to take place in the world, let us never despair of the prevalence of virtue on the whole. Let us not exaggerate, beyond measure, the quantity of vice that is found in the mixture. It is proper to observe, that in the parable now before us, after the owner of the field had *sown his good seed*, no reason is given us to think, that the good seed was entirely choked up by *tares*. On the contrary, we are told that *the blade sprung up, and brought forth fruit*; and, though the *tares* also arose, yet, in the end, there was a *harvest*, when the *wheat was reaped and gathered into the barn*. In the most corrupted times, God never leaves himself without many witness on earth. He is always attentive to the cause of goodness; and frequently supports and advances it by means which we are unable to trace. He nourishes much piety and virtue in hearts that are unknown to us; and beholds repentance ready to spring up among many whom we consider as reprobates. I know that it has always been common for persons to represent the age in which they live as the worst that ever appeared; and religion and virtue as just on the point of vanishing from among men. This is the language sometimes of the serious; often of the hypocritical, or of the narrow-minded. But true religion gives no sanction to such severe censures, or such gloomy views. Though the *tares* must be at all times springing up, there is no reason for believing that they shall ever overspread the whole field. The nature of the weeds that spring up may vary, according to the nature of the soil.—Different modes of iniquity may distinguish different ages of the world; while the sum of corruption is nearly the same. Let not our judgments of men, and of the times in which we live, be hasty and presumptuous. Let us trust in the grace of God, and hope the best of mankind.

\* Psalm lxxiii. 19, 20.



IN the fourth and last place, let us keep our eyes ever fixed on that important period, which is alluded to in the text, as the conclusion of all. *Let both grow together until the harvest.* The great spiritual year is to be closed by a *harvest*, when *the householder is to gather the wheat into his barn*; when, at the end of the world, the final distinction of men and characters is to take place. The confused mixture of good and evil, which now prevails, is only a temporary dispensation of Providence, accommodated to man's fallen and imperfect state. Let it not tempt us for a moment to distrust the reality of the Divine government; or to entertain the remotest suspicion that moral good and evil are to be on the same terms for ever. The frailties of our nature fitted us for no more at present than the enjoyment of a very mixed and imperfect society. But when our nature, purified and reined, shall become ripe for higher advancement, then shall the spirits of the just, disengaged from any polluted mixture, undisturbed by sin or by sinners, be united in one Divine assembly, and rejoice for ever in the presence of Him who made them. Looking forward to this glorious issue with stedfast faith, let no cross appearances ever discomfit our hopes, or lead us to suspect that we have been serving God in vain. If we continue *faithful to the death*, we may rest assured, that in due time we shall *receive the crown of life*.

## SERMON LV.

ON THE RELIEF WHICH THE GOSPEL AFFORDS TO THE  
DISTRESSED.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

---

*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I  
will give you rest.*—MATTH. xi. 28.

THE life of man on earth is doomed to be clouded with various evils. Throughout all ranks the afflicted form a considerable portion of the human race; and even they who have a title to be called prosperous, are always in some periods of their life, obliged to drink from the cup of bitterness. The Christian religion is particularly entitled to our regard, by accommodating itself with great tenderness to this distressed condition of mankind. It is not to be considered as merely an authoritative system of precepts. Important precepts it indeed delivers for the wise and proper regulation of life. But the same voice which enjoins our duty, utters the words of consolation. The Gospel deserves to be held a dispensation of relief to mankind under both the temporal and spiritual distresses of their state.

This amiable and compassionate spirit of our religion conspicuously appears in the character of its great Author. It shone in all his actions while he lived on earth. It breathed in all his discourses; and, in the words of the text, is expressed with much energy. In the preceding verse he had given a high account of his own person and dignity. *All things are delivered unto me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.* But, lest any of his hearers should be discouraged by this mysterious representation of his greatness, he instantly tempers it with the most gracious

benignity ; declaring, in the text, the merciful intencion of his mission to the world. *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

THE first thing which claims our attention in these words, is, what we are to understand by *coming unto Christ*, This is a phrase which has often given occasion to controversy. By theological writers it has been involved in much needless mystery, while the meaning is in itself plain and easy. The very metaphor that is here used serves to explain it. In the ancient world, disciples flocked round their different teachers, and attended them wherever they went ; in order both to testify their attachment, and to imbibe more fully the doctrine of their masters. *Coming unto Christ*, therefore, is the same with resorting to him as our declared Master ; acknowledging ourselves his disciples, believers in his doctrine, and followers of his precepts. As Christ is made known to us under the character both of a Teacher and a Saviour, our *coming to him* imports not only submission to his instructions, but confidence also in his power to save. It imports that, forsaking the corruptions of sin and the world, we follow that course of virtue and obedience which he points out to us ; relying on his mediation for pardon of our offences, and acceptance with Heaven. This is what is implied in the Scripture term *Faith* ; which includes both the assent of the understanding to the truth of the Christian religion, and the concurrence of the will in receiving it.

WHAT next occurs in the text to attract our notice, is the description of those to whom the invitation is addressed. All those who *labour and are heavy laden*, that is, who, in one way or other, feel themselves grieved and distressed, are here invited to come to Christ.—Now, from two sources chiefly our distresses arise, from moral or from natural causes.

*First*, THEY may arise from inward moral causes ; from certain feelings and reflections of the mind, which occasion uneasiness and pain. A course of sin and vice always proves ruinous and destructive in the issue. But its tendency to ruin is often not perceived, while that tendency is advancing. For, as sin is the reign of passion and pleasure, it forms men to a thoughtless inconsiderate state. Circumstances, however, may occur, and frequently, in the course of life, do occur, which disclose to a vicious man the ruin which he is bringing on himself, as an offender against the God who made him. When some occasional confinement to solitude, or some turn of adverse fortune, directs his attention immediately upon his own character ; or when, drawing towards the close of life, his passions subside, his pleasures withdraw, and a future state comes forward to his view ; in such situations it often happens, that the past follies and crimes of such a man appear to him in a light most odious and shock-

ing; and not odious only, but terrifying to his heart. He considers that he is undoubtedly placed under the government of a just God, who did not send him into this world for nought; that he has neglected the part assigned to him; has contemned the laws of Heaven; has degraded his own nature; and instead of being useful, having been hurtful and pernicious to those among whom he lived, is about to leave a detestable memory behind him.—What account shall he give of himself to his Maker?—Self-condemned, polluted by so many crimes, how can he expect to find mercy in his sight?—Hence, an overwhelmed and dejected mind; hence, dismal forebodings of punishment; hence, that *wounded spirit*, which, when it is deeply pierced, becomes the sorest of all human evils, and has sometimes rendered existence a burden which could not be endured.

Such distresses as these, arising from moral internal causes, may be made light of by the giddy and the vain; and represented as confined to a few persons only of distempered imagination. But to those whose professions give them occasion to see men under various circumstances of affliction, they are known to be far from being unfrequent in the world; and, on many more occasions than is commonly imagined, to throw over the human mind the blackest gloom of which it is susceptible. Religious feelings, be assured, have a deep root in the nature of man. They form a part of the human constitution. They are interwoven with many of those fears and hopes which actuate us in the changing situations of fortune. During the gay and active periods of life, they may be smothered; but with most men, they are smothered rather than totally obliterated: And if any crisis of our condition shall awaken, and bring them forth, in their full force, upon a conscious guilty heart, woe to the man, who, in some disconsolate season, is doomed to suffer their extreme vengeance!

BUT, while under such distresses of the mind, not a few may be said *to labour and to be heavy laden*, greater still is the multitude of those who, from natural external causes, from the calamities and evils of life, undergo much suffering and misery. The life of man is not indeed wholly composed of misery. It admits of many pleasing scenes. On the whole, there is reason to believe that it affords more joy than grief. At the same time, the unfortunate, as I before observed, form always a numerous class of mankind; and it may be said with truth, that *sore travail is ordained for the sons of men*. Though the burden is not equally laid on all; some there always are, on whom it falls with oppressive weight.—Unexpected disappointments have crushed their hopes, and blasted the plans which they had formed for comfort in the world. The world had, perhaps, smiled upon them once, only to give them a sharper feeling of its miseries at

the last. Struggling with poverty, unable to support their families whom they see languishing around them, they, at the same time, are obliged, by their situation in society, to conceal their necessities; and, under the forced appearance of cheerfulness, to hide from the world a broken heart. They are stung, perhaps, by the unkindness of friends; cast off by those in whom they had trusted; or torn by untimely death from real friends, in connection with whom they might have flourished and been happy; at the same time borne down, it may be, with the infirmities of a sickly body, and left to drag a painful life without assistance or relief.—How many sad scenes of this nature, on which it were painful to insist, does the world afford!

When we turn to those who are accounted prosperous men, we shall always find many sorrows mingled with their pleasures; many hours of care and vexation, wherein they acknowledge themselves classed with those who *labour and are heavy laden*. In entering into some gay festive assembly, we behold affected cheerfulness displayed on every countenance; and might fancy that we had arrived at the temple of unmixed pleasure, and gladness of heart. Yet, even there, could we look into the bosoms of these apparently happy persons, how often would we find them inwardly preyed upon by some tormenting suspicions, some anxious fears, some secret griefs, which either they dare not disclose to the world, or from which, if disclosed, they can look for no relief; in short, amidst that great company of pilgrims, who are journeying through life, many there are whose journey lies through a valley of tears; and many to whom that valley is only cheered by transient glimpses of joy.

To these classes of mankind is addressed the invitation of the text. To them it is in a particular manner addressed; overlooking the giddy and dissipated multitude. *Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden*. Not as if our Saviour were always ready to accept that sort of piety which is merely the consequence of distress; or made all those welcome, who are driven by nothing but fear or danger to have recourse to him. His words are to be understood as intimating, that the heart which is humbled and softened by affliction, is the object of his compassionate regard; that he will not reject us merely because we have been cast off by the world; but that, if with proper dispositions and sentiments we apply to him in the evil day, we shall be sure of meeting with a gracious reception. It now remains to show what that reception is which we may look for; what that *rest* is which Christ hath promised to confer on those who *come to him*; whether distress arise from moral or from natural causes. *Come unto me, and I will give you rest*.

I. CHRIST affords rest to the disturbed mind that labours under apprehensions and fears of guilt. Let those who suffer dis-

tress of this nature *come to Christ*, that is, with contrition and repentance, have recourse to him as their Saviour, and they shall regain quietness and peace. Foolish and guilty they have been, and justly lie under dread of punishment; but the penitent sorrow which they now feel implies their disposition to be changed. It implies, as far as it is genuine, that, sensible of their folly, they now desire to become good and wise; and are determined for the future to hold a virtuous course, could they only hope to obtain pardon for the past. In this situation of mind, let them not be cast down and despair. Christ has brought with him from Heaven the olive-branch. He carries in his hand the signal of forgiveness. The declaration which he publishes is, *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord and he will have mercy upon him: and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*\* Insufficient though our own repentance be, to procure pardon from Heaven, we are informed, that an all-sufficient atonement has been made by Christ. Neither the number nor the atrocity of offences excludes from forgiveness, the penitent who returns to his duty. To all who come under this description, the offer of mercy extends, without exception. *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*†

This discovery of Divine government, afforded by the Gospel, is perfectly calculated to scatter the gloom which had overcast the desponding heart. The atmosphere clears up on every side; and is illuminated by cheering rays of celestial mercy. Not only is hope given to the penitent, but it is rendered sinful not to indulge that hope. We are not only allowed and encouraged, but we are commanded to trust in the Divine clemency. We are commanded to believe that *none who come unto Christ he will in any wise cast out.*‡ *As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, Oh house of Israel?*§—Such is the relief which the religion of Christ brings to them who *labour and are heavy laden* under the impressions of guilt and Divine displeasure; a relief which nothing can render ineffectual to the heart, except of the most gloomy superstition founded on gross misconceptions of the nature and attributes of God.—Let us now,

II. CONSIDER what *rest* the religion of Christ gives to them whose distress arises not from inward and moral, but from natural and external causes; from adverse fortune, or any of those numerous calamities to which we are at present exposed. To such persons it may seem more difficult to promise any effectual

\* Isaiah, lv. 7.

† Rom. viii. 32.

‡ John, vi. 37.

§ Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

relief. In the former case the distress lay entirely in the mind. As soon as its views are rectified, and its apprehensions quieted, the evil is removed, and the cure effected. Here, the distress arises from without; and the religion of Christ effects not the course of external events. But though it removes not all the evils of life; though it promises no continuance of undisturbed prosperity (which indeed it were not salutary for man always to enjoy;) yet, if it mitigates the evils which necessarily belong to our state, and supports us under them, it may justly be said to give *rest to them who labour and are heavy laden*. When much that is material and important is effected, we have no cause to complain, though all that we desire be not accomplished.—In this part of the discourse, I am to be considered as addressing myself not merely to such as are at present suffering any severe calamity; I now speak to many, who, in the midst of health and affluence, enjoy the various comforts of life. But I must desire such persons to look forward to what may one day be their state. Let them reflect how important it is to prepare themselves for the future unknown vicissitudes of the world. For, *if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.*\*—Now, either in the prospect of future distress, or under present suffering, I say, that the religion of Christ gives *rest* to the heart by the fortitude which it inspires, and by the consolations which it affords.

*First*, It inspires fortitude. It discovers a supreme administration, so friendly to the interests of goodness, as never to allow the followers of Christ to dread, that, in any situation of fortune, they shall be neglected by Heaven. From the abstract consideration of the Divine perfections, men had always some ground to believe, that the general order of the universe was consulted by its great Ruler. But how far the interest of individuals might be obliged to yield, or, in many cases, might be sacrificed, to this general order, they were left altogether in the dark. Here the Gospel of Christ comes to our aid, by the explicit assurance which it gives, that, in the great system of Providence, the welfare of every single good man is particularly included. *All things*, we are expressly told, are made to *work together*, not merely for the order and perfection of the whole, but also, *for good to them who love God.*† The life of every person who comes under this description, forms a system complete within itself; where every event that happens to him possesses its destined place, and forms a link in that great chain of causes, which was appointed, from the beginning of things, for carrying on his improvement and felicity. Such an arrangement of the affairs of the world, may appear astonishing to our

\* Eccles. xi. 8

† Rom. viii. 28.

narrow capacities; yet surely implies no effort beyond the reach of infinite power, joined with infinite wisdom and goodness.

Hence arises a degree of fortitude and constancy to good men, which can upon no other grounds be attained. Faith, in these principles of the Gospel, erects for them a fortress impregnable to the assaults of the world, into which they can at all times retreat. Sitting under the shelter of Divine protection, they calmly here the storm, when it blows with its utmost violence around them. *The floods have lifted up their voice; they have lifted up all their waves. But the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters; yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.\** Of the man who possesses such principles, it is justly said, *His heart is established; he shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.†* Tranquillity, order, and magnanimity, dwell with him; while all is confusion and trepidation among those, who have nothing to look to but the apparent disorders of the world.

THE doctrine of Christ not only arms us, in this manner, with fortitude against the approach of evil; but, supposing evils to fall upon us with their heaviest pressure, it lightens the load by many consolations to which others are strangers. While bad men trace, in the calamities with which they are visited, the hand of an offended Sovereign, Christians are taught to view them as the well-intended chastisements of a merciful Father. They hear, amidst them, that still voice which a good conscience brings to their ear; *Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God.‡* They apply to themselves the comfortable promises with which the Gospel abounds. They discover in these the happy issue decreed to their troubles; and wait with patience till Providence shall have accomplished its great and good designs. In the mean time, devotion opens to them its blessed and holy sanctuary: that sanctuary in which the wounded heart is healed, and the weary mind is at rest; where the cares of the world are forgotten, where its tumults are hushed, and its miseries disappear; where greater objects open to our view than what the world presents; where a more serene sky shines, and a sweeter and calmer light beams on the afflicted heart. In those moments of devotion, a pious man, pouring out his wants and sorrows to an Almighty Supporter, feels that he is not left solitary and forsaken in a vale of wo. God is with him, Christ and the Holy Ghost are with him; and though he should be bereaved of every earthly friend, he can look up in Heaven to a friend who will never die.

To these present consolations, the religion of Christ adds the joyful prospect of that future state, where eternal *rest remaineth*

\* Psalm xciii. 3, 4.

† Psalm cxii. 7, 8.

‡ Isaiah, lxi. 10.



for the people of God. This life they are taught to consider as only the *house of their pilgrimage*; the temporary mansion of painful though necessary discipline. But let them endure for a little, and the pilgrimage shall end, the discipline shall be finished; and all the virtuous be assembled in those blissful regions which are prepared for their reward. Such a prospect cheers the darkest hours of life; and affords a remedy to every trouble. *The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed.\** They appear, in this comparative view, as no more than a distressing dream of the night, from which one awakes into health, and light, and joy. Peculiar is this high consolation to the religion of Christ. It is what all nations had eagerly wished for; what all philosophy had anxiously sought to discover; but what no research, no philosophy were able to ascertain to mankind, till Christ brought the assurance of life and immortality from Heaven; and conferred on his disciples this noble and inestimable gift.

Thus, on the whole, the Christian doctrine is found to be the great medicine of life. It is the balm of human sorrows and cares. In our present state, where so many are suffering actual distress, of one kind or other, and where all have reason to dread the approach of distress, it is religion only that can alleviate the burdens of life, and smooth our passage through this evil world. — Let this view of religion persuade us to improve the sacred ordinance of our Lord's supper for *coming unto Christ* in the way before explained: that is, joining ourselves to him as his disciples; his disciples, not in words and professions only, but in heart and in truth; *taking upon us his yoke*, as is added in the words immediately following the text: and *learning of him who is meek and lowly in heart*. Let those who labour under the sense of remembered follies and crimes, *come unto Christ* with penitent dispositions, and they shall obtain pardon. Let those who labour under the suffering of present, or the apprehension of future sorrows, *come unto Christ*, and they shall receive consolation. All who are in any sense *heavy laden*, coming unto him, shall find *rest* to their souls.

BEFORE concluding this discourse, there is another set of men not yet mentioned, to whom I must also address the exhortation in the text; those I mean who, labouring under none of the distressful burdens of life, are surfeited of its pleasures; who labour under the burden only of languid ease, and the load of insipid prosperity. You drag, my friends, but a miserable existence. Oppressed by no sorrow, you feel vacuity and dissatisfaction within; you are often weary of life; and in your solitary hours,

\* Romans, viii. 18.

are disposed to confess that all you have experienced is vanity. Wherefore should you any longer *spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not ? Come to the waters which are now offered to you, and drink. Hear, and your souls shall live.* Retreat from the corrupting vanities of the world to Christ, to religion, and to virtue. New sources of enjoyment shall then be opened to you. A world yet untried shall display itself to your view. You shall be formed to a relish for the quiet and innocent pleasures of piety and devotion ; of friendship and good affections ; of useful knowledge, and virtuous activity ; of calm society, and seasonable retirement ; pleasures of which at present you have no conception ; but which, upon trial, you shall find superior to the trifling or turbulent amusements, in which you have hitherto passed your days.— The true satisfaction of the human mind is only to be found in religion and goodness ; in a purified heart and a virtuous life. All other plans of happiness are fallacious, and pregnant with disappointment. It is only by *acquainting ourselves with God* that we can *find peace* : And those who are *weary and heavy laden* now, shall be *weary and heavy laden* to the end, unless they come to him who only can *give them rest*.

## SERMON LVI.

### ON LUXURY AND LICENTIOUSNESS.

---

*The harp, and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts ; but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands.*—ISAIAH, v. 12.

It appears from many passages in the writings of this prophet. that in his days great corruption of manners had begun to take place among the people of Israel. Originally a sober and a religious nation, accustomed to a simple and pastoral life, after they had enlarged their territories by conquest, and acquired wealth by commerce, they gradually contracted habits of luxury ; and luxury soon introduced its usual train of attending evils. In the history of all nations the same circulation of manners has been found ; and the age in which we live resembles, in this respect, the ages which have gone before it. Forms of iniquity may vary ; but the corrupt propensities of men remain at all times much the same ; and revolutions from primitive simplicity to the refinements of criminal luxury have been often exhibited on the stage of the world. The reproof directed in the text to the Jews of that ancient age will be found equally applicable to the manners of many in modern times. In discoursing from it, I shall first consider the character of those who are described in the text, and shew the guilt that is involved in it. I shall next consider the duties which persons of that character are supposed to have neglected ; to regard the work of the Lord, and to consider the operation of his hands.

I. WHEN we take into view the character pointed at in the text, it is evident that what the prophet means to reprove is the spirit of inconsiderate dissipation, of intemperate indulgence, and irreligious luxury. It is not *the feast and the wine, the harp and the viol*, which he means to condemn. Music and wine are,

in themselves, things of innocent nature: Nay, when temperately enjoyed, they may be employed for useful purposes; for affording relaxation from the oppressive cares of life, and for promoting friendly intercourse among men. The opulent are not prohibited from enjoying the good things of this world, which Providence has bestowed upon them. Religion neither abolishes the distinction of rank, (as the vain philosophy of some would teach us to do;) nor interferes with a modest and decent indulgence of pleasure. It is the criminal abuse of pleasure which is here censured; that thoughtless and intemperate enjoyment of it which wholly absorbs the time and attention of men; which obliterates every serious thought of the proper business of life; and effaces the sense of religion and of God.

It may be proper to remark, that it is not open and direct impiety, which is laid to the charge of the persons here characterised. It is not said, that in their feast they scoffed at religion, or blasphemed the name of God. To this summit of wickedness these persons had not yet arrived; perhaps the age in which they lived gave not its countenance to this wantonness of impiety. It is merely a negative crime of which they are accused, that they *regarded not the work of the Lord, neither considered the operation of his hands*. But this absence of all religious impressions is here pointed out, as sufficient to stigmatize their characters with guilt. As soon as the sense of a Supreme Being is lost, the great check is taken off, which keeps under restraint the passions of men. Mean desires and low pleasures take place of the greater and nobler sentiments which reason and religion inspire. Amidst the tumult of *the wine and the feast*, all proper views of human life are forgotten. The duties which, as men, they have to perform, the part they have to act in the world, and the distresses to which they are exposing themselves, are banished from their thoughts. *To-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundantly*, is the only voice. Inflamed by society, and circulated from one loose companion to another, the spirit of riot grows and swells, till it ends in brutal excess.

Were such disorders rare and occasional merely, they might perhaps be forgotten and forgiven. But nourished by repetition and habit, they grow up among too many, to become the business and occupation of life. By these unfortunate votaries of pleasure, they are accounted essential to happiness. Life appears to stagnate without them. Having no resource within themselves, their spirits sink, and their very being seems annihilated, till the return of their favourite pleasures awaken within them some transient sparkles of joy. Idleness, ease, and prosperity, have too natural a tendency to generate the follies and vices now described. *Because they have no changes*, said the Psalmist, *therefore they*

*fear not God.\** They are the dark, and solitary hours of life, which recall men to recollection and wisdom. They show to the unthinking what this world really is, and what may be expected from it. But the day that is always bright and unclouded, is not made for men. It flatters them with the dangerous illusion, that it is in their power to render life one scene of pleasure; and that they have no other business on earth, but to spread the *feast*, and to call *the harp and the viol* to sound. But the examples are so frequent, of the dangers and the crimes which arise from an intemperate abuse of pleasure, that on this part of the subject it seems needless to insist any longer. I proceed, therefore,

II. To consider the duties which men are accused of having neglected; and which it is here supposed, if duly attended to, would have acted as the correctives of dissolute and irreligious luxury; these are, *to regard the work of the Lord*, and *to consider the operation of his hands*.—By recommending such duties, I do not mean to represent it as requisite that the feast should be turned into an act of worship; that the countenances of men should be always grave; or that, in the hours of amusement and of social festivity, no subject may employ their thoughts and their discourse, except God and a future state. All extremes in religion are dangerous; and by carrying austerity too far, we are in hazard of only promoting hypocrisy. But though some in the last age might be prone to this extreme; yet, at the present day there is not much occasion for warning men against it.—What I now insist upon is, that all our pleasures ought to be tempered with a serious sense of God; that scenes of gaiety and enjoyment should never make us forget that we are subjects of his government, and have a part allotted us to act in this world; that on no occasion they should be prolonged so much, repeated so often, or suffered to transport us so far, as to lead us to break any of the Divine laws, or to act inconsistently with the character of men and Christians. A prevailing sense of God on the mind is to be ever held the surest guard of innocence and virtue, amidst the allurements of pleasure. It is the salutary mixture which must be infused into the cup of joy, in order to render it safe and innoxious.

This sense of God should lead us, in the language of the prophet, *to regard the work of the Lord, and to consider the operation of his hands*; which expressions may be undertood as requiring us to have God upon our thoughts under two views; *to regard his work*, as the Author of nature; and *to consider the operation of his hands*, as the Governor of the world. Let us attend more particularly to each of these views of the Supreme being.

\* Psalm, lv. 19.

IN the first place, we are to view God as the Author of nature, *or to regard the work of the Lord* With his works we are in every place surrounded. We can cast our eyes no where, without discerning the hand of Him who formed them, if the grossness of our minds will only allow us to behold Him. Let giddy and thoughtless men turn aside a little from the haunts of riot. Let them stand still, and contemplate the wordrous works of God; and make trial of the effect which such contemplation would produce.—It were good for them that even independently of the Author, they were more acquainted with his works; good for them that from the societies of loose and dissolute men, they would retreat to the scenes of nature; would oftener dwell among them, and enjoy their beauties. This would form them to the relish of uncorrupted innocent pleasures; and make them feel the value of calm enjoyments, as superior to the noise and turbulence of licentious gaiety. From the harmony of nature and of nature's works, they would learn to hear sweeter sounds than what arise from *the viol, the tabret and the pipe*.

But to higher and more serious thoughts these works of nature give occasion, when considered in conjunction with the Creator who made them.—Let me call on you, my friends, to catch some interval of reflection, some serious moment, for looking with thoughtful eye on the world around you. Lift your view to that immense arch of Heaven which encompasses you above. Behold the sun in all his splendour rolling over your head by day; and the moon by night, in mild and serene majesty, surrounded with that host of stars which present to your imagination an innumerable multitude of worlds. Listen to the awful voice of thunder. Listen to the roar of the tempest and the ocean. Survey the wonders that fill the earth which you inhabit. Contemplate a steady and powerful Hand, bringing round spring and summer, autumn and winter, in regular course; decorating this earth with innumerable beauties, diversifying it with innumerable inhabitants, pouring forth comforts on all that live; and, at the same time, overawing the nations with the violence of the elements, when it pleases the Creator to let them forth.—After you have viewed yourselves as surrounded with such a scene of wonders; after you have beheld, on every hand, such an astonishing display of majesty, united with wisdom and goodness; are you not seized with solemn and serious awe? Is there not something which whispers you within, that to this great Creator reverence and homage are due by all the rational beings whom he has made? Admitted to be spectators of his works, placed in the midst of so many great and interesting objects, can you believe that you were brought hither for no purpose, but to immerse yourselves in gross and brutal, or, at best, in trifling pleasures: lost to all sense of the wonders

you behold; lost to all reverence of that God who gave you being, and who has erected this amazing fabric of nature, on which you look only with stupid and unmeaning eyes?—No: Let the scenes which you behold prompt correspondent feelings. Let them awaken you from the degrading intoxication of licentiousness, into nobler emotions. Every object which you view in nature, whether great or small, serves to instruct you. The star and the insect, the fiery meteor and the flower of spring, the verdant field and the lofty mountain, all exhibit a Supreme Power, before which you ought to tremble and adore; all preach the doctrine, all inspire the spirit of devotion and reverence. *Regarding then, the work of the Lord*, let rising emotions of awe and gratitude call forth from your souls such sentiments as these.—“Lord, wherever I am, and whatever I enjoy, may I never forget thee, as the Author of nature! “May I never forget that I am thy creature and thy subject! “In this magnificent temple of the universe, where thou hast “placed me, may I ever be thy faithful worshipper, and may “the reverence and the fear of god be the first sentiments of “my heart.—It is to such consideration of God I would now recall your thoughts from the *wine and the feast*, as proper to check the spirit of levity and folly; and to inspire manly and becoming sentiments, in the place of criminal dissipation. But,

In the *second* place, there is a consideration of a nature still more serious to be employed for the same purpose; the consideration of God as not only the Author of nature, but the Governor of his creatures. While we *regard the work of the Lord*, we are also to *consider the never-ceasing operation of his hands*. We are to look up to an awful and irresistible Providence, stretching its arm over our heads; directing the fate of men, and dispensing at its pleasure happiness or misery. In the giddy moments of jollity, the wanton and thoughtless are apt to say: “*Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.* Nothing “is better for man, than to rejoice as much as he can, all the “days of his vain life; and to keep himself undisturbed by superstitious terrors. He who sitteth in the Heavens bestows no “minute attention on the sons of earth. He permits *all things to come alike to all; one event to happen to the righteous and to the wicked.*”——Be assured, my brethren, it is not so. You greatly deceive yourselves, by imagining that your Creator and Governor is indifferent to the part you are now acting; or that the distribution of good and evil, which now takes place, has no relation to your moral conduct. In some instances, that relation may not be apparent; because the moral government of God is not completed in this world. But a multitude of proofs shew

government to be already begun: and point out to the train in which you may expect it to proceed.

In the history of all ages and nations, you cannot but have observed a thousand instances in which *the operation of the Divine hand* has been displayed; overtaking evil-doers sooner or later with punishment, and bringing on their own heads the ruin they had devised for others. You are not to imagine that this displeasure of providence is exerted only against the ambitious, the treacherous, and the cruel, who are the authors of extensive misery to the world. Under this idea, perhaps, you may be desirous to shelter yourselves, that your excesses are of a harmless kind; that you seek nothing more than the enjoyment of your own pleasures; that your *feast* and your *wine* interfere not with the order of the world; and that therefore you have done nothing which should awake the sleeping thunder, and bring it down from Heaven on your heads. Though not stained with the blackest colours of guilt, your conduct may nevertheless be highly offensive to the Ruler of the world. His government is not of that indolent inattentive kind, which allows impunity to every lesser criminal. He beholds with displeasure the behaviour of those who degrade their nature by vicious disorders; and contaminate, by their example, every society with which they are connected. His measures are taken, that, in one way or other, they shall suffer.

Look around the circle of your acquaintance, and observe, whether they are not the sober, the industrious, and the virtuous, who visibly prosper in the world, and rise into reputation and influence; observe whether the licentious and intemperate are not constantly humbled and checked by some dark reverse either in their health or their fortune; whether the irreligious and profligate are ever suffered to escape long, without being marked with infamy, and becoming objects of contempt.—I ask, to what cause this is to be ascribed, but to that *operation of the hand of God*, which I am now calling you to consider? Does it not obviously carry the marks of a plan, a system of things contrived and fore-ordained by Providence, for rewarding virtue, and punishing vice in every form of its disorders?—The Governor of the world need not for this purpose step from his throne, or put forth his hand from the clouds. With admirable wisdom he hath so ordered the train of human affairs, that, in their natural course, *men's own wickedness shall reprove them, and their backslidings correct them; that they shall be made to eat the fruit of their doings, and to fall into the pit which themselves had digged.*

These things have been always so apparent to observation, that though a man may have been seduced into irregular and



evil course during his life, yet, at the close of it, it seldom happens but he discerns their pernicious nature, and condemns himself for them. Never, perhaps, was there a father, who, after he had spent his days in idleness, dissipation, and luxury, did not, when dying, admonish the children whom he loved, to hold a more honourable course, to follow the paths of virtue, to fear God, and to fulfill properly the duties of their station.—To yourselves, indeed, I can confidently appeal, whether what I am now saying, be not confirmed by your own testimony. After you have been guilty of some criminal acts, in the course of those riotous pleasures which you indulge, have you not, at certain times, felt the stings of remorse? Were you not obliged to confess to yourselves that a sad prospect of misery was opening before you, if such excesses were to continue? Did you not hear an inward voice upbraiding you, for having sunk and degraded your character so far below that of many of your equals around you?—My friends, what was this but the voice of God, speaking, as the Governor of his creatures, within your heart; testifying loudly, that your course of life was displeasing to him; and warning you of punishments that were to follow. If his displeasure against you is already begun to be testified, can you tell where it is to stop, or how long it may continue to pursue you, throughout future stages of your existence? *Who knoweth the power of his wrath?*—To this awful, this warning voice will you not be persuaded reverently to listen? impressed by the dread authority which it carries, shall you not fall down on your knees before your Maker, imploring his mercy to pardon your past offences, and his grace to rectify your future way?

SUCH ought to be the effects of the consideration of God as the Governor of the world. It leads to thoughts of a very serious nature. When we *regard the work of the Lord*, and contemplate him as the Author of the universe, such contemplation prompts devotion. But when we *consider the operations of his hands* in providence, and contemplate him as the Governor of mankind, such contemplation prompts humiliation before him for offences committed. The former addresses itself to the ingenuous sentiments that are left in the heart; and awakens a sense of our unworthiness, in neglecting the Author of nature amidst our riotous pleasures. The latter addresses itself to our regard for safety and happiness; and awakens fear and dread, from consciousness of the guilt we have contracted. Hence springs up in every thoughtful mind, an anxious concern to avert the displeasure, and regain the favour of that Supreme Being to whom we are all subject. This, among unenlightened nations, gave rise to sacrifices, expiations, and all the rites of humble though superstitious worship. Among nations, who have been instructed in true religion, sentiments of the same

nature pave the way for prayer, repentance, faith, and all those duties, by means of which we may hope, through a Divine Mediator and Intercessor, to be reconciled to Heaven. Natural and revealed religion here appear in concord. We behold the original dictates of the human heart laying a foundation for the glad reception of the comfortable tidings of the Gospel.

I HAVE thus endeavoured to show in what manner, by *regarding the work of the Lord, and considering the operation of his hands*, we may prevent the dangers arising from a thoughtless indulgence of pleasure; we may be furnished with an antidote to the poison which is too often mixed in that intoxicating cup. Human life is full of troubles. We are all tempted to alleviate them as much as we can, by freely enjoying the pleasurable moments which Providence thinks fit to allow us. Enjoy them we may: But, if we would enjoy them safely, and enjoy them long, let us temper them with the fear of God. As soon as this is forgotten and obliterated, the sound of *the harp and the viol* is changed into the signal of death. The serpent comes forth from the roses where it had lain in ambush, and gives a fatal sting. Pleasure in moderation is the cordial, in excess it is the bane, of life.

## SERMON LVII.

ON THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN A FUTURE STATE.

---

*Thou wilt shew me the path of life : In thy presence is fulness of joy ; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.—*  
PSALM xvi. 11.

THE Apostle Peter, in a discourse which he held to the Jews, applies this passage, in a mystical and prophetic sense, to the Messiah.\* But, in its literal and primitive meaning, it expresses the exalted hopes by which the Psalmist David supported himself amidst the changes and revolutions, of which his life was full. By these hopes when flying before Saul, when driven from his throne, and persecuted by an unnatural son, he was enabled to preserve his virtue, and to maintain unshaken trust in God. In that early age of the world, those explicit discoveries of a state of immortality, which we enjoy, had not yet been given to mankind. But though the *Sun of righteousness* was not arisen, the dawn had appeared of that glorious day which he was to introduce. Even in those ancient times, holy men, as the Apostle writes to the Hebrews, *saw the promises afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them ; and, confessing that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth, declared that they sought after a better country that is an heavenly.*† Indeed, in every age, God permitted such hopes to afford support and consolation to those who served him. The full effect of them we behold in those triumphant expressions of the text, which are to be the subject of this discourse. They lead us to consider, first, The hope of the Psalmist in his present state ; *Thou wilt shew me the path of life.* And secondly, the termination of his hope in that future state, where *in the presence of God is fulness of joy, and at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

\* Acts. ii. 25—28

† Heb. xi. 13—16

I. *Thou wilt shew me the path of life.* This plainly imports, that there are different *paths*, or courses of conduct, which may be pursued by men in this world; a path which leads to life or happiness, and a path which issues in death or destruction. These opposite lines of conduct are determined by the choice which men make of virtue or of vice; and hence men are divided into two great classes, according as their inclinations lead them to good or evil. *The path of life* is often a rough and difficult path, followed only by a few. The opposite one is the broad way, in which the multitude walk; seemingly smooth, and strewed with flowers; but leading in the end to death and misery. *The path of life* conducts us up a steep ascent. The palace of virtue has, in all ages, been represented as placed on the summit of a hill; in the ascent of which labour is requisite, and difficulties are to be surmounted; and where a conductor is needed, to direct our way, and to aid our steps.

Now, the hope which good men entertain is, that this *path of life* shall be shewn them by God; that, when their intentions are upright, God will both instruct them concerning the road which leads to true happiness, and will assist them to pursue it successfully. Among nations where any suitable ideas of God or of virtue began to be formed, hopes of this nature also began to be entertained. It was consonant to the nature of man, to think that the Supreme Being was favourable to virtue. Accordingly, in the writings of some of the ancient philosophers, we find various obscure traces of this belief, that there was a benign heavenly Spirit, who illuminated the minds of the virtuous, and assisted their endeavours to obtain wisdom and happiness. They even asserted, that no man became great or good, without some inspiration of Heaven.

But what they indistinctly conceived, and could not with confidence rely upon, the doctrine of Christianity hath clearly explained and fully confirmed; expressly and frequently teaching, that, not only by the external discoveries of revelation, but by the inward operations of his Spirit, he *shews* to the humble and virtuous *the path of life*. While, by his word, he instructs them in their duty, by the influence of his grace he assists them in the performance of it. In all revelation there is certainly no doctrine more comfortable than this. It is to good men a noble and pleasing thought, that they are pursuing a path which God has discovered and pointed out to them. For they know that every path, in which he is their conductor, must be honourable, must be safe, must bring them in the end to felicity. They follow that *Shepherd of Israel*, who always leads his flock into *green pastures, and makes them lie down beside the still waters*. At the same time, they know that if there be truth in religion at all, on this principle they may securely rest, that the Divine Being will ne-

ver desert those who are endeavouring to follow out, as they can, the path which he has shewn them. He beholds them here in a state of great imbecility; surrounded with much darkness; exposed to numberless dangers, from the temptations that assault them without, and the seduction of misguided and disorderly passions within. In this situation, can they ever suspect that the Father of mercies will leave his servants, alone and unbefriended, to struggle up the hill of virtue, without stretching forth a compassionate arm to aid their frailty, and to guide them through the bewildering paths of life? Where were then the *God of love*? Where, those infinite compassions of his nature, in which all his worshippers have been encouraged to trust?—No: He *will send forth his light and his truth to bring them to his holy hill*. For *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance be- holdeth the upright*. With him there is no oblique purpose, to turn him aside from favouring the cause of goodness. No undertaking to which he has given his countenance shall prove abortive. No promise that he has made shall be allowed to fail. Whom he loveth, *he loveth to the end*. *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant*. *The meek will he guide in judgment, and them will he teach his way*. *His grace shall be sufficient for them, and his strength be made perfect in their weakness*. *They go from strength to strength; every one of them appeareth before God in Zion*,\*—Such are the hopes with which good men in the present life set forth on a course of piety and virtue. *Thou wilt shew me the path of life*. Let us now proceed,

II. To consider the termination of these hopes in a future state. *In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore*. All happiness assuredly dwells with God. *The fountain of life* is justly said to be *with him*. That supreme and independent Being must necessarily possess within himself every principle of beatitude; and no cause from without can possibly affect his untroubled felicity. Among created dependant beings, happiness flows in scattered and feeble streams; streams that are often tinged with the blackness of misery. But from before the throne of God issues the river of life, full, un- mixed, and pure; and the pleasures, which now in scanty por- tions we are permitted to taste, are all derived from that source. Whatever gladdens the hearts of men or angels, with any real and satisfactory joy, comes from Heaven. It is a portion of the *pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty*; a ray *is- suing from the brightness of the everlasting life*. It is manifest, therefore, that every approach to God must be an approach to felicity. The enjoyment of his immediate presence must be the

\* Psalm xxv. 14, 9. 2 Cor. xii. 9. Psalm lxxiv. 7.

consummation of felicity; and it is to this presence the Psalmist here expresses his hope, that the *path of life* was to conduct him.

The whole of what is implied in arriving at the presence of the Divinity, we cannot expect to comprehend. Such expressions as these of Scripture, *beholding the face of God; being made glad with the light of his countenance, and satisfied with his likeness; seeing light in his light; seeing no longer darkly as through a glass, but face to face; seeing him as he is*; are expressions altogether mysterious, conveying sublime though obscure ideas of the most perfect happiness and highest exaltation of human nature. This we know, that the absence of God, the distance at which we are now placed from any communication with our Creator, is one great source of our infelicity. Faith exerts its endeavours, but often ineffectually, to raise our souls to him. He is a *God that hideth himself*, His ways seem intricate and perplexed. We frequently cannot reconcile them to the conceptions which we had formed of his nature; and with many a suspicion and doubt they perplex the enquiring mind. His works we survey with astonishment. We wonder and adore. But while we clearly trace the footsteps of their great Author, his presence we can never discern. *We go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but we cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he worketh, but we cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that we cannot see him.*\* Hence, amidst the various sorrows and discouragements of the present state, that exclamation of Job's is often drawn forth from the pious heart, *Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!*†

Surrounded by such distressing obscurity, no hope more transporting can be opened to a good man, than that a period is to come when he shall be allowed to draw nearer to the Author of his existence, and to enjoy the sense of his presence. In order to convey some faint idea of that future bliss, by such an image as we can now employ, let the image be taken from the most glorious representative of the Supreme Being, with which we are acquainted in this world, the Sun in the heavens. As that resplendent luminary cheers and revives the universe, when, after the darkness of the tempestuous night, it comes forth in the morning with its brightest lustre, and inspires every heart with gladness; as ascending gradually through the heavens, it converts that whole vast extent, over which its beams are diffused, into a region of light; and thus changes entirely the state of objects by arraying all nature in beauty, and transforming it into the image of its own brightness:—Some such change as this, though in a degree infinitely superior, we may conceive the revelation of the Divine Presence to produce upon the human

\* Job, xxiii. 8, 9.

† Job, xxiii. 3.

soul. *I will behold thy face in righteousness ; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.*—But, without endeavouring further to unfold mysteries which we cannot explore, there are two sublime and expressive views of the Divine Essence given us in Scripture, on which it may be edifying that our thoughts should rest for a little, in order to aid our conceptions of the blessedness of good men hereafter, in the presence of God. It is said, *God is light.\* God is love.†* Let us consider what *fulness of joy* must arise from such manifestations of the Divine Essence to the blessed.

*God is light.* The revelation of his presence infers, of course, a complete diffusion of light and knowledge among all who partake of that presence. This unquestionable forms a primary ingredient of happiness. Ignorance, or the want of light, is the source of all our present misconduct, and all our misfortunes. The heart of man is dark ; and in the darkness of his heart is the seat of his corruption. He is unable to discern what is truly good. Perpetually employed in search of happiness, he is perpetually misled by false appearances of it. The errors of his understanding impose upon his passions ; and, in consequence of the wrong directions which his passions take, he is betrayed into a thousand disorders. Hence sensuality, covetousness, and all the violent contests with others about trifles, which occasion so much misery, and so many crimes in the world. *He feedeth on ashes, a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand ?‡*—Once open to him the perfect sources of knowledge and truth ; suppose him placed in the presence of that God who is *Light* ; suppose him illuminated by light derived immediately from the Supreme Being ; presently all his former errors would fly away, as mists are dispelled by the rising sun. His whole nature would be changed and reformed. The prejudices which obscured his understanding would be removed. The seductions of his passions would disappear. Rectitude and virtue, having nothing now to obstruct their entrance, would take entire possession of his heart. Angels are happier than men, because they enjoy more enlarged knowledge and views ; because they labour under none of our unhappy deceptions ; but see the truth as it is in itself ; see it, as it is in God. Sharing the same light which illuminates them, good men in a future state will share in their felicity.

Moreover, the light that flows from the presence of Him who is the original source of light, not only banishes miseries which were the effects of former darkness, but also confers the most exquisite enjoyment. The knowledge afforded us at present

\* 1 John, i. 5.

† 1 John, iv. 8.

. Isaiah, xlv. 20.

serves to supply our most pressing wants; but it does no more. It is always imperfect and unsatisfactory; nay, much painful anxiety it often leaves. Narrow is the sphere within which the mind can see at all; and even there it can see only *darkly as through a glass*. But when it shall be enlarged beyond this dusky territory, let loose from this earthly prison, and in *God's light* permitted to see *light*, the most magnificent and glorious spectacles must open to the view of the purified spirit. What must it be to behold the whole stupendous scene of nature unveiled, and its hidden mysteries disclosed! To trace the wise and just government of the Almighty, through all those intricacies which had so long perplexed us! To behold his hand conducting ten thousand worlds, which are now unknown to us; and throughout all the regions of boundless space, to view wisdom and goodness perpetually acting, and diversifying its operations in forms of endless variety! Well may such discoveries inspire that song of the blessed, which the Apostle John heard *as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! Just, and true are thy ways, thou King of saints!*\* As God is light,

*God is Love.* His presence must of course diffuse love, among all who are permitted to dwell in it. *He that loveth not, knoweth not God. He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.*† Were man a single, solitary being, the full enjoyment of light might suffice for his happiness; as the perfection of knowledge would rectify and improve to the highest all his faculties. But both here and hereafter, he is connected with other beings. Heaven implies a society; and the felicity of that society is constituted by the perfection of love and goodness, flowing from the presence of the God of love.

Hence follows the entire purification of human nature from all those malevolent passions, which have so long rendered our abode on earth the abode of misery. We greatly deceive ourselves, when we charge our chief distresses merely to the account of our external condition in the world. From the disadvantages attending it, I admit, that we may often have been exposed to suffer. We have met with disappointments in our pursuits. By the arrows of misfortune, we may have been wounded. Under infirmities of body, we may have languished. But on this we may depend, that the worst evils of our present condition arise from the want of goodness and love; from the disorders of selfish passions; from the irritation which these occasion when working within ourselves, and the distress which they produce

\* Rev. xix. 6. xv. 3.

† 1 John, iv. 8. 16.



when breaking out upon us from others; in a word, from that corrupted state of temper, and that reciprocation of jealousies, suspicions, and injuries, which is ever taking place among the societies of men. Could you banish distrust, craft and uncharitableness, from the earth, and form all mankind into an assembly of the just and the benevolent; could you inspire every heart with kind affections, and render every one friendly and generous to his neighbour; you would banish at once the most afflictive tribe of human evils. Seldom would the voice of complaint be heard. All nature would assume a different aspect. Cheerfulness would be seen in every countenance. Paradise would return. The wilderness would smile; *the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose.*—Now such are the effects which the presence of the God of love must produce on the inhabitants above, *beholding his glory, they are changed into the same image.* In that temple of eternal love, which his presence has hallowed and consecrated, no sound but the voice of harmony is ever heard; no appearances ever present themselves but those of peace and joy.

Thus, considering God under these two illustrious characters which are given of him in Scripture, as *Light*, and as *Love*, it follows that in his presence there must be *fulness of joy*. But I am far from saying that the few imperfect hints I have now given, exhaust, or even approach to the sum of those *pleasures for evermore which are at God's right hand*. Ten thousand pleasures are there, which now we have neither faculties to comprehend, nor powers to enjoy. Behind that mysterious cloud, which covers the habitation of eternity, the view of mortals cannot penetrate. Content with our humble and distant situation, we must as yet remain. Faith can only look to those glories from afar. In patient silence, it must wait, trust, and adore.

Supposing the ideas which I have set before you, in this discourse, to be no more than the speculations of a contemplative mind, such as were wont of old to be indulged by the philosophers of the Platonic school, still they would deserve attention, on account of their tendency to purify and elevate the mind.—But when they are considered in connection with a revelation, which, upon grounds the most unquestionable, we believe to be divine, they are entitled to command, not attention only, but reverence and faith.—They present to us such high expectations as are sufficient to determine every reasonable man to the choice of virtue; to support him under all its present discouragements, and to comfort him in the hour of death. Justly may they excite in our hearts, that ardent aspiration of the Psalmist: *My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; Oh! when shall I come, and appear before him!*—But with this wish in our hearts never, never, I beseech you, let us forget what was set forth in the first part of this discourse; that in order to arrive at the presence of

God, *the path of life* must previously be shewn to us by him, and that in this path we must persevere to the end. These two things cannot be disjoined, a virtuous life and a happy eternity. *Who shall ascend unto the hill of the Lord? and who shall stand in his holy place? He only who hath clean hands and a pure heart.* Between a corrupted heart and the God of light and love, there never can be any connection. But of this we may rest assured, that the path of piety and virtue, pursued with a firm and constant spirit, will, in the end, through the merits of our blessed Redeemer, bring us to that presence, where *is fulness of joy, and where are pleasures for evermore.*

## SERMON LVIII.

ON CURIOSITY CONCERNING THE AFFAIRS OF OTHERS.

---

*Peter seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.*—JOHN, XXI. 22.

THESE words occurred in a conference which our Lord held with Simon Peter, after his resurrection from the dead. Conscious of the disgrace which he had incurred by his late denial of his Master, Peter must at this time have appeared before him with shame. Our Lord, after a tacit rebuke, implied in the question which he repeatedly puts to him, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?* restores him, with great benignity, to his office as an Apostle, by giving the commandment to *feed his sheep*; and intimates also, that it should be his lot to suffer death in the cause of his Master. The Apostle John, distinguished here by the denomination of *the disciple whom Jesus loved*, being present at this conversation, Peter, who was always eager and forward, looking to John, puts this question to our Saviour, *Lord, and what shall this man do?* “What shall be his employment? what his rank and station in thy kingdom? what his future fate in life?”—By what principles, Peter was moved to put this unseasonable and improper question to his Master; whether it arose from mere curiosity, or from some emotion of rivalry and jealousy, does not appear; but it is plain that our Lord was dissatisfied with the inquiry which he made; and presently he checks Peter’s curiosity, by a severe reply; *What is that to thee?* “What is it to thee what *this man shall do*; what shall be his rank; or what the circumstances of his life or his death? Attend thou to thine own duty. Mind thy proper concerns. Fulfil the part which I have allotted to thee. *Follow thou*

“*me.*”——The instruction which arises from this conversation of our Lord’s with Peter, is, That all prying inquirers into the state, circumstances, or character of others, are reprehensible and improper: that to every man a particular charge is assigned by his Lord and Master, the fulfilment of which ought to be the primary object of his attention, without officiously thrusting himself into the concerns of others. The illustration of these points shall make the subject of the present discourse.

THAT idle curiosity, that inquisitive and meddling spirit, which leads men to pry into the affairs of their neighbours, is reprehensible on three accounts. It interrupts the good order, and breaks the peace of society. It brings forward and nourishes several bad passions. It draws men aside from a proper attention to the discharge of their own duty.

IT interrupts, I say, the order, and breaks the peace of society. In this world we are linked together by many ties. We are bound by duty, and we are prompted by interest, to give mutual assistance, and to perform friendly offices to each other. But those friendly offices are performed to most advantage, when we avoid to interfere unnecessarily in the concerns of our neighbour. Every man has his own part to act, has his own interest to consult, has affairs of his own to manage, which his neighbour has no call to scrutinize. Human life then proceeds in its most natural and orderly train, when every one keeps within the bounds of his proper province; when, as long as his pursuits are fair and lawful, he is allowed, without disturbance, to conduct them in his own way. *That ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business,*\* is the apostolical rule, and indeed the great rule, for preservation of harmony and order. But so it is, that, in every age, a set of men have existed, who, driven by an unhappy activity of spirit, oftener perhaps than by any settled design of doing ill, or any motives of ambition or interest, love to intermeddle where they have no concern, to inquire into the private affairs of others, and, from the imperfect information which they collect, to form conclusions concerning their circumstances and character. These are they who, in scripture, are characterised as *tattlers, and busy bodies in other men’s matters*, and from whom we are called to *turn away*.

Though persons of this description should be prompted by nothing but vain curiosity, they are, nevertheless, dangerous troublers of the world. While they conceive themselves to be inoffensive, they are sowing dissension and feuds. Crossing the lines in which others move, they create confusion, and awaken resentment. For every man conceives himself to be injured, when he finds another intruding into his affairs, and, without

\* 1. Thess. iv. 11.

any title, taking upon him to examine his conduct. Being improperly and unnecessarily disturbed, he claims the right of disturbing in his turn those who wantonly have troubled him.—Hence, many a friendship has been broken; the peace of many a family has been overthrown; and much bitter and lasting discord has been propagated through society.

WHILE this spirit of meddling curiosity injures so considerably the peace and good order of the world, it also nourishes among individuals who are addicted to it, a multitude of bad passions. Its most frequent source is mere idleness, which, in itself a vice, never fails to engender many vices more. The mind of man cannot be long without some food to nourish the activity of its thoughts. The idle, who have no nourishment of this sort within themselves, feed their thoughts with inquiries into the conduct of their neighbours. The inquisitive and curious are always talkative. What they learn, or fancy themselves to have learned, concerning others, they are generally in haste to divulge. A tale which the malicious have invented, and the credulous have propagated; a rumor which, arising among the multitude, and transmitted by one to another, has, in every step of its progress, gained fresh additions, becomes in the end the foundation of confident assertion, and of rash and severe judgment.

It is often by a spirit of jealousy and rivalry, that the researches of such persons are prompted. They wish to discover something that will bring down their neighbours character, circumstances, or reputation, to the level of their own; or that will flatter them with an opinion of their own superiority. A secret malignity lies at the bottom of their inquiries. It may be concealed by an affected show of candour and impartiality. It may even be veiled with the appearance of a friendly concern for the interest of others, and with affected apologies for their failings. But the hidden rancour is easily discovered.—While, therefore, persons of this description trouble the peace of society, they at the same time poison their own minds with malignant passions. Their disposition is entirely the reverse of that amiable spirit of charity, on which our religion lays so great a stress. Charity *covereth a multitude of sins*; but this prying and meddling spirit seeks to discover and divulge them. Charity *thinketh no evil*; but this temper inclines us always to suspect the worst. Charity *rejoiceth not in iniquity*; this temper triumphs in the discovery of errors and failings. Charity, like the sun, brightens every object on which it shines; a censorious disposition casts every character into the darkest shade it will bear.

It is to be farther observed, that all impertinent curiosity about the affairs of others tends greatly to obstruct personal re-

formation; as it draw men's thoughts aside from what ought to be the chief object of attention, the improvement of their own heart and life. They who are so officiously occupied about their neighbours, have little leisure, and less inclination, to observe their own defects, or to mind their own duty. From their inquisitive researches, they find, or imagine they find; in the behaviour of others, an apology for their own failings: And the favourite results of their inquiries generally is to rest satisfied with themselves. They are at least as good, they think, as others around them. The condemnation which they pass on the vices of their neighbours, they interpret to be a sentiment of virtue in themselves. They become those hypocrites described by our Lord, who see clearly *the mote that is in their neighbour's eye, while they discern not the beam that is in their own.*

In opposition to such a character as this, the doctrine plainly inculcated by the text is, that to every man a particular charge is given by his Lord and Master, a part is assigned him by Providence to act; that to this he ought to bend his chief attention; and, instead of scrutinizing the character or state of others, ought to think of himself, and leave them to stand or fall by their own master. *What shall this man do?* said Peter. *What,* replies our Lord, *is that to thee? Follow thou me.*

WHERE persons possess any important station, or distinguished rank in the world, the application of this doctrine to them is manifest. If they have any candour, they cannot refuse to acknowledge that God and the world have a title to expect from them a diligent attention, to their proper part in life; and that to waste their time in idle inquiries about others, with whom they have nothing to do, is reprehensible and sinful. But there are multitudes of mankind, to whom this appears in a very different light. They are humble and private men, who are willing to conceive themselves as of little importance in the world. Having no extensive influence, and no call, as they think, to distinguish themselves by active exertions in any sphere, they imagine that they may innocently lead an idle life, and indulge their curiosity, by canvassing at pleasure the character and the behaviour of those around them. With persons of this description every society too much abounds.—My brethren, no one ought to consider himself as insignificant in the sight of God. In our several stations we are all sent forth to be labourers in God's vineyard. Every man has his work allotted, his talent committed to him; by the due improvement of which he might, in one way or other, serve God, promote virtue, and be useful in the world. *Occupy till I come,* is the charge given to all Christians, without exception. To be entirely unemployed and idle, is the prerogative of no one, in any rank of life.

Even that sex, whose task is not to mingle in the labours of public and active business, have their own part assigned them to act. In the quiet of domestic shade, there are a variety of virtues to be exercised, and of important duties to be discharged. Much depends on them for the maintenance of private economy and order, for the education of the young, and for the relief and comfort of those whose functions engage them in the toils of the world. Even were no such female duties occur to be performed, the care of preparing for future usefulness; and of attaining such accomplishments as procure just esteem, is laudable. In such duties and cares, how far better is time employed, than in that search into private concerns, that circulation of rumours, those discussions of the conduct, and descants on the character of others, which engross conversation so much, and which end, for the most part, in severity of censure?

In whatever condition we are placed, to act always in character, should be our constant rule. He who acts in character, is above contempt, though his station be low. He who acts out of character, is despicable, though his station be ever so high. *What is that to thee*, what this man or that man does? Think of what thou oughtest to do thyself; of what is suitable to thy character and place; of what the world has a title to expect from thee. Every excursion of vain curiosity about others, is a subtraction from that time and thought which was due to ourselves, and due to God. *Having gifts*, says the Apostle Paul, *differing according to the grace that is given us, whether ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exorteth, on exhortation. He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.\**

In the great circle of human affairs, there is room for every one to be busy and well-employed in his own province, without encroaching upon that of others. It is the province of superiors to direct; of inferiors, to obey; of the learned, to be instructive; of the ignorant, to be docile; of the old, to be communicative; of the young, to be advisable and diligent. Art thou poor? Show thyself active and industrious, peaceable and contented. Art thou wealthy? Show thyself beneficent and charitable, condescending and humane. If thou livest much in the world, it is thy duty to make the light of a good example shine conspicuously before others. If thou livest private and retired, it is thy business to improve thine own mind, and to add. If thou canst do no more, one faithful subject to the Messiah's kingdom. There is indeed no man so sequestered from active life, but within his own narrow sphere he may find some opportunities of

\* Rom. xii. 6--9.

doing good ; of cultivating friendship, promoting peace, and discharging many of these lesser offices of humanity and kindness, which are within the reach of every one, and which we all owe to one another. In all the various relations which subsist among us in life, as husband and wife, master and servants, parents and children, relations and friends, rulers and subjects, innumerable duties stand ready to be performed ; innumerable calls to virtuous activity present themselves on every hand, sufficient to fill up with advantage and honour the whole time of man.

THERE is, in particular, one great and comprehensive object of attention, which, in the text, is placed in direct opposition to that idle curiosity reprehended by our Lord ; that is, to follow Christ. *Follow thou me.* What this man or that man does ; how he employs his time ; what use he makes of his talents ; how he succeeds in the world ; are matters, concerning which the information we receive can never be of great importance to us ; often, is of no importance at all. But how our Saviour behaved while he was on earth, or how, in our situation, he would have behaved, are matters of the highest moment to every Christian. The commandment given in the text, to *follow him*, includes both observance of his words, and imitation of his example. The words of Christ contain, as we all know, the standing rule of our life. His example exhibits the great model on which our conduct ought to be formed ; and it is to this that the precept here delivered directly refers.—Examples have great influence on all. But by all human examples, we are in danger of being occasionally misled. We are ever obliged to be on our guard, lest the admiration of what is estimable, betray us into a resemblance of what is blenished and faulty. For the most perfect human characters, in the midst of their brightness and beauty, are always marked with some of those dark spots which stain the nature of man. But our Lord possessed all the virtues of the greatest and best men, without partaking any of their defects. In him, all was light without a shade, and beauty without a stain.—At the same time, his example is attended with this singular advantage, of being more accommodated than any other to general imitation. It was distinguished by no unnatural austerities, no affected singularities ; but exhibits the plain and simple tenor of all those virtues for which we have most frequent occasion in ordinary life. In order to render it of more universal benefit, our Lord fixed his residence in no particular place ; he tied himself down to no particular calling, or way of living ; but gives us the opportunity of viewing his behaviour, in that variety of lights which equally and indifferently regard all mankind. His life was divided between the retired and the active state. Devotion and business equally shared it. In the



discharge of that high office with which he was vested, we behold the perfect model of a public character; and we behold the most beautiful example of private life, when we contemplate him among his disciples, as a father in the midst of his family.—By such means he has exhibited before us specimens of every kind of virtue; and to all ranks and classes of men has afforded a pattern after which they may copy. Hardly is there any emergency which can occur in life, but from some incident in our Saviour's conduct, from some feature displayed in his character, we are enabled to say to ourselves, "Thus Christ would have spoken, thus he would have acted, thus he would have suffered, "if he had been circumstanced as we are now."

Instead, therefore of thinking of thy neighbours around thee, and of enquiring how they behave, keep Christ in thine eye, and in thy whole conduct follow him. *Follow him* in his steady and conscientious discharge of duty, amidst opposition from evil men and a corrupted world. Follow him in his patient submission to his Father's will, and the calmness of his spirit under all trials. Follow him in his acts of disinterested benevolence, in his compassion to the unhappy, in his readiness to oblige, to assist, and to relieve. Imitate the mildness and gentleness of his manners. Imitate the affability and condescension which appeared in his behaviour. Imitate the uncorrupted simplicity and purity which distinguished his whole life.

THESE are much worthier and nobler objects of your attention, than any of those trifling varieties which you can explore and discover in the character of those among whom you live.—By lifting your view to so high a standard, you will be preserved from descending to those futile and corrupting employments of thought, which occupy the idle, the vain, and the malignant. It is incredible, how much time and attention are thrown away by men in examining the affairs of others, and discussing their conduct. Were their time and attention thrown away only, the evil would in some degree, be less. But they are worse than thrown away; they are not merely fruitless, but productive of much mischief. Such a habit of thought is connected with a thousand vices. It is the constant source of rash and severe censure. It arises from envy and jealousy. It fomented ill-nature and pride. It propagates misunderstanding and discord. All those evils would be prevented, if the reproof which our Lord administers in the text came oftener home, with proper authority to the reflection of men: *What is that to thee?* Each of us have more material and important business of our own to fulfil. Our task is assigned; our part allotted. Did we suitably examine how that part was performed, we should be less disposed to busy ourselves about the concerns of others. We should

discover many a disorder to be corrected at home ; many a weed to be pulled out from our own grounds ; much remaining to be done, in order to render ourselves useful in this world, and fit for a world to come.—Wherefore, instead of being critics on others, let us employ our criticism on ourselves. Leaving others to be judged by Him who searcheth the heart, let us implore his assistance for enabling us to act well our own part, and to follow Christ.

## SERMON LIX.

ON OUR PRESENT IGNORANCE OF THE WAYS OF GOD.

---

*Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.*—JOHN, xiii. 7.

THESE words of our Lord were occasioned by a circumstance in his behaviour which appeared mysterious to his disciples. When about to celebrate his last passover, he went to give them an instructive lesson of condescension and humility. The mode which he chose for delivering this instruction, was the emblematical action of washing their feet. When Simon Peter saw his Master addressing himself to the performance of so menial an office, he exclaims with the greatest surprise, *Lord, dost thou wash my feet?* Our Lord replies, in the words of the text, *What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.* “My behaviour in this instance, may seem unaccountable to you at present; but you shall afterwards receive a satisfactory explanation of the intent of that symbol which I now employ.”

The expressions of a Divine Person, on this occasion, can very naturally and properly be applied to various instances, where the conduct of Providence, in the administration of human affairs, remains dark and mysterious to us. *What I do thou knowest not now.* We must for a while be kept in ignorance of the designs of Heaven. But this ignorance, though necessary at present, is not always to continue. A time shall come when a commentary should be afforded on all that is now obscure; when the veil of mystery shall be removed; and full satisfaction be given to every rational mind. *Thou shalt know hereafter.* This is the doctrine which I purpose to illustrate in the following discourse.

I. OUR Saviour's words lead us to observe, that many things in the conduct of Providence are at present mysterious and unintelligible. The truth of this observation will not be called in question. It is indeed very readily admitted by all; and ever since the beginning of the world has been the foundation of many a complaint, and of much scepticism concerning the government of Heaven.— That human affairs are not left to roll on according to mere chance, and that Providence interposes in them to a certain degree, is made evident by various tokens to every candid mind. But the perplexity and trouble of the thoughtful inquirer arises from observing that Providence appears not to pursue any regular or consistent plan. An unaccountable mixture of light and darkness presents itself to us, when we attempt to trace the affairs of the world up to any wise and righteous administration. We see justice and order begun; but on many occasions they seem to be deserted. The ray of light which we had traced for a while, suddenly forsakes us; and, where we had looked for the continuance of order, we meet with confusion and disappointment. For instance; when we examine the constitution of the human mind, we discern evident marks of its being framed with a view to favour and reward virtue. Conscience is endowed with signal authority to check vice. It brings home uneasiness and remorse to the bad; and it soothes and supports the righteous with self-approbation and peace. The ordinary course of human things is made to coincide in some degree with this constitution of our nature. The worthy and the good are, in general, honoured and esteemed. *He that walketh uprightly* is, for the most part, found to *walk surely*. The chief misfortunes that befall us in life can be traced to some vices or follies which we have committed; and it almost never happens but the *sinner's own wickedness is made, sooner or later, to reprove him, and his backslidings to correct him*.

All this carries the impress of a just Providence, of a wise and a benevolent administration of the universe. We cannot avoid perceiving that the Almighty hath *set his throne for judgment*. At the same time, when we pursue our inquiries, the Almighty appears to *hold back the face of his throne, and to spread his cloud upon it*.\* For in looking abroad into the world, how many scenes do we behold which are far from corresponding with any ideas we could form of the government of Heaven? Many nations of the earth we see lying in a state of barbarity and misery; sunk in such gross ignorance as degrades them below the rank of rational beings; or abandoned to be the prey of cruel oppression and tyranny. When we look to the state of individuals around us, we hear the lamentations of the un-

\* Job, xxvi. 9.

happy on every hand. We meet with weeping parents, and mourning friends. We behold the young cut off in the flower of their days, and the aged left desolate in the midst of sorrows. The useful and virtuous are swept away, and the worthless left to flourish. The lives of the best men are often filled with discouragements and disappointed hopes. Merit languishes in neglected solitude; and vanity and presumption gain the admiration of the world. From the scourge of calumny, and from the hand of violence, the injured look up to God as the Avenger of their cause; but often they look up in vain. He is *a God that hideth himself*. He dwelleth, as to them, in the secret place of darkness; or, if he dwelleth in light, it is in *light to which no man can approach*. Resignation may seal up their lips; but in silence they drop the tear and mourn while they adore.

SUCH, it must not be dissembled, are the difficulties which encounter us when we attempt to trace the present ways of God. At the same time, upon reflection, we may be satisfied that causes can be assigned for things appearing in this unfavourable light; and that there is no reason to be surprised at the divine conduct being mysterious at present.

The monarchy of the universe is a great and complicated system. It comprehends numberless generations of men, who are brought forth to act their parts for purposes unknown to us. It includes two worlds at once; the world that now is, and which is only a small portion of existence; and a world that is to come, which endures for eternity. To us, no more than the beginnings of things are visible. We see only some broken parts of a great whole. We trace but a few links of that chain of being, which, by secret connections, binds together the present and the future. Such knowledge is afforded us as is sufficient for supplying the exigencies and wants of our present state; but it does no more. Peeping abroad from a dark corner of the universe, we attempt in vain to explore the counsels that govern the world. It is an attempt to sound an unfathomable deep with a scanty line; and with a feeble wing to ascend above the stars. In any complicated work, even of human art, it is found necessary to be acquainted with the design of the whole, in order to judge of the fitness of its parts. In a scheme so complex as the administration of the world, where all the parts refer to one another, and where what is seen is often subordinate to what is invisible, how is it possible but our judgments must be often erroneous, and our complaints ill-founded? If a peasant or a cottager be incapable of judging of the government of a mighty empire, is it surprising that we should be at a loss concerning the conduct of the Almighty towards his creatures? *What I do, thou knowest not now.*

BUT, on this argument still more can be said for our satisfaction. We are to observe, that complete information respecting the ways of God, not only was not to be expected here; but, moreover, that it would have been hurtful, if granted to us in our present state. It would have proved inconsistent with that state; with the actions which we have to perform in it, and the duties we have to fulfil. It would indeed have overthrown the whole design of our being placed in this world. We are placed here under the trial of our virtue. Ignorance of the events that are ordained to befall us, ignorance of the plans and decrees of Heaven, enter necessarily into a state of trial. In order to exercise both our intellectual and moral powers, and to carry them forward to improvement, we must be left to find our way in the midst of difficulties and doubts, of hardships and sufferings. We must be taught to act our part with constancy, though the reward of our constancy be distant. We must learn to bear with patience whatever our Creator judges proper to lay upon us, though we see not the reason of the hardships he inflicts. If we were let into the secret of the whole plan of Providence; if the justice of Heaven were, in every step of its procedure, made manifest to our view, man would no longer be the creature he now is, nor would his present state answer any purpose of discipline or trial.

Mystery and darkness, therefore, must of necessity now take place in the course of things. Our present state can be no other than a state of twilight or dawn, were dubious forms shall often present themselves to us, and where we shall find ourselves in a middle condition between complete light and total darkness. Had we enjoyed no evidence of a just Judge ruling the earth, and of his providence interposing in our affairs, virtue would have been altogether deprived of its encouragement and support. Had the evidence, on the other hand, been so strong as to place the hand of the Almighty constantly before our eyes, the intention of our present existence would have been defeated, and no trial of virtue have remained. Instead, therefore, of complaining of the obscurity which at present covers the conduct of Providence, we see that, on the whole, we have reason to submit and adore.

II. THE text suggests that, though what God is doing, or what he intends to do, we *know not now*, yet there is ground to believe, that at some future period we shall receive information. *What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.*

The question here arises, what that *hereafter* is, to which we are to look for the solution of our present doubts?

IN the first place, *hereafter* may, on some occasions, refer to the subsequent course of events in this world. It often happens that the consequences of things throw light on the designs of God. The history of Providence, in proportion as it advances, disem-

broils itself. Though our present condition forbids extensive and complete information, yet as much is sometimes allowed to appear as gives us favourable openings into the righteous and benevolent counsels of Heaven.—Thus in the public affairs of the world it has been frequently seen, that from the most unpromising causes important and beneficent effects have, in the sequel, arisen. In our own country, at one period, the violent passions of a prince gave beginning to the Reformation. At another period arbitrary attempts against religion and liberty occasioned that happy Revolution which has formed the era of national prosperity. In many instances, *the wrath of man* has been made to *praise God*. Those wars and commotions that shake the moral world have answered similar purposes with tempests in the natural world, of purging the air from noxious vapours, and restoring it to a temperature more sound and wholesome. From the midst of confusion, order has been made to spring; and from temporary mischief, lasting advantages to arise.—In all cases of this nature, with which sacred and civil history abounds, secret designs of Heaven were going on, which were unfolded in the end. The wheel was always in motion. The hand of the clock was advancing with unperceived progress, till the moment came of its striking the appointed hour.

In like manner, with respect to individuals, there is often a *hereafter* in the course of their lives, which discloses and justifies the ways of God. Not to mention the good effects which misfortunes are found to produce on the minds of men, by checking their vices and correcting their errors, innumerable exemplifications can be given, of misfortunes paving their way to future advancement in the world. We are always querulous and impatient when designs succeed not according to our wish. Ignorant of what futurity is to bring forward, occupied with nothing but the present, we exclaim, Where is God? Where the sceptre of righteousness? *Hath he forgotten to be gracious?* or doth he indeed see, and is there knowledge in the Most High? *God seeth not as man seeth*: He looketh not merely to what you suffer, but to what the effect of these sufferings is to be. Consider only in how different a light the patriarch Joseph would view the events of his life after he had seen in what they had terminated, from the light in which he saw them, when led away by the Ishmaelites as a slave, or when thrown by Potiphar into the Egyptian prison. We murmur against Providence, just as the impetuous youth frets against his instructors and tutors, who are keeping him under a strict, and, as he thinks, a needless, discipline. He knows not that, by their instruction and discipline, they are laying the foundation of his future fortunes; of the wealth which he is to acquire, and of the advancement to which he is to rise in the world. What may justly be said to

him by his tutors and instructors, is equally applicable to us all under our present state of education; *What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.*—Regarding, then, the unknown issue of all worldly events in this life, let us never despair; let us never think dishonourably of the government of God; but have patience till his providence accomplish its designs in its own way and at its own time. *Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him.\**

IN the second place, the expression of *hereafter* in the text must be understood to refer, in its full extent, not to future events in this life, but to a subsequent state of being. For this life is no more than the beginning of the mighty and extensive plans of Providence. The seeds are only now sown, of what is to ripen and come forth, at the harvest of the world, when the revolution of the great moral year shall be furnished, and the government of God shall obtain its full completion. It is the chief scope of religion to direct our view to this period; and it hath often taught us that the knowledge of the ways of God, then enjoyed by the blessed, shall constitute a chief article of their felicity. *Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face. Now we know in part; but then we shall know even as we are known. When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. In God's light we shall see light†* The reasons that required obscurity to remain for a while on the ways of God no longer subsist. The education of good men is completed; and the intention of those steps of education, which once they could not comprehend, now becomes apparent.—Why this man was prematurely carried away from the world in the beginning of a promising course; why that deserving family were left overwhelmed with grief and despair, by the loss of one who was their sole benefactor and support; why friendships cemented by tender ties were suddenly torn asunder by death; these are enquiries to which we can now make no reply; and which throw a dark gloom over the conduct of the Almighty. But the spirits of the just above, who are admitted to a larger view of the ways of God, see the reasons of such counsels. They see that one man was seasonably taken away from dangers and evils to come, which, unknown to him, were hovering over his head. They see that Providence was in secret preparing unexpected blessings for the family who appeared to be left disconsolate and hopeless. They see that it was time for friendships to be dissolved, when their longer continuance would to some of the parties have proved a snare. Where we behold nothing but the rod of power stretched forth, they discern an interposition of the hand of mercy.

\* Job, xxxv. 14.

† Cor. xiii. 10, 12. Psalm xxxv. 9.



Let us wait till this promised *hereafter* arrive, and we shall in like manner be satisfied concerning the events that now disturb and perplex us. We shall then know why so much darkness and misery have been so long permitted to remain on the earth, and so much oppression and tyranny to prevail among the nations. We shall see rising as from the ashes of the old world, a new and beautiful structure; *new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.* As wide as is the difference between the appearance of the world when it lay in its primitive chaos, *without form and void*, and the appearance it has now assumed, when resplendent with the light of the sun, and decked with the beauties of nature; such is the difference between the Divine plans in their beginnings, and in their full completion. At the conclusion, and not till then, the glory of the Lord shall become manifest to all; and, as it is described in the book of the Revelation, a voice shall be heard *from every creature which is in heaven and on the earth, and under the earth, saying, Blessing and honour, and power, and glory, be to him that sitteth on the throne. Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty: just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.\**

APPLICATION of the doctrines that have been illustrated may be made to two classes of men,

*First*, To sceptics; who, from the present mysterious conduct of Providence, hastily draw the conclusion, that no government is exercised over human affairs, but that all things are suffered indiscriminately to come alike to all men.—I have shown that, from the inadequate views which we are at present able to take of the general system, such mysterious appearances of Providence must be expected to take place. Not only so, but I have also shown it to be fit and necessary that this mixture of obscurity should now remain; as a full display of regular justice and order would be inconsistent with the moral improvement of men in this life. Let me desire the sceptic to look to the state of the natural world. When he thinks of the order and magnificence that prevail in it, he will, perhaps, be unwilling to pronounce it the mere production of chance. He cannot but recognize the hand of intelligence, and acknowledge it to have proceeded from a designing Cause. I ask him, Whether in the natural world he discerns not as many mysterious and puzzling appearances as are to be found in the moral world? Are not destructive storms, burning mountains, uninhabitable deserts, as difficult to be reconciled to his preconceived ideas of supreme wisdom and goodness in the Creator, as the sufferings and afflictions which in the course of providence befall the just? The natural and

\* Rev. v. 13.—xv. 3.

moral world are, in this respect, counterparts to one another. Both are marked with the same characters, and carry the impress of the same powerful and gracious hand. In both, it is evidently the intention of the first Author not to render every thing level to our capacity; but in the midst of high design and order, to allow certain objects to appear, which contradict the ideas we have formed, and mock our vain researches. Now, if we are obliged to admit that the order and beauty of the natural world sufficiently prove it to be the work of a wise Creator, notwithstanding the seeming deformities which it exhibits; are we not led by the same train of reasoning to conclude, that the moral world is under the direction of a wise Governor, though much of what he now does we cannot satisfactorily explain.

*Secondly*, THE doctrine of the text is to be applied not only for silencing sceptics, but for comforting the pious. Never let them be dejected by the darkness which now covers the ways of the Almighty. If he withdraw himself from their view, it is not because he neglects them; but because they are incapable of comprehending his designs; because it were not for their good that all his designs were revealed to them.—Instead of perplexing themselves about what is obscure, let them rest on the clear and authentic discoveries that have been given of the Divine goodness. Let them rest on those great and signal facts that prove it; particularly on that illustrious fact, the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. He that *spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all*, will assuredly not always conceal himself from those who serve him. Though what he does they *know not now*, the time approaches when *they shall know hereafter*. Till that time come, let them believe and trust; let them hope and adore. From this conclusion let them never depart, that to *fear God and keep his commandments*, is in every situation the truest wisdom; that if there be government in the universe at all, the virtuous and the worthy are loved and protected by Heaven: that in *due season they shall reap if they faint not*: for the care of them is with the Lord, and their reward with the Most High.

## SERMON LX.

### ON THE SLAVERY OF VICE.

---

*While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.—2 PETER, ii. 19.*

BONDAGE and subjection are disagreeable sounds to the ear, disagreeable ideas to the mind. The advocates of vice, taking advantage of those natural impressions, have in every age employed them for discrediting religion. They represent it as the bondage and confinement of the freeborn soul of man; as a state of perpetual constraint, formed by a system of severe rules, which designing men have contrived to impose as fetters on the multitude. On the other hand, they paint a licentious course to themselves, and hold it out to the world, as the gay and pleasurable enjoyment of life; where, having surmounted the prejudices of education, and the timorous scruples of conscience, men can think and act at pleasure, and give full scope to every wish of the heart.—But what if those pretended sons of freedom be themselves held in miserable subjection, and their boasts of liberty be no more than the *swelling words of vanity*? The Apostle asserts in the text that, while they *promise liberty* to others, they are the *servants*, or slaves of *corruption*. *overcome and brought into bondage by it*. This assertion of the Apostle I propose to illustrate. I shall endeavour to make it appear, that no true liberty can arise from vice; that bad men undergo the worst servitude; and that no one is free, but he who is virtuous and good.

IT is necessary to begin with removing false ideas of liberty, and shewing in what it truly consists. We are not to imagine, that to be free, imports our being set loose from restraint or rule of every kind. No man, in any condition of life, is at liberty to act always as he pleases, and to gratify every wish he forms. The nature of the human state, necessarily imposes on all men

various restraints. The laws of society allow no one to indulge himself in pursuits or pleasures that are injurious to his neighbour. Even our own nature limits our pleasures within certain bounds. All our desires cannot be gratified together. They frequently interfere, and require him who would indulge one favourite passion, to deny himself in another. Distinctions, therefore, must be made, preferences be given, and some general regulations of conduct be observed, by every one who consults his own welfare. If there be any regulation which insures us of safety and happiness, to be disengaged from the observance of that regulation is no article of liberty; at least of such liberty as a wise man would wish to enjoy. It is in effect to be turned loose to our own ruin. It is such liberty as a blind man enjoys, of wandering at random, and striking into every devious path, without a guide to direct his steps, and save him from destruction.

That unbounded licentiousness, therefore, which sinners prefer to every regulation of conduct, is altogether different from true freedom. It is in moral behaviour the same as anarchy is in a state, where law and order are extinct. Anarchy, surely, is no less incompatible with true liberty than absolute despotism; and of the two it is hard to say which is the least eligible, or the most miserable state. Liberty by no means supposes the absence of all government. It only supposes that the government under which we are placed is wise; and that the restraints to which we voluntarily submit ourselves have been contrived for the general interest.

To be free, therefore, imports, in general, our being placed in such circumstances, that, within the bounds of justice and good order, we can act according to our own deliberate choice, and take such measures for our conduct as we have reason to believe are conducive to our welfare; without being obstructed either by external force, or by violent internal impulse. This is that happy and dignified state which every wise man earnestly wishes to enjoy. The advantages which result from it are chiefly these three: freedom of choice; independence of mind; boldness and security. In opposition to these distinguishing characters of liberty, I now proceed to shew that, in the first place, vice deprives bad men of free choice in their actions; that, in the second place, it brings them under a slavish dependence on external circumstances; and that, in the third place, it reduces them to that abject, cowardly, and disquieted state which is essentially characteristic of bondage.

I. VICE is inconsistent with liberty, as it deprives sinners of the power of free choice, by bringing them under the dominion of passions and habits. Religion and virtue address themselves to reason. They call us to look round on every side; to think

well of the consequences of our actions; and, before we take any step of importance, to compare the good with the evil that may ensue from it. He, therefore, who follows their dictates, acts the part of a man who freely consults, and chooses, for his own interest. But vice can make no pretensions of this kind. It awaits not the test of deliberate comparison and choice; but overpowers us at once by some striking impression of present advantage or enjoyment. It hurries us with the violence of passion; captivates us by the allurements of pleasure; or dazzles us by the glare of riches. The sinner yields to the impulse, merely because he cannot resist it. Reason remonstrates; conscience endeavours to check him; but all in vain. Having once allowed some strong passion to gain the ascendant, he has thrown himself into the middle of a torrent, against which he may sometimes faintly struggle, but the impetuosity of the stream bears him along. In this situation he is so far from being free, that he is not master of himself. He does not go, but is driven; tossed, agitated and impelled; passive, like a ship to the violence of the waves.

After passion has for a while exercised its tyrannical sway, its vehemence may by degrees subside. But when, by long indulgence, it has established habits of gratification, the sinner's bondage becomes then more confirmed, and more miserable. For, during the heat of pursuit, he is little capable of reflection. But when his ardour is abated, and, nevertheless, a vicious habit rooted, he has full leisure to perceive the heavy yoke he has brought upon himself. How many slaves do we see in the world, to intemperance, and all kinds of criminal pleasure, merely through the influence of customs, which they had allowed to become so inveterate that it was not in their power to alter them? Are they not often reduced to a condition so wretched, that when their licentious pleasures have become utterly insipid, they are still forced to continue them, solely because they cannot refrain; not because the indulgence gives them pleasure, but because abstinence would give them pain; and this too, even when they are obliged at last to condemn their habits of life, as injuring their fortune, impairing their constitution, or disgracing their character? Vice is not of such a nature that we can say to it, *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther.* Having once entered into its territories, it is not in our power to make a retreat when we please. *He that committeth sin, is the servant of sin.* No man who has once yielded up the government of his mind, and given loose rein to his desires and passions, can tell how far these may carry him. He may be brought into such a desperate state, that nothing shall remain for him but to look back with regret upon the forsaken path of innocence and liberty; and, severely conscious of the thralldom he suffers, to groan under fetters which

he despairs of throwing off. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spot? Then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to do evil.\**

Vice confirms its dominion, and extends it still farther over the soul, by compelling the sinner to support one crime by means of another. Not only he is enslaved to those vices which take their rise from his own inclination, but they render others necessary, to which, against his inclination, he must submit; and thereby strengthen the commanding power of iniquity within him. The immoderate love of pleasure, for instance, leads him into expense beyond his fortune. In order to support that expense, he is obliged to have recourse to low and dishonourable methods of gain, which originally he despised. To cover these, he is forced upon arts of dissimulation and fraud. One instance of fraud obliges him to support it by another; till, in the end, there arises a character of complicated vice; of luxury shooting forth into baseness, dishonesty, injustice, and perhaps cruelty. It is thus that one favourite passion brings in a tribe of auxiliaries to complete the dominion of sin. Among all our corrupt passions there is a strong and intimate connection. When any one of them is adopted into our family, it never quits us until it has fathered upon us all its kindred.—By such means as these, by the violence of passions, by the power of habits, and by the connection of one vice with another, sin establishes that servitude over the will, which deprives bad men of all power of free choice in their actions.

II. THE slavery produced by vice appears in the dependence under which it brings the sinner to circumstances of external fortune. One of the favourite characters of liberty is, the independence it bestows. He who is truly a free man is above all servile compliances, and abject subjection. He is able to rest upon himself; and while he regards his superiors with proper deference, neither debases himself by cringing to them, nor is tempted to purchase their favour by dishonourable means. But the sinner has forfeited every privilege of this nature. His passions and habits render him an absolute dependant on the world, and the world's favour; on the uncertain goods of fortune, and the fickle humours of men. For it is by these he subsists, and among these his happiness is sought; according as his passions determine him to pursue pleasure, riches, or preferments. Having no fund within himself whence to draw enjoyment, his only resource is in things without. His hopes and fears all hang upon the world. He partakes in all its vicissitudes; and is moved and shaken by every wind of fortune. This is to be, in the strictest sense, a slave to the world.

\* Jeremiah, xiii. 23.

Religion and virtue, on the other hand, confer on the mind principles of noble independence. *The upright man is satisfied from himself.* He despises not the advantages of fortune; but he centers not his happiness in them. With a moderate share of them, he can be contented; and contentment is felicity. Happy in his own integrity, conscious of the esteem of good men, reposing firm trust in the providence, and the promises of God, he is exempted from servile dependence on other things. He can wrap himself up in a good conscience, and look forward, without terror, to the change of the world. Let all things shift around him as they please, he believes that, by the divine ordination, they shall be made *to work together*, in the issue *for his good*. And therefore, having much to hope from God, and little to fear from the world, he can be easy in every state. One who possesses within himself such an establishment of mind, is truly free.—But shall I call that man free, who has nothing that is his own, nor property assured; whose very heart is not his own, but rendered the appendage of external things, and the sport of fortune? Is that man free, let his outward condition be ever so splendid, whom his imperious passions detain at their call, whom they send forth at their pleasure to drudge and toil, and to beg his only enjoyment from the casualties of the world? Is he free, who must flatter and lie, to compass his ends; who must bear with this man's caprice, and that man's scorn; must profess friendship where he hates, and respect where he contemns; who is not at liberty to appear in his own colours, nor to speak his own sentiments; who dares not be honest, lest he should be poor?—Believe it, no chains bind so hard, no fetters are so heavy, as those which fasten the corrupted heart to this treacherous world; no dependence is more contemptible than that under which the voluptuous, the covetous, or the ambitious, man lies, to the means of pleasure, gain, or power. Yet this is the boasted liberty, which vice promises, as the recompense of setting us free from the salutary restraints of virtue.

III. ANOTHER character of the slavery of vice, is that mean, cowardly, and disquieted state to which it reduces the sinner. Boldness and magnanimity have ever been accounted the native effects of liberty. He who enjoys it, having nothing to apprehend from oppressive power, performs the offices, and enjoys the comforts of life, with a manly and undisturbed mind. Hence his behaviour is dignified, and his sentiments are honourable; while he who is accustomed to bend under servile subjection, has always been found mean-spirited, timorous, and base.—Compare, in these respects, the virtuous and the vicious man, and you will easily see to which of them the characteristics of freedom most justly belong. The man of virtue, relying on a good conscience and the protection of Heaven, acts with firmness and

courage; and, in the discharge of his duty, fears not the face of man. The man of vice, conscious of his low and corrupt aims, shrinks before the steadfast and piercing eye of integrity; is ever looking around him with anxious and fearful circumspection, and thinking of subterfuges, by which he may escape from danger. The one is *bold as a lion*; the other *flieth when no man pursueth*. To the one, nothing appears contemptible, by which he can procure any present advantage. The other looks with disdain on whatever would degrade his character. "I will not," says he, "so demean myself, as to catch the favour of the greatest man, by this or that low art. It shall not be said or thought of me, that I did what was base, in order to make my fortune. Let others stoop so low, who cannot be without the favours of the world. But I can want them, and therefore at such a price I will not purchase them." This is the voice of true liberty; and speaks that greatness of mind which it is formed to inspire.

Corresponding to that abject disposition which characterises a bad man, are the fears that haunt him. The terrors of a slave dwell on his mind, and often appear in his behaviour. For guilt is never free from suspicion and alarm. The sinner is afraid, sometimes, of the partners of his crimes, lest they betray him; sometimes, of those who have suffered by his crimes, lest they revenge themselves; frequently, of the world around him, lest it detect him; and, what is worst of all, he is reduced to be afraid of himself. There is a witness within him, that testifies against his misdeeds; and threatens him in secret, when other alarms leave him. Conscience holds up to his view the image of his past crimes, with this inscription engraved upon it, "*God will bring every work into judgment.*" How opposite is such a state as this, to the peaceful security arising from the liberty enjoyed by the virtuous?—Were there nothing more in the circumstances of sinners to affix upon them the marks of servitude, this alone would be sufficient, that, as the scripture expresses it, *through fear of death they are all their lifetime subject to bondage.*\* Death sets all other captives free. The slave who digs in the mine, or labours at the oar, can rejoice at the prospect of laying down his burden together with his life; and tastes the hope of being at last on equal terms with his cruel oppressor. But, to the slave of guilt there arises no hope from death. On the contrary, he is obliged to look forward with constant terror to this most certain of all events, as the conclusion of all his hopes and the commencement of his greatest miseries.

I HAVE thus set before you such clear and unequivocal marks of the servitude undergone by sinners, as fully verify the asser-

\* Heb. ii. 15.



tion in the text, that a state of vice and corruption is a state of bondage. In order to perceive how severe a bondage it is, let us attend to some peculiar circumstances of aggravation which belong to it.

First, It is a bondage to which the mind itself, the native seat of liberty, is subjected. In other cases, a brave man can comfort himself with reflecting that, let tyrants do their worst, let prisons or fetters be his lot, his mind remains unconquered and free. Of this liberty, they cannot rob him; here he moves in a higher sphere, above the reach of oppression or confinement, but what avails the show of external liberty, to one who has lost the government of himself? As our Saviour reasons in another case, *If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness.* So we may reason here, if that part of thy nature, thy mind, thy will, by which only thou canst enjoy and relish liberty, be itself in bondage, to evil passions and habits, how miserable must be that bondage?

Next, it is aggravated by this consideration, that it is a bondage which we have brought upon ourselves. To have been forced into slavery, is misfortune and misery. But to have renounced our liberty and chosen to be slaves, is the greatest reproach added to the greatest misery. Moments there frequently must be, when a sinner is sensible of the degradation of his state; when he feels with pain the slavish dependence under which he is brought to fortune and the world, to violent passions and settled habits, and to fears and apprehensions arising from conscious guilt. In such moments, how cruel is the reflection, that of all this disgrace and misery he has been the author to himself; that, by voluntary compliance, he has given to his passions that haughty ascendant which they now exercise over him; has forged the chains with which he is bound, and sold himself to do iniquity.

Lastly, The servitude of vice is accompanied with this farther aggravation, that it is subjection to our own servants.—Those desires and passions which the sinner has raised to lawless rule, were given us as instruments of self-preservation; but were plainly designed to be under the direction of a higher power. Of themselves, they are headstrong and blind; they bear all the marks of intended subordination; and conscience is invested with every ensign of authority and supremacy. But sin inverts the whole frame of human nature. It compels reason to bow down before those passions which it was formed to command; and leads it, as it were, in triumph, to grace the shameful conquest of its ministers and servants. It has been always observed that none are so insolent in power, as they who have usurped an authority to which they had no right; and so it is found to hold in this instance. The desires and passions of a

vicious man having once obtained an unlimited sway, trample him under their feet. They make him feel that he is subject to divers, and contradictory as well as imperious masters, who often pull him different ways. His soul is rendered the receptacle of many repugnant and jarring dispositions; and resembles some barbarous country, cantoned out into different principalities, who are continually waging war on one another.—Such is the state into which sinners have brought themselves, in order to be free from the supposed confinement of virtue. Where they had promised themselves nothing but ease and pleasure, they are made to experience restraints more severe, and mortifications more painful than any which they would have undergone under the discipline of religion.

It will perhaps be contented by some, that although the representation which has now been given of the slavery of sin holds true in certain instances, yet that it is applicable only to those who come under the description of atrocious sinners.—They imagine that a certain moderate course may be held in vice, by means of which, men, without throwing altogether aside the restraints of reason, may enjoy an easy and pleasurable life.—By reasoning thus, my friends, you flatter and deceive yourselves to your own destruction. Be assured that, by every vicious indulgence, you are making an approach to a state of complete slavery; you are forfeiting a certain share of your liberty; how soon the whole of it may be forfeited you are not aware. It is true, that all which has now been said of the servitude of sin, applies only to a character corrupted in the extreme. But remember, that to this extreme no man ever arrives at once. He passes through many of those intermediate stages, in one of which you are now perhaps found. Vice always creeps by degrees; and insensibly twines around us those concealed fetters by which we are at last completely bound.—As you value therefore your liberty and your happiness, avoid every approach to evil. Consider all vicious pleasures as enchanted ground, by entering on which, you will be farther and farther ensnared within the magic circle, till at length you are precluded from all retreat. The most pure and virtuous man is always the freest. The religion of Christ is justly entitled the *perfect law of liberty*.\* It is only when the *Son makes us free*, that *we are free indeed*: and it was with reason the Psalmist said, *I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts*.†

\* James, i. 25

† Psalm cxix. 45.

## SERMON LXI.

### ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

---

*Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.*—PSALM XXVI. 8.

*GOD is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.* That religion chiefly consists in an inward principle of goodness, is beyond dispute, and that its value and efficacy are derived from its effects in purifying the heart, and reforming the life. All external services, which have not this tendency, are entirely insignificant. They degenerate into mere superstition, equally unacceptable to God, and unprofitable to man. Hence they are so often treated in Scripture, with high contempt, when substituted in the room of the important duties of a virtuous life.

Notwithstanding this, it is certain that external services have their own place, and a considerable one too, in the system of religion. What their proper place is, no one can be at a loss to discern, who will only make a just distinction between the means, and the end, in religion. It is evident there is danger in man's erring here, either on one side or other; and it is certain that they have erred on both. After it was observed, that mankind were prone to lay too much weight on the external parts of religion, it began to be thought that no weight was to be allowed to them at all. The time was, when all religion centered in attending the duties of the church, and paying veneration to whatever was accounted sacred. This alone sanctified the character, and compensated every blemish in moral conduct. From this extreme the spirit of the age seems to be running fast into the opposite extreme, of holding every thing light that belongs to public worship. But if superstition be an evil, and a very great one it undoubtedly is, irreligion is not a smaller evil: And though

the *form of godliness* may often remain when the *power* of it is wanting; yet the *power* cannot well subsist where the *form* is altogether gone.—The holy Psalmist, whose words are now before us, discovers much better principles. Expressing always the highest regard for the laws of God, and the precepts of virtue, he breathes at the same time a spirit of pure devotion. Though loaded with the cares of royalty, and encircled with the splendour of a court, he thought it well became him to shew respect to the great Lord of nature; and on many occasions expresses as he does in the text, his delight in the public service of the temple. *Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.* In discoursing from which words, I purpose to shew the importance of the public worship of God, and the benefits resulting from it. I shall consider it in three lights; as it respects God; as it respects the world; as it respects ourselves.

I. LET us consider it with respect to God. If there exist a Supreme Being, the Creator of the world, no consequence appears more natural and direct than this, that he ought to be worshipped by his creatures, with every outward expression of submission and honour. We need only appeal to every man's heart, whether this be not a principle which carries along with it its own obligation, that to Him who is the fountain of our life and the Father of our mercies; to Him who has raised up that beautiful structure of the universe in which we dwell, and where we are surrounded with so many blessings and comforts; solemn acknowledgments of gratitude should be made, praises and prayers should be offered, and all suitable marks of dependence on him be expressed.—This obligation extends beyond the silent and secret sentiments of our hearts. Besides private devotion, it naturally leads to associations for public worship; to open and declared professions of respect for the Deity. Where blessings are received in common, an obligation lies upon the community, jointly to acknowledge them. Sincere gratitude is always of an open and diffusive nature. It loves to pour itself forth; to give free vent to its emotions; and, before the world, to acknowledge and honour a Benefactor.

So consonant is this to the natural sentiments of mankind, that all the nations of the earth have, as with one consent, agreed to institute some forms of worship; to hold meetings at certain times in honour of their deities. Survey the societies of men in their rudest state; explore the African deserts, the wilds of America, or the distant islands of the ocean; and you will find that over all the earth some religious ceremonies have obtained. You will every where trace, in one form or other, the temple, the priest, and the offering. The prevalence of the most absurd superstitions furnishes this testimony to the truth, that in

the hearts of all men the principle is engraved, of worship being due to that invisible Power who rules the world.—Herein consists the great excellency of the Christian religion, that it hath instructed us in the simple and spiritual nature of that worship. Disencumbered of idle and unmeaning ceremonies, its ritual is pure, and worthy of a Divine Author. Its positive institutions are few in number, most significant of spiritual things, and directly conducive to good life and practice.—How inexcusable then are we, if, placed in such happy circumstances, the sense of those obligations to the public worship of God shall be obliterated among us, which the light of nature inculcated, in some measure, on the most wild and barbarous nations!

The refinements of false philosophy have indeed suggested this shadow of objection, that God is too great to stand in need of any external service from his creatures; that our expressions of praise and honour are misplaced with respect to Him, who is above all honour and all praise; that in his sight, the homage we seek to pay must appear contemptible; and is therefore in itself superfluous and trifling.—But who hath taught those vain reasoners, that all expressions of gratitude and honour towards a superior become unsuitable, merely because that superior needs not any returns? Were they ever indebted to one whose favours they had it not in their power to repay; and did they, on that account, feel themselves set loose from every obligation to acknowledge, and to praise their benefactor? On the contrary, the more disinterested his benefice was, did not gratitude, in any ingenious mind, burn with the greater ardour, and prompt them the more eagerly to seize every opportunity of publicly testifying the feelings of their hearts?—Almighty God, it is true, is too great to need our service or homage.—But he is also too good not to except it, when it is the native expression of a grateful and generous mind. If pride and self-sufficiency stifle all sentiments of dependence on our Creator; if levity, and attachment to worldly pleasures, render us totally neglectful of expressing our thankfulness to Him for his blessings; do we not hereby discover such a want of proper feeling, such a degree of hardness and corruption in our affections, as shows us to be immortal and unworthy; and must justly expose us to the high displeasure of Heaven? On the contrary, according to every notion which we can form of the father of the universe, must it not be acceptable to him to behold his creatures properly affected in heart towards their great Benefactor; assembling together to express, in acts of worship, that gratitude, love, and reverence which they owe; and thus nourishing and promoting in one another an affectionate sense of his

goodness Are not such dispositions, and such a behaviour as this, intimately connected with all virtue?

*O come, let us worship and bow down! let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For he is our God; and we are the flock of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. The prayer of the upright is his delight. It cometh before him as incense, and the uplifting of their hands as the evening sacrifice.*—Having thus shown the reasonableness of public worship with respect to God, let us now,

II. CONSIDER its importance in another view, as it respects the world. When we survey the general state of mankind, we find them continually immersed in worldly affairs; buised about providing the necessaries of life, occupied in the pursuits of their pleasures, or eagerly prosecuting the advancement of their interests. In such a situation of things, a small measure of reflection might convince any one, that without some returns of sacred days, and some solemn calls to public worship, it were impossible to preserve in the world any sense of objects, so foreign to the general current of thought, as an invisible Governor, and a future state. If it be of importance to the peace and good order of society, that there should prevail among men the belief of One in the heavens, who is the protector of righteousness and the avenger of crimes; if it be of importance that they be taught to look forward to a day of judgment, when they are to be brought to account for their most secret actions, and eternally rewarded or punished, according as their conduct has been good or evil; if such principles as these, I say, be of consequence to the public welfare, they certainly inforce the authority of public worship and prove the necessity of religious instruction.

I speak now particularly with a view to the multitude, the great mass and body of the people. We all know, how seldom from education, or private instruction they have the advantage of deriving sentiments of religion or morality. Early obliged to labour for their bread, they would remain all their days in gross ignorance of every moral or sacred principle, were it not for those public assemblies in which they hear of God, and Christ, and judgment, and heaven, and hell. Shut up those temples to which they resort with reverence; exclude them from the opportunities they now possess of receiving religious instruction, and inbibing religious ideas; and what can you expect them to become? No other than a ferocious rabble, who, set free from checks of conscience, and fears of divine vengeance, would be prone to every outrage which they could commit with impunity. It is well known, that in the early ages of the world, sages and legislators who endeavoured to tame and

to associate the barbarous hordes of men, found it necessary for this purpose to have recourse to religion. By bringing the rude multitudes to worship together, and, at stated times and places, to join in hymns and songs to their deities, they gradually restrained them from violence, and trained them to subordination and civilized life.

During the progress of society in after periods, religious assemblies at church continues I am persuaded, to have a very considerable influence on the civilization and improvement of the people. Even independent of effect upon the moral principles, by leading numbers of them to meet together in an orderly way, and in their most decent appearance, they tend to humanize and polish their manners. They strengthen the social connections, and promote friendly intercourse among those who are in the same neighbourhood, and in the same lines of life. It must, at the same time, be agreeable to every humane mind to think, that one day in seven is allotted for rest to the poor from their daily labours, and for such enjoyments of ease and comfort as their station affords. It is the only day which gives them occasion to feel themselves as belonging to the same class of beings with their superiors; when joining with them in the same acts of worship, and recognizing a common Lord. Amidst those distinctions which the difference of ranks necessarily introduces into human society, it is surely fit that there be some occasions when man can meet with man as a brother, in order that the pride of the great may be checked; and the low may be taught that, if they discharge properly their appointed part, they have reason to expect from the Lord of the universe, the same rewards with the rich and the mighty.

It will, I believe, be generally admitted, that forms of public worship, and means of religious instruction, are important on several accounts, for the body of the people, and belong to the maintenance of public safety and order. But many who admit this, are apt to think, that to the common people alone they may be left. To persons of liberal education and enlarged minds, what benefit can arise from hearing what they already know; and what, perhaps, is to be inculcated on them by those who are of inferior capacity to themselves?—Admitting this plea of superiority which their vanity forms, and setting aside for the present any personal obligation they are under to worship God, I must ask such persons, how they can expect that religious assemblies will be long respected by the lower ranks of men, if by men of rank and education they are discountenanced and forsaken? Do not they know, that those lower ranks are ready to copy the manners and to follow the example, of their superiors in all things; but assuredly in nothing more than in what appears to set them free from restraint, and to gratify licentious-

ness? While they acknowledge the importance, and even the necessity of public religion to certain classes of men, do they nevertheless contribute by their behaviour to defeat the end of public religion, and to annihilate that importance which they ascribe to it?—They are employed in framing laws and statutes for preventing crimes, and keeping the disorderly multitude within bounds; and at the same time, by personally discountenancing public worship, they are weakening, they are even abolishing, among the multitude, that moral restraint which is of more general influence upon manners than all the laws they frame. In vain they complain of the dishonesty of servants, of the insolence of mobs, of the attacks of the highwayman. To all these disorders they have themselves been accessory. By their own disregard of sacred institutions, they have disseminated profligacy among the people. They have broken down the floodgates which served to restrain the torrent; they have let it loose to overflow the land; and by the growing deluge may themselves be swept away.—But I must next argue upon a different ground; and proceed,

III. To set forth the importance of the public worship of God to every individual in every rank of life. Whatever his station be, he is still a man; and has the duties of a man to perform. Were his attendance on divine worship of no other effect, than to add countenance to a salutary institution, this alone would render it his duty. But moreover, we assert it to be his duty on his own account; if it be the duty of every man to use the proper means of preserving and fortifying his virtue. All the Christian institutions have a direct tendency to this end.—They all serve to give warmth to piety, and to add solemnity to moral virtue. A very high opinion, indeed, that man must have of his own character, who imagines that, amidst all the follies and corruptions of the world, he stands in need of no assistance for enabling him to act his part with propriety and dignity.

The question is not, Whether persons of rank and education are to learn any thing that is new to them, by frequenting the places of public worship? The great principles of piety and morality are obvious and easily known; and we shall readily admit, that there are many to whom no new instruction is communicated in the house of God. But, my friends, the purpose of your going there is to have known truths recalled to your mind, and their dormant influence awakened; is to have serious meditations suggested; to have good dispositions raised; to have the heart adjusted to a composed and tranquil frame. Is there any man of reason and reflection, who will not acknowledge such effects, as far as they follow from attendance on religious ordinances, to be of the most beneficial nature? These occa-



sional cessations from the cares and anxieties of life, these interruptions to the bustle and the passions of the world, in order to think and hear of eternity, are both a relief and an improvement to the mind. By this retreat from its ordinary circle of thoughts, it is enabled to return with more clearness and more vigour, to the business of the world, after a serious and proper pause.

But I must ask the persons with whom I now reason, whether there be no other call to come to God's house, than to hear instruction there? Is not the devout adoration of the God of heaven the principal object of our religious assemblies; and is this what any man of reflection, and of sober mind, dare to make light of? In the temple of the Lord, the rich and the poor, the prince and the peasant, appear as suppliants alike for the protection and favour of the Almighty.—Great and flourishing as thou mayest think thyself, know that thou standest as much in need of that protection, as the meanest of the crowd whom thou beholdest worshipping, with lowly reverence, the God of their fathers. The sun of prosperity shines at present on thy head, and the favourable gale carries thee softly along the stream of life. But, the Almighty needs only to give the word, and instantly the tempest shall rise; and thy frail bark shall be driven into the ocean, and whelmed in the deep. *In my prosperity, I said I shall never be moved. Thou, Lord, didst hide thy face, and I was troubled.* Look up, with dread, to that awful hand of Providence which is stretched over your heads. Remember the instability of all human things; remember it, and tremble, ye who despise the devout acknowledgment of him who disposes of the human fate! *Though ye live many years and rejoice in them all, remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many.\**

But after all that has been urged on this subject, I am sensible it may be objected, that many who make conscience of paying strict regard to the institutions of religion, do not appear to have derived much benefit from them. They are not, it will be said, more improved in moral conduct, and in the proper discharge of the several duties of life, than others who have been apparently negligent of the services of the church. On the contrary, a formal regard to these appears to be substituted by many, in the room of the weightier matters of the law. Though this should be admitted, it goes no farther than to shew that human weakness, or corruption, may defeat the purpose of the most promising means of moral improvement. That a superstitious attention to external worship, has too often usurped the character and supplanted the place, of real virtue, will not be denied.

\* Eccles. xi. 8.

Admonitions against so dangerous an error cannot be given too often. But because the best things have been often misapplied and abused, no argument thence arises for their being undervalued, and thrown aside. So also reason, instruction, and discipline of every kind, have been frequently perverted to bad ends; and yet their intrinsic worth and usefulness remain untouched, and acknowledged.—Besides this, it cannot be admitted that, because religious institutions produce not all the good that might be wished, and hoped for, they therefore do no good at all. This were a rash and ill-founded conclusion. If the morals of men are not always amended by them as they ought to have been, there is reason, however, to think that they would have been, worse without them. Some check is always given by them to open profligacy. Some assistance is furnished to good dispositions of heart; at least, to decency of manners. Even momentary impressions of seriousness made on the thoughtless by the solemnities of religion, are not without their fruit. They leave generally some trace behind them; and when the traces are often renewed, they may be hoped, through the divine blessing, to form at last a deep impression on the mind.

At the same time, I do not say that religious institutions work upon the mind like a charm; and that mere bodily attendance on them will always insure us of some profitable effect. Let the means that are employed, for the improvement of rational beings, be ever so powerful in themselves, much of their success will always depend on the manner in which they are received and applied. I shall therefore conclude my reasonings on this subject, with a few observations concerning the dispositions requisite on our part, for deriving benefit from the public ordinances of religion.

THE ends for which we assemble in the house of God, are two; to worship God, and to listen to religious instructions.

The public worship of God is the chief and most sacred purpose of every religious assembly of Christians. Let it here be remembered, that it is not the uttering, or the hearing of certain words, that constitutes the worship of the Almighty. It is the heart that praises or prays. If the heart accompany not the words that are spoken or heard, we *offer the sacrifice of fools*.—By the inattentive thought, and the giddy and wandering eye, we profane the temple of the Lord, and turn the appearance of devotion into insult and mockery.

With regard to religious instruction, attention and reverence are unquestionably due. All religious and moral knowledge comes from God. It is a light from Heaven, first transmitted to man by the original constitution of his nature, and afterwards made to shine with fairer and fuller lustre by the revelation of

the gospel in Jesus Christ. Its brightness may sometimes be stronger, and sometimes weaker, according to the mediums by which it is conveyed. But still, as far as the instructions delivered from the pulpit are illuminated by the ray from Heaven, they are the truths of God, and ought to be received as such.—Refinements of vain philosophy, or intricate subtilities of theological controversy, are undoubtedly not entitled to such regard. But when the great principles of natural or revealed religion are discussed; when the important doctrines of the Gospel concerning the life, and sufferings, and death of our blessed Redeemer are displayed; or useful instructions regarding the regulation of life, and the proper discharge of our several duties, are the subjects brought into view; it is not then the human speaker, but the Divine authority, that is to be regarded.

In the speaker, many imperfections and infirmities may be discovered. The discoveries of the Gospel are represented in Scripture, as a hidden treasure brought to light; but, by the appointment of God, *we have this treasure in earthen vessels.*\*—It is not the spirit of curiosity that ought to bring us to church. Too often, it is to be feared, we assemble there merely as critics on the preacher; critics on his sentiments, his language, and his delivery. But, such are not the dispositions which become us on so serious an occasion. It is with humility, with fairness, and candour, with an intention to improve ourselves in piety and virtue, with a view to make personal application to our own character, that we ought to hear the word of God.—When we enter the sacred temple, let us ever consider ourselves as creatures surrounded with darkness, seeking illumination from Heaven; as guilty creatures, imploring forgiveness from our Judge; as frail and mortal creatures, preparing for that eternal habitation into which we know not how soon we are to pass.

If with such sentiments and impressions we join in the worship of God, and the ordinances of religion, we may justly hope that they shall be accompanied to us with the Divine blessing. It is the express precept of God, *not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.*† *Gather together the people, men, women, and children, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law.*‡ *Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give unto the Lord the glory due to his name.*—Thus hath God commanded, and he never commanded his people to seek his name in vain. For, *where two or three are gathered together in his name, our Lord hath told us that he is in the*

† 2 Corinth. iv. 7.

† Heb. x. 25.

‡ Deut. xxxii. 12.

*midst of them.\* God hath said, that he loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.† The prayer of the upright is his delight. Both in their temporal and spiritual concerns, they may be most expected to prosper, who can say with the Psalmist in the text. Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.*

\* Matth. xviii. 20.

† Psalm lxxxvii. 2.

## SERMON LXII.

ON THE FASHION OF THE WORLD PASSING AWAY.

---

—The fashion of this world passeth away.—1 COR. vii. 31.

TO use this world so as not to abuse it, is one of the most important, and at the same time one of the most difficult lessons which religion teaches. By so many desires and passions we are connected with the objects around us, that our attachment to them is always in hazard of becoming excessive and sinful.—Hence religion is often employed in moderating this attachment, by rectifying our erroneous opinions, and instructing us in the proper value we ought to set on worldly things. Such was particularly the scope of the Apostle in this context. He is putting the Corinthians in mind that their *time is short*; that every thing here is transitory; and therefore, that in all the different occupations of human life, in *weeping* and *rejoicing*, and *buying* and *possessing*, they were ever to keep in view, this consideration, that *the fashion of this world passeth away*. The original expression imports the figure or form under which the world presents itself to us. The meaning is, all that belongs to this visible state is continually changing. Nothing in human affairs is fixed or stable. All is in motion and fluctuation; altering its appearance every moment, and passing into some new form. Let us meditate for a little on the serious view which is here given us of the world, in order that we may attend to improvements which it suggests.

I. *The fashion of the world passeth away*, as the opinions, ideas, and manners of men are always changing. We look in vain for a standard to ascertain and fix any of these; in vain expect that what has been approved and established for a while, is always to endure. Principles which were of high authority among our ancestors are now exploded. Systems of philosophy

which were once universally received, and taught as infallible truths, are now obliterated and forgotten. Modes of living, behaving, and employing time, the pursuits of the busy, and the entertainments of the gay, have been entirely changed. They were the offspring of fashion, the children of a day. When they had run their course, they expired; and were succeeded by their modes of living, and thinking, and acting, which the gloss of novelty recommended for a while to the public taste.

When we read an account of the manners and occupations, of the studies and opinions, even of our own countrymen, in some remote age, we seem to be reading the history of a different world from what we now inhabit. Coming downwards, through some generations, a new face of things appears. Men begin to think, and act, in a different train; and what we call refinement gradually opens. Arriving at our own times, we consider ourselves as having widely enlarged the sphere of knowledge on every side; having formed just ideas on every subject; having attained the proper standard of manners and behaviour; and wonder at the ignorance, the uncouthness, and rusticity of our forefathers. But, alas! what appears to us so perfect shall in its turn pass away. The next race, while they shove us off the stage, will introduce their favourite discoveries and innovations; and what we now admire as the height of improvement, may in a few ages hence be considered as altogether rude and imperfect. As one wave effaces the ridge which the former had made on the sand by the sea shore, so every succeeding age obliterates the opinions and modes of the age which had gone before it. *The fashion of the world* is ever passing away.

Let us only think of the changes which our own ideas and opinions undergo in the progress of life. One man differs not more from another, than the same man varies from himself in different periods of his age, and in different situations of fortune. In youth, and in opulence, every thing appears smiling and gay. We fly as on the wings of fancy; and survey beauties wherever we cast our eye. But let some more years have passed over our heads, or let disappointments in the world have depressed our spirits; and what a change takes place! The pleasing illusions that once shone before us; the splendid fabrics that imagination had reared: the enchanting maze in which we once wandered with delight, all vanish and are forgotten. The world itself remains the same, But its form, its appearance, and aspect, is changed to our view; its *fashion*, as to us, hath *passed away*.

II. While our opinions and ideas are thus changing within, the condition of all external things is, at the same time, ever changing without us, and around us. Wherever we cast our

eyes over the face of nature, or the monuments of art, we discern the marks of alteration and vicissitude. We cannot travel far upon the earth, without being presented with many a striking memorial of the changes made by time. What was once a flourishing city, is now a neglected village. Where castles and palaces stood, fallen towers and ruined walls appear. Where the magnificence of the great shone, and the mirth of the gay resounded, there, as the prophet Isaiah describes, *the owl and the raven now dwell, thorns come up, and the nettle and the bramble grow in the courts.*—When we read the history of nations, what do we read but the history of incessant revolution and change? We behold kingdoms alternately rising and falling; peace and war taking place by turns; princes, heroes, and statesmen, coming forth in succession on the stage, attracting our attention for a little by the splendid figure they make, and then disappearing and forgotten. We see the *fashion of the world* assuming all its different forms, and, in all of them, *passing away.*

But to historical annals there is no occasion for our having recourse. Let any one who has made some progress in life, recollect only what he has beheld passing before him in his own time. We have seen our country rise triumphant among the nations; and we have seen it also humbled in its turn. We have seen in one hemisphere of the globe new dominions acquired, and in another hemisphere, our old dominions lost. At home, we have seen factions and parties shift through all their different forms; and administrations, in succession, rise and fall. What were once the great themes of eager discussion, and political contest are now forgotten. Fathers recount them to their children as the tales of other times. New actors have come forth on the stage of the world. New objects have attracted the attention, and new intrigues engaged the passions of men. New members fill the seats of justice, new ministers the temples of religion; and a new world, in short, in the course of a few years, has gradually and insensibly risen around us.

When from the public scene we turn our eye to our own private connections, the changes which have taken place in the *fashion of the world*, must touch every reflecting mind with a more tender sensibility. For where are now many of the companions of our early years; many of those with whom we first began the race of life; and whose hopes and prospects were once the same with our own? In recollecting our old acquaintance and friends, what devastations have been made by the hand of time; On the ruins of our former connections, new ones have arisen; new relations have been formed; and the circle of those among whom we live is altogether changed from what it once was. Comparing our present situation with our former condition of life;

looking back to our father's house, and to the scenes of youth; remembering the friends by whom we were trained, and the family in which we grew up; who but with inward emotion, recollects those days of former years, and is disposed to drop the silent tear, when he views *the fashion of the world thus always passing away!*

III. NOT only our connections with all things around us change, but our own life, through all its stages and conditions, is ever passing away. How just, and how affecting is that image, employed in the sacred writings to describe the state of man, *we spend our years as a tale that is told!*\* It is not to any thing great or lasting that human life is compared; not to a monument that is built, or to an inscription that is engraved; not even to a book that is written, or to a history that is recorded; but to *a tale*, which is listened to for a little; where the words are fugitive and passing, and where one incident succeeds and hangs on another, till, by insensible transitions we are brought to the close; *a tale*, which in some passages may be amusing, in others, tedious; but whether it amuses or fatigues, is soon told and soon forgotten. Thus year steals upon us after year. Life is never standing still for a moment; but continually, though insensibly, sliding into a new form. Infancy rises up fast to childhood; childhood to youth; youth passes quickly into manhood; and the gray hair, and the faded look, are not long of admonishing us, that old age is at hand. In this course all generations run. The world is made up of unceasing rounds of transitory existence. Some generations are coming forward into being, and others hastening to leave it. The stream which carries us all along, is ever flowing with a quick current, though with a still and noiseless course. The dwelling place of man is continually emptying, and by a fresh succession of inhabitants, continually filling anew. *The memory of man passeth away like the remembrance of a guest who hath tarried but one night.*

As the life of man, considered in its duration, thus fleets and passeth away, so, during the time it lasts, its condition is perpetually changing. It affords us nothing on which we can set up our rest; no enjoyment or possession which we can properly call our own. When we have begun to be placed in such circumstances as we desired, and wish our lives to proceed in the same agreeable tenor, how often comes some unexpected event across to disconcert all our schemes of happiness? Our health declines; our friends die: our families are scattered; something or other is not long of occurring, to show us that the wheel must turn round; *the fashion of the world must pass away.* Is there any man who dares to look to futurity with an eye of confident

\* Psalm xc. 9.



hope; and to say, that against a year hence, he can promise being in the same condition of health or fortune as he is at present? The seeds of change are every where sown in our state; and the very causes that seemed to promise us security, are often secretly undermining it. Great fame provokes the attacks of envy and reproach. High health gives occasion to intemperance and disease. The elevation of the mighty never fails to render their condition tottering; and that obscurity which shelters the mean, exposes them, at the same time, to become the prey of oppression. So completely is the *fashion of this world* made by Providence for change, and prepared for *passing away*. In the midst of this instability, it were some comfort, did human prosperity decay as slowly as it rises. By slow degrees, and by many intervening steps, it rises. But one day is sufficient to scatter and bring it to nought. I might add.

IV. THAT the world itself in which we dwell, the basis of all our present enjoyments, is itself contrived for change, and designed to pass away. While the generations of men come forth in their turns, like troops of succeeding pilgrims, to act their part on this globe, the globe on which they act is tottering under their feet. It was once overflowed by a deluge. It is shaken by earthquakes; it is undermined by subterraneous fires; it carries many a mark of having suffered violent convulsions, and of tending to dissolution. Revelation informs us that there is a day approaching, in which *the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, the elements shall melt with fervent heat; and the earth and the works therein shall be burnt up*. When this destined hour arrives the *fashion of the world* shall have finally *past away*. Immortal spirits shall then look back upon this world, as we do at present on cities and empires, which were once mighty and flourishing, but now are swept from existence, and their place is no more to be found.

I SHALL insist no longer on this representation of things. Enough has been said, to show that the *fashion of the world*, in every sense, *passes away*. Opinions and manners, public affairs and private concerns, the life of man, the conditions of fortune, and the earth itself on which we dwell, are all changing around us.—Is every thing, then, with which we are connected, passing and transitory? Is the whole state of man no more than a dream or fleeting vision? Is he brought forth to be only the child of a day? Are we thrown into a river where all flows, and nothing stays; where we have no means of resisting the current; nor can reach any firm ground on which to rest our foot?—No, my brethren; man was not doomed to be so unhappy; nor made by his Creator so much in vain. There are three fixed and permanent objects to which I must now call your at-

tion, as the great supports of human constancy amidst this fugitive state. Though this world changes and passes away, virtue and goodness never change; God never changes; Heaven and immortality pass not away.

*First*, VIRTUE and goodness never change; Let opinions and manners, conditions and situations, in public and in private life, alter as they will, virtue is ever the same. It rests on the immoveable basis of Eternal Truth. Among all the revolutions of human things, it maintains its ground; ever possessing the veneration and esteem of mankind, and conferring on the heart, which enjoys it, satisfaction and peace. Consult the most remote antiquity. Look to the most savage nations of the earth. How wild, and how fluctuating soever the ideas of men may have been, this opinion you will find to have always prevailed, that probity, truth, and beneficence form the honour and the excellency of man. In this, the philosopher and the savage, the warrior and the hermit, join. At this altar all have worshipped. Their offerings may have been unseemly. Their notions of virtue may have been rude, and occasionally tainted by ignorance and superstition; but the fundamental ideas of moral worth have ever remained the same.

Here then is one point of stability, affected by no vicissitudes of time and life, on which we may rest. Our fortunes may change, and our friends may die; but virtue may still be our own; and as long as this remains, we are never miserable. *Till I die I will not remove my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go. My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.\** He who, with the holy man of old, can hold this language, may with undisturbed mind survey time flying away, life decaying, and the whole fashion of the world changing around him. He hath within himself, a source of consolation and hope, independent of all earthly objects. Every terrestrial glory sparkles only for a little, with transient brightness. But virtue shines with eternal and unalterable splendour. It derives its origin from Heaven: and partakes both of the lustre, and the stability, of celestial objects. *It is the brightness of the everlasting light; the unspotted mirror of God, and the image of his goodness.*

In the *second* place, God never changes. Amidst the unceasing vicissitude of earthly things, there remains at the head of the universe an Eternal Protector of virtue, whose *throne is established for ever*. With him there is *no variableness, neither any shadow of turning*; no inconstancy of purpose, and no decay of wisdom or of power. We know that he loved righteousness from the beginning of days, and that he will continue to

\* Job, xxvii. 5, 6

love it unalterably to the last. Forseen by him was every revolution which the course of ages has produced. All the changes which happen in the state of nature, or the life of men, were comprehended in his decree. How much soever worldly things may change in themselves, they are all united in his plan; they constitute one great system or whole, of which he is the Author; and which, at its final completion, shall appear to be perfect. His dominion holds together, in a continued chain, the successive variety of human events; gives stability to things that in themselves are fluctuating; gives constancy even to the *fashion of the world* while it is *passing away*. Wherefore, though all things change on earth, and we ourselves be involved in the general mutability, yet as long as, with trust and hope, we look up to the Supreme Being, we rest on the *rock of ages*, and are safe amidst every change. We possess a fortress to which we can have recourse in all dangers; a refuge under all storms; a *dwelling-place in all generations*.

IN the *third* and last place, Heaven and immortality pass not away. The fleeting scenes of this life are to be considered as no more than an introduction to a nobler and more permanent order of things, when man shall have attained the maturity of his being. This is what reason gave some ground to expect; what revelation has fully confirmed; and, in confirming it, has agreed with the sentiments and anticipations of the good and wise in every age. We are taught to believe, that what we now behold, is only the first stage of the life of man. We are arrived no farther than the threshold; we dwell as in the outer courts of existence. Here, tents only are pitched; tabernacles erected for the sojourners of a day. But in the region of eternity, all is great, stable, and unchanging. There, the *mansions* of the just are prepared; there, the *city which hath foundations* is built; there is established, the kingdom *which cannot be moved*. Here every thing is in stir and fluctuation; because here good men continue not, but pass onward in the course of being. There, all is serene, steady, and orderly; because there remaineth the final *rest of the people of God*. Here, all is corrupted by our folly and guilt; and of course must be transient and vain. But there, purchased by the death, and secured by the resurrection, of the Son of God, is an *inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*. There reigns that tranquillity which is never troubled. There shines that sun which never sets. There flows that river of pleasures, which is always unruffled and pure. Looking forward to those Divine habitations, the changes of the present world disappear to the eye of faith; and a good man becomes ashamed of suffering himself to be dejected by what is so soon to pass away.

SUCH are the objects you ought to oppose to the transient *fashion of the world*; Virtue, and God, and Heaven. Fixing your regard on these, you will have no reason to complain of the lot of man, or the world's mutability.—The design of the preceding representation which I gave of the world, was not to indulge vain declamation; to raise fruitless melancholy; or to throw an unnecessary cloud over human life: But to show the moderation requisite in our attachment to the world; and at the same time, to point out the higher objects both of attention and consolation which religion affords.—Passing and changeable as all human things are, among them, however, we must at present act our part; to them we must return from religious meditation. They are not below the regard of any Christian; for they form the scene which Providence has appointed at present for his activity, and his duty. Trials and dangers they may often present to him; but amidst these he will safely hold his course, if, when engaged in worldly affairs, he keep in view those Divine objects which I have been setting before him. Let him ever retain connection with Virtue, and God, and Heaven. By them let his conduct be regulated, and his constancy supported. So shall he *use this world* without *abusing it*. He shall neither droop under its misfortunes, nor be vainly elated by its advantages; but though all its changes shall carry an equal and steady mind; and in the end shall receive the accomplishment of the promises of Scripture, that though *the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, he that doth the will of God, shall abide for ever.*\*

\* 1 John, ii. 17.

## SERMON LXIII.

### ON TRANQUILLITY OF MIND.

---

—*He that doeth these things shall never be moved.*

PSALM XV. 5.

TRANQUILLITY of mind, or, in the words of the text, a mind *not moved* or disquieted by the accidents of life, is undoubtedly one of the greatest blessings that we can possess on earth. It is here mentioned as the reward of the man, whose character had been described in this Psalm, as leading a virtuous life, and discharging his duty towards God and his neighbour. It is indeed the ultimate aim, to which the wishes of the wise and reflecting have ever been directed, that with a mind undisturbed by anxieties, cares, and fears, they might pass their days in a pleasing serenity. They justly concluded that, by enjoying themselves in peace, they would enjoy, to the greatest advantage, all the comforts of life that came within their reach.

This happy tranquillity, the multitude conceive to be most readily attainable by means of wealth, or at least, of an easy fortune; which they imagine would set them above all the ordinary disturbances of life. That it has some effect for this purpose, cannot be denied. Poverty and straitened circumstances are often inconsistent with tranquillity. To be destitute of those conveniences that suit our rank in the world; to be burdened with anxiety about making provision for every day which passes over our head; instead of bringing comfort to a family who look up to us for aid, to behold ourselves surrounded with their wants and complaints, are circumstances which cannot fail to give much uneasiness to every feeling mind. To take measures, therefore, for attaining a competent fortune, by laudable means, is wise and proper. Entire negligence of our affairs, and in-

difference about our worldly circumstances, is, for the most part, the consequence of some vice, or some folly.—At the same time, I must observe, that the attainment of opulence is no certain method of attaining tranquillity. Embarrassments and vexations often attend it; and long experience has shewn, that tranquillity is far from being always found among the rich. Nay, the higher that men rise in the world, the greater degrees of power and distinction which they acquire, they are often the farther removed from internal peace. The world affords so many instances of miseries abounding in the higher ranks of life, that it were needless to enlarge on a topic so generally known and admitted.

Assuming it, therefore, for an undoubted truth, that the mere possession of the goods of fortune may be consistent with the want of inward tranquillity, we must look around for other more certain grounds of it. We must enquire whether any line of conduct can be pointed out, which, independent of external situation in the world, shall tend to make us easy in mind; shall either bestow, or aid, that tranquillity which all men desire. The remaining part of this discourse shall be employed in suggesting, with great plainness of speech, such directions as appear to me most material on this important subject.

THE *first* direction which I have to suggest is, that we imitate the character of the man who is described in this Psalm, as *walking uprightly, working righteousness, and speaking the truth, as he thinketh in his heart*; that we study to preserve a clear conscience, and to lead a virtuous and honourable, at least an inoffensive and innocent life. Of such a man only it can be said, that, *doing these things, he shall never be moved*. So great is the power of conscience over every human being, that the remembrance of crimes never fails to overthrow tranquillity of mind. Be assured, that he who defrauds his neighbour, who has ensnared the innocent, has violated his trust, or betrayed his friend, shall never enjoy within himself undisturbed quiet. His evil deeds will at times recur to his thoughts, like ghosts rising up in black array before him to haunt his couch. Even the sense of a foolish and trifling conduct; of a life passed in idleness and dissipation; by which, though a man has not been guilty of great crimes, he has, however, wasted his substance, misspent his time, and brought upon himself just reproach; even this, I say, is sufficient to create much uneasiness and disquiet to the heart. Let him, therefore, who wishes to enjoy tranquillity, study, above all things, to act an irreproachable part. With comfort he will rest his head on his pillow at night, when he is conscious that throughout the day he has been doing his duty towards God and man: when none of the transactions

of that day come back, in painful remembrance, to upbraid him. To this testimony of a good conscience, let him be able,

IN the *second* place, to join humble trust in the favour of God. As, after the best endeavours we can use, no man's behaviour will be entirely faultless, it is essential to peace of mind, that we have some ground for hope in the Divine mercy, that, through the merits of Jesus Christ, our defects shall be forgiven, and grace be shewn us by Heaven. This includes all the duties of faith and repentance that are required by the Gospel; the faithful discharge of which duties is absolutely necessary for delivering us from those fears of another world, which, if not allayed, are sufficient to banish all tranquillity from the heart. Our religious principles must at the same time be sound and pure; and carefully preserved from the taint of superstition, whose gloomy horrors, taking possession of weak and ill-informed minds, convert what they mistake for religion, into a source of misery.—Moreover, it is necessary that we be able to place trust in God, not only as our future Judge, but as the present Governor of human affairs. So uncertain is the continuance of every earthly comfort, that he who reposes no confidence in the Supreme Disposer of events, must be often disquieted and dejected. He alone possesses firm tranquillity, who, amidst all human vicissitudes, looks up, with settled trust, to an Almighty Ruler, as to one under whose conduct he is safe. To him alone belongs that happy privilege, described by the Psalmist: *He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.*\*

I have pointed out the primary and essential foundations of tranquillity; virtuous conduct, good principles, and pious dispositions. At the same time, a man may be both pious and virtuous, and yet through some defects in the management of his mind and temper, may not possess that happy serenity and self-enjoyment, which ought to be the portion of virtue and piety. Instances of this will occur to every one who is acquainted with the world. We too often behold persons, whose principles, and whose moral conduct, are in the main unexceptionable, leading an uncomfortable life; through fretfulness of temper, peevishness of manners, or sullenness of disposition. There is, therefore, some discipline to be studied; there are some subsidiary parts of character to be attended to, in order to give piety and virtue their full effect for conferring tranquillity. To the consideration of these secondary means I now proceed. Let me then advise you,

IN the *third* place, to attend to the culture and improvement of your minds. A fund of useful knowledge, and a stock of ideas, afford much advantage for the enjoyment of tranquillity.

\* Psalm cxiii. 7.

I do not mean that every man must study to become deeply learned. The situation of many would not allow it. The taste, and the habits of others, prevent it. But what I mean is, that every man who wishes to lead a comfortable life should provide for himself, as much as he can, by means of observation, reading, and reflecting, a large field of useful thoughts.—In a mind absolutely vacant, tranquillity is seldom found. The vacancy too often will be filled up by bad desires and passions. Whereas the mind of a wise man is a kingdom to itself. In his lonely, or melancholy hours, he finds always resources within himself, to which he can turn for relief. As there are many occasions when external objects afford no pleasure, it is only by being able to rest on the entertainments afforded to himself by his mind, that any one can pass his days with self-enjoyment. Let me recommend, for the same purpose,

IN the *fourth* place, that we be always careful to provide proper employment for our time. Regular industry and labour, with intervals of ease, is perhaps the state most conducive of any to tranquillity. If our station give no call to industry, it will be profitable that we study to have some end or object in view, to which our attention shall be directed. Relaxation, from intense or incessant pursuit, is requisite for comfort. But if relaxation degenerate into total idleness, it becomes in a high degree adverse to tranquillity. Every man by his nature is formed, more or less for action. In a mind that is entirely quiescent, and that has no object to put it into motion, instead of self-enjoyment, there will be constant languor, tediousness, and misery. Life stagnates in such a situation, like a pool of dead waters; and the man becomes a burden to himself. Violent and dangerous pursuits, which distract and embroil those who are engaged in them, I cannot be understood to recommend. Every one sees how foreign these are to a state of tranquillity. But, in the ordinary tenour of calm and easy life, I would advise every one to have some end before him; some object which shall bring the mind into action, and fill up the vacancies of time.—Provided the object be innocent and of no unsuitable or degrading nature, it may answer this purpose, though it should not be in itself of high importance. It is better for the mind to have some determinate direction given it, than to be always left floating, as it were, in empty space.—But about whatever objects we are employed, it is still more material to tranquillity, that, in the

*Fifth* place, we learn to govern our passions. These are the most frequent disturbers of our peace. Necessary as their impulse is to give activity to the mind, yet if they are not kept in subordination to reason, they speedily throw all things into confusion. Such of them as belong to the malignant and unsocial



class, evidently tend to produce vexation and disquiet. Against suffering these to gain possession of the heart, admonition is scarcely necessary. But I must admonish you, that even those which are accounted of innocent nature, and which therefore may lay hold of virtuous minds, if they obtain the entire mastery, are sufficient to overthrow the tranquillity of life. Let every one therefore, who values that tranquillity, study to retain moderation and self-command, even in the midst of passions which have a fair and bland appearance. He will find that the gratification of any one of them, compensates not that perpetual slavery to which it will reduce him, when it becomes inordinate.

I have farther to admonish you, that this self-command is particularly necessary in all that relates to habitual temper.—Even where strong passions are out of the question, those slight emotions which ruffle or sour the temper, are sufficient, by their frequent recurrence, to poison all self-enjoyment. He, who would possess a tranquil state, must, above all things, cultivate calmness and gentleness of disposition. He ought especially to cultivate it in that society, whether domestic or social, with which he has most frequent intercourse. We all know, that there are thousands, who in public, and in formal companies, appear to be all gentleness and sweetness, but who, at home, and among their nearest relations, give vent, with freedom, to the most harsh and peevish dispositions. Such persons are not likely to enjoy much real comfort. For it is the daily and familiar intercourse of life, that temper chiefly exerts its power, either for promoting or for disturbing the tranquillity of our days. On occasions when men come closest together, if, instead of meeting in smooth contact, they rub and grate on one another, the feelings produced on both sides are of the most offensive and displeasing kind. Nothing can be assumed as a more certain axiom, than that he who allows either inordinate passions, or a cross temper, to govern him, must, though he should possess all that flourishing fortune can bestow, be a stranger to tranquillity.

IN the *sixth* place, let me advise you never to expect too much from the world. High hopes, and florid views, are great enemies to tranquillity. When rashly indulged, they are constantly producing disappointments. Their indulgence, in the mean time, occasions discontent with our present situation; and he who is discontented cannot be happy. One of the first lessons, both of religion and wisdom, is, to moderate our expectations and hopes; and not to set forth on the voyage of life like men who expect to be always carried forward with a favourable gale. Let your views be suited to your rank and station in the world; and never soar fantastically beyond them. Content yourselves with sober pleasures, and form your relish to them. Be thankful

when you are free from pain, though you be not in the midst of high enjoyment. Be satisfied, if the path you tread be easy and smooth, though it be not strewed with flowers. Human life admits not of continued pleasure; nor is it always rendered happy by great exaltation. Remember, that it is a middle region which is the native station of tranquillity. It neither aspires to those heights of the atmosphere where the thunder is formed, nor creeps always on the ground. Affect not, on every occasion, to put yourselves forward. Be content to retire sometimes into the shade; and allow others to take their proper place.—It will be easily seen, that I speak not now to the ambitious and aspiring; but to those who value tranquillity more than splendid appearance in the world.

Such persons I also advise, while they expect not too much from the world, neither, also, to form too high expectations from the characters of those on whose friendship they rest, and with whom it is their lot to be connected, either in social or domestic relations. If you have looked for perfection any where, you will find yourself disappointed; and the consequence of this disappointment will be, that friendship will cool, and disgust succeed. If you wish to enjoy comfort in any of your connections, take your fellow-creatures as they are, and look for their imperfections to appear. You know you have your own; bear with those of others, as you expect that they are to bear with you. As no one is without his failings, few also are void of amiable qualities. Select for your companions, those who have the greatest share of such qualities; and value them accordingly.—In a word, make the best of this world as you find it. Reckon both on the state of human life, and on the society of men, as mixed and chequered with good and evil. Carrying always in your eye such views of things, you will be best formed to those equal spirits, and that reasonable disposition of mind, which make the basis of tranquillity. I shall only add, as my

*Seventh*, and last, advice on this subject, to mix retreat with the active business of the world, and to cultivate habits of serious thought and recollection. I before advised those who are not particularly engaged in active life, to form to themselves some object of pursuit, in order to furnish proper employment to time and thought. But the great multitude of men are in a different situation. Industry is required of them; business and cares press; and active pursuits occupy their closest attention. He who, in this situation, pours himself forth incessantly on the world, cannot escape partaking much of its disturbance and trouble. Amidst bustle, intrigue, and dissension, he must pass many an uneasy hour. Here an enemy encounters him; there a rival meets him. A suspicious friend alarms him one hour; an ungrateful one provokes him the next. I do not recommend

that, for these reasons, he who studies tranquillity should retire from all public business, and forsake the haunts of men. This were the retreat of a monk, not of a good and a wise man. Tranquillity were too dearly purchased by the neglect of those duties which belong to a man, and a Christian. Nor indeed in absolute seclusion from the world, is tranquillity ever found. On the contrary, when the human mind is cut off from those employments for which it was designed by Nature and Providence, it preys on itself, and engenders its own misery. Tranquillity is always most likely to be attained, when the business of the world is tempered with thoughtful and serious retreat. *Commune with your hearts on your bed, and be still.* Leaving this world to itself, let there be seasons which you devote to yourselves, and to God. Reflection and meditation allay the workings of many unquiet passions; and place us at a distance from the tumults of the world. When the mind has either been ruffled or cast down, an intercourse with God and Heaven we find a sanctuary to which we can retreat. In the hours of contemplation and devotion, a good man enjoys himself in peace. He beholds nobler objects than what worldly men can behold. He assumes a higher character. He listens to the voice of Nature and of God; and from this holy sanctuary comes forth with a mind fortified against the little disturbances of the world. Such habits, therefore, cannot be too much recommended to the lovers of tranquillity, as powerful subsidiary means for attaining that happy state.

I HAVE thus pointed out what appears to me the discipline of religion and wisdom for tranquillity of mind. *He that doeth these things shall never be moved.*—During the early periods of life, vivid sensations of pleasure are the sole objects thought worthy of pursuit. Mere ease and calmness are despised, as the portion of the aged only and the feeble. Some longer acquaintance with the world, with its disappointed hopes and fallacious pleasures, teaches almost all men, by degrees, to wish for tranquillity and peace. But you must not imagine, that these are blessings which will drop on men of their own accord as soon as they begin to desire them. No: the thoughtless and the profligate will ever remain strangers to them. They will remain the sport of every accident that occurs to derange their minds, and disturb their life.—The three great enemies to tranquillity are, Vice, Superstition, and Idleness: Vice, which poisons and disturbs the mind with bad passions; Superstition, which fills it with imaginary terrors; Idleness, which loads it with tediousness and disgust. It is only by following the path which eternal wisdom has pointed out, that we can arrive at the blessed temple of tranquillity, and obtain a station there: By doing, or at least endeavouring to do, our duty to God and man; by acquiring a humble

trust in the mercy and favour of God through Jesus Christ; by cultivating our minds, and properly employing our time and thoughts; by governing our passions and our temper; by correcting all unreasonable expectations from the world and from men; and, in the midst of wordly business, habituating ourselves to calm retreat and serious recollection.—By such means as these, it may be hoped, that through the Divine blessing, our days shall flow in a stream as unruffled as the human state admits. *The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest. But the work of righteousness is peace; and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever.\**

\* Isaiah, xxxii. 17.

## SERMON LXIV,

ON THE MISFORTUNES OF MEN BEING CHARGEABLE ON  
THEMSELVES.

---

*The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth  
against the Lord.*—PROVERBS, XIX. 3.

HOW many complaints do we hear from every quarter, of the misery and distress that fill the world? in these the high and the low, the young and the aged, join; and since the beginning of time, no topic has been more fertile of declamation than the vanity and vexation which man is appointed to suffer. But are we certain that this vexation, and this vanity, is altogether to be ascribed to the appointment of Heaven? Is there no ground to suspect that man himself is the chief and immediate author of his own sufferings? What the text plainly suggests is, that it is common for men to complain groundlessly of Providence; that they are prone to accuse God for the evils of life, when in reason they ought to accuse themselves; and that after their *foolishness* hath *perverted their way*, and made them undergo the consequences of their own misconduct, they impiously *fret in heart against the Lord*. This is the doctrine which I now propose to illustrate, in order to silence the sceptic, and to check a repining and irreligious spirit. I shall for this end make some observations, first, on the external, and next, upon the internal, condition of man, and then conclude with such serious and useful improvement as the subject will naturally suggest.

I. LET us consider the external condition of man. We find him placed in a world, where he has by no means the disposal of the events that happen. Calamities sometimes befall the worst and the best, which it is not in their power to prevent,

and where nothing is left them, but to acknowledge and to submit to the high hand of Heaven. For such visitations of trial, many good and wise reasons can be assigned, which the present subject leads me not to discuss. But though those unavoidable calamities make a part, yet they make not the chief part, of the vexations and sorrows that distress human life. A multitude of evils beset us, for the source of which we must look to another quarter.—No sooner has any thing in the health, or in the circumstances of men, gone cross to their wish, than they begin to talk of the unequal distribution of the good things of this life ; they envy the condition of others ; they repine at their own lot, and fret against the Ruler of the world.

Full of these sentiments, one man pines under a broken constitution. But let us ask him, whether we can, fairly and honestly, assign no cause for this but the unknown decree of Heaven. Has he duly valued the blessing of health, and always observed the rules of virtue and sobriety? Has he been moderate in his life, and temperate in all his pleasures? If now he be only paying the price of his former, perhaps his forgotten indulgencies, has he any title to complain, as if he were suffering unjustly? Were you to survey the chambers of sickness and distress, you would find them peopled with the victims of intemperance and sensuality, and with the children of vicious indolence and sloth. Among the thousands who languish there, you would find the proportion of innocent sufferers to be small.—You would see faded youth, premature old age, and the prospect of an untimely grave, to be the portion of multitudes who, in one way or other, have brought those evils on themselves ; while yet these martyrs of vice and folly have the assurance to arraign the hard fate of man, and to *fret against the Lord*.

But you, perhaps, complain of hardships of another kind ; of the injustice of the world ; of the poverty which you suffer, and the discouragements under which you labour ; of the crosses and disappointments of which your life has been doomed to be full.—Before you give too much scope to your discontent, let me desire you to reflect impartially upon your past train of life.—Have not sloth, or pride, or ill-temper, or sinful passions, misled you often from the path of sound and wise conduct? Have you not been wanting to yourselves in improving those opportunities which Providence offered you, for bettering and advancing your state? If you have chosen to indulge your humour or your taste, in the gratifications of indolence or pleasure, can you complain, because others, in preference to you, have obtained those advantages which naturally belong to useful labours, and honourable pursuits? Have not the consequences of some false steps, into which your passions or your pleasures have be-

trayed you, pursued you through much of your life; tainted, perhaps, your character, involved you in embarrassments, or sunk you into neglect?—It is an old saying, that every man is the artificer of his own fortune in the world. It is certain that the world seldom turns wholly against a man, unless through his own fault. *Godliness is, in general, profitable unto all things.* Virtue, diligence, and industry, joined with good temper and prudence, has ever been found the surest road to prosperity; and where men fail of attaining it, their want of success is far oftener owing to their having deviated from that road, than to their having encountered insuperable bars in it.—Some, by being too artful, forfeit the reputation of probity.—Some, by being too open, are accounted to fail in prudence.—Others, by being fickle and changeable, are distrusted by all. The case commonly is, that men seek to ascribe their disappointments to any cause, rather than to their own misconduct; and when they can devise no other cause, they lay them to the charge of Providence. Their folly leads them into vices; their vices into misfortunes; and in their misfortunes they *fret against the Lord.* They are doubly unjust towards God. In their prosperity, they are apt to ascribe their success to their own diligence, rather than to God's blessing; and in their adversity, they impute their distresses to his providence, not to their own misbehaviour. Whereas the truth is the very reverse of this.—*Every good and every perfect gift cometh from above;* and of evil and misery, man is the author to himself.

When from the condition of individuals, we look abroad to the public state of the world, we meet with more proofs of the truth of this assertion. We see great societies of men torn in pieces by intestine dissensions, tumults and civil commotions. We see mighty armies going forth, in formidable array, against each other, to cover the earth with blood, and to fill the air with the cries of widows and orphans. Sad evils these are, to which this miserable world is exposed.—But are these evils, I beseech you, to be imputed to God? Was it he who sent forth slaughtering armies into the field, or who filled the peaceful city with massacres and blood? Are these miseries any other than the bitter fruit of men's violent and disorderly passions?—Are they not clearly to be traced to the ambition and vices of princes, to the quarrels of the great, and to the turbulence of the people?—Let us lay them entirely out of the account, in thinking of Providence; and let us think only of the *foolishness of men.* Did man controul his passions, and form his conduct according to the dictates of wisdom, humanity, and virtue, the earth would no longer be desolated by cruelty; and human societies would live in order, harmony, and peace. In those scenes of mischief and violence which fill the world, let man be-

hold, with shame, the pictures of his vices, his ignorance and folly. Let him be humbled by the mortifying view of his own *perverseness*; but let not *his heart fret against the Lord*.——  
From the external condition, let us proceed,

II. To consider the internal state of man. It is certain that much disquiet and misery may be found there, although his outward condition appear undisturbed and easy. As far as this inward disquietude arises from the stings of conscience, and the horrors of guilt, there can be no doubt of its being self-created misery; which it is altogether impossible to impute to Heaven. But even, when great crimes and deep remorse, are not the occasions of torment, how often is poison infused into the most flourishing conditions of fortune, by the follies and the passions of the prosperous? We see them peevish and restless; corrupted with luxury, and enervated by ease; impatient of the smallest disappointment; oppressed with low spirits, and complaining of every thing around them. How many *Hamans, Hazaels, and Herods*, are there in the world, who, from what they suffer within, pass their days in more vexation and misery, than they who undergo the hardships of poverty? Dare such men in their most discontented moments, charge the providence of Heaven with miseries of their own procuring? Providence had put into their hands the fairest opportunity of passing their life with comfort. But they themselves blasted every comfort that was offered; and verified the prediction, that *the prosperity of fools shall destroy them*.\*

As it is man's own *foolishness* which ruins his prosperity, we must not omit to remark, that it is the same cause which aggravates and embitters his adversity. That you suffer from the external afflictions of the world, may often be owing to God's appointment; but when, in the midst of these, you also suffer from the disorders of your mind and passions, this is owing to yourselves; and there are those inward disorders which add the severest sting to external afflictions. Many are the resources of a good and a wise man, under all the disasters of life. In the midst of them, it is always in his power to enjoy peace of mind, and hope in God. He may suffer; but under suffering he will not sink, as long as all is sound within. But when the spirit has been wounded by guilt and folly, its wounds open, and bleed a fresh, upon every blow that is received from the world. The mind becomes sensible and sore to the slightest injuries of fortune; and a small reverse is felt as an insupportable calamity.

On the whole, the farther you search into human life, and the more you observe the manners and the conduct of men, you will be the more convinced of this great truth, that of the distresses

\* Prov. i. 32.



which abound in the world, we are the chief authors. Among the multitudes who are, at this day, bewailing their condition and lot, it will be found to hold, of far the greater part, that they are reaping the *fruit of their own doings*; *their iniquities are reproving them, and their backslidings correcting them.* Unattainable objects foolishly pursued, intemperate passions nourished, vicious pleasures and desires indulged, God, and God's holy laws forgotten; these, these are the great scourges of the world; the great causes of the life of man being so embroiled and unhappy. God hath ordained our state on earth to be a mixed and imperfect state. We have ourselves to blame for its becoming and insupportable one. If it bring forth nothing to us but vexation and vanity, we have sown the seeds of that vanity and vexation; and as we have sown, we must reap.—I now proceed to make improvement of those truths which we have been considering.

IN the *first* place, let us be taught to look upon sin as the source of all our miseries. It may sometimes assume the gentler names of folly, irregularity, or levity; but under whatever form it appears, it always imports a deviation from that sacred law which ought to regulate our conduct. It is still *the root that beareth gall and wormwood*;<sup>\*</sup> and in exact proportion to the quantity of this poisonous weed, which we ourselves have intused into our cup, we must expect to drink the waters of bitterness. If the *foolishness of man* did not *pervert his ways*, his heart would have no occasion to *fret against the Lord*. He would enjoy competent satisfaction in every situation of life; and, under its unavoidable evils, would derive consolation from religion and virtue.—Indeed, of every evil which we now endure, of those evils which we look upon to be the appointment of Providence, as well as of others, sin is ultimately the cause; as it was man's revolt from God, which gave rise originally to those evils, and which rendered the chastisements we undergo, in this state of discipline, necessary even for the *sons of God*.—But at present, we confine our observation to those miseries of which men are the immediate procurers to themselves; and from them alone, we find sufficient reason to consider sin as the capital foe to man; as the great troubler and disturber of his life. To Providence, then, let us look up with reverence. On sin let our indignation be vented; and, what is of more consequence, against sin and all its approaches, let our utmost caution be employed. As we proceed through the different paths of life, let us accustom ourselves to beware of sin, as the hidden snake lurking among

\* Deut. xxix. 18.

the grass, from whose fatal touch we must fly in haste, if we would not experience its sting.—Too many have no just apprehensions of this danger. *Fools*, said the wise man, *make a mock at sin*. A fool indeed he must be, who dares to think lightly of it. He shews not only the depravity of his heart, but, what perhaps he will be more ashamed to be charged with, he shews his ignorance of the world. He shews that he knows not, he understands not, even his worldly interest, nor the interest and happiness of human society.

In the *second* place, let us learn, from what has been set forth, one of the most awful and important of all truths, the reality of a Divine government exercised over the world. Blind must that man be who discerns not the most striking marks of it, in the doctrine which has been under our review. If there be a sceptic, who contends, that unrestrained liberty in the gratification of desire is given to man; that, in the sight of his Creator, all actions are equal; and that no rule of moral conduct hath been prescribed, or by any penalty enforced; in order to confute such a man, we have not recourse to reasonings, but simply appeal to plain and obvious facts. We bid him look only to the life of man; and take notice how every vice is, by the constitution of things, connected with misery. We bid him trace the history of any one, with whose conduct he had particular occasion to be acquainted; and observe, whether the chief misfortunes which pursued him were not brought upon him by his own misbehaviour. We bid him remark in the history of nations, whether public virtue has not always exalted them; and whether licentiousness and crimes have not paved the way for their ruin. These are testimonies to the truth of religion which cannot by any sophistry be evaded. This is a voice, which speaks its warnings loud and strong to every heart.

The system upon which the Divine government at present proceeds, plainly is, that men's *own wickedness* should be appointed to *correct them*; that sinners should be *snares in the work of their hands, and sunk in the pit which themselves had digged*; that the *backslider in heart should be filled with his own ways*.—Of all the plans which could have been devised for the government of the world, this approves itself to reason, as the wisest and most worthy of God; so to frame the constitution of things, that the Divine laws should in a manner execute themselves, and carry their sanctions in their own bosom. When the vices of men require punishment to be inflicted, the Almighty is at no loss for ministers of justice. A thousand instruments of vengeance are at his command; innumerable arrows are always in his quiver. But such is the profound wisdom of his plan, that no peculiar interposals of power are requisite. He has no occa-

sion to step from his throne, and to interrupt the order of nature. With that majesty and solemnity which befits Omnipotence, He pronounces, *Ephraim is joined to his idols ; let him alone.\** He leaves transgressors to their own guilt, and punishment follows of course. Their sins do the work of justice. They lift the scourge ; and with every stroke which they inflict on the criminal, they mix this severe admonition, that as he is only reaping the fruit of his own actions, he deserves all that he suffers. —From what has been said, I might take occasion,

In the *third* place, to show the injustice of our charging Providence with a promiscuous and unequal distribution of its favours among the good and the bad. That unequal distribution takes place in appearance only, not in reality. The whole conduct of Providence sufficiently marks, which of those classes of men it blesses and protects. The prosperity of sinners is no more than a deceitful show. The great materials of happiness are provided for the virtuous ; and *evil* never fails to *pursue the wicked*. I shall close the discourse with observing,

In the *fourth* and last place, the necessity which plainly arises from our present condition, of looking up to God for direction, and aid in the conduct of life. The result of the whole doctrine I have now delivered is, that man's happiness or misery is in a great measure, put into his own hands. In vain he complains of Providence. If his *heart fret against the Lord*, it is only because *his foolishness hath perverted his way* : for on himself, and his own behaviour, it depends, to be free of those miseries which harass the wicked.—But, alas ! when we say, that this depends upon man, on what uncertain ground do we place his security ? Is man, when left to himself, equal to this high trust that is reposed in him, this important charge that is committed to him, of attaining happiness, by wise and irreproachable conduct ?—Inconstant as he is in virtue, variable in his resolutions, soft and yielding in his nature to a thousand temptations ; how shall he guide himself through such slippery and dangerous paths as those of human life ; where many hidden precipices surround him ; many false lights lead him astray ; and where the consequence of every step he takes may be destruction and ruin ?—

Thankful let us be to Heaven, that in this situation, a merciful guide stretches out his hand to aid us ; that a celestial light shines upon us from above ; that a divine Spirit is promised to illuminate and strengthen us. Let us humbly request of Heaven, that this Spirit of the Almighty may ever be our guide ; never presumptuously trusting in our own wisdom, but listening attentively to the voice of God ; and *in all our ways*

\* Hosea, iv. 17.

*acknowledging him* who only can *direct our steps*.—Upon the whole let us hold fast the persuasion of these fundamental truths; —that, in all his dispensations, God is just and good; that the cause of all the troubles we suffer is in ourselves, not in Him; that virtue is the surest guide to a happy life; that he who forsakes this guide, enters upon the path of death; but that he who *walketh uprightly, walketh surely*; and that he who *keepeth the commandment, keepeth his own soul*.

## SERMON LXV.

ON INTEGRITY AS THE GUIDE OF LIFE.

---

*The integrity of the upright shall guide them.*—PROVERBS,  
xi. 3.

RIGHTEOUSNESS and sin, are, in this book of Proverbs, frequently contrasted with each other, and the advantages of the former displayed. The righteous man is shown to be *more excellent than his neighbour*, as *the ways in which he walks are ways of pleasantness*, while *the ways of transgressors is hard*. Honour is represented as attending the one, while shame is the portion of the other. The path of the one leads to life; that of the other to destruction. In the text, an advantage of righteousness is specified, which is not commonly attended to, and which some will not readily allow that it possesses. We are told by the wise man, that it affords light and direction to conduct, and will prove our best guide through all the intricacies of life. *The integrity of the upright shall guide them*; or, as it is added, to the same purpose, in a following verse, *the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way*. There are many who will admit, that integrity is an amiable quality; that it is entitled to much respect, and in most cases ought to influence our behaviour; who, nevertheless, are unwilling to allow it the chief place in the direction of their worldly conduct. They hold, that a certain artful sagacity, founded upon knowledge of the world, is the best conductor of every one who would be a successful adventurer in life; and that a strict attention to integrity, as his only guide, would often lead him into danger and distress. In opposition to tenets of this kind, I now purpose to shew that, amidst all perplexities and dangers, there is no guide we can choose so safe, and so successful on the whole, as the integrity of an upright mind; and that, upon every trying occasion, principles of probity and honour will conduct a good man through

life with more advantage, than if he were to act upon the most refined system of worldly wisdom.

IT will not take much time to delineate the character of the man of integrity, as by its nature it is a plain one, and easily understood. He is one who makes it his constant rule to follow the road of duty according as the word of God, and the voice of his conscience, point it out to him.

He is not guided merely by affections, which may sometimes give the colour of virtue to a loose and unstable character. The upright man is guided by a fixed principle of mind, which determines him to esteem nothing but what is honourable, and to abhor whatever is base and unworthy in moral conduct. Hence you find him ever the same; at all times, the trusty friend, the affectionate relation, the conscientious man of business, the pious worshipper, the public-spirited citizen. He assumes no borrowed appearance. He seeks no mask to cover him; for he acts no studied part; but he is in truth what he appears to be, full of truth, candour and humanity. In all his pursuits, he knows no path but the fair and direct one; and would much rather fail of success, than attain it by reproachful means. He never shews you a smiling countenance, while he meditates evil against you in his heart. He never praises you among your friends; and then joins in traducing you among your enemies. You will never find one part of his character at variance with another. In his manners, he is simple and unaffected; in all his proceedings, open and consistent.—Such is the man of integrity spoken of in the text. Let us now proceed to shew, in what manner, and with what effect, integrity serves for the guide of his life.

EVERY one who has begun to make any progress in the world, will be sensible, that to conduct himself in human affairs with wisdom and propriety, is often a matter of no small difficulty. Amidst that variety of characters, of jarring dispositions, and of interfering interests, which take place among those with whom we have intercourse, we are frequently at a stand as to the part most prudent for us to choose. Ignorant of what is passing in the breasts of those around us, we can form no more than doubtful conjectures concerning the events that are likely to happen. They may take some turn altogether different from the course in which we have imagined they were to run, and according to which we had formed our plans. The slightest incident often shoots out into important consequences, of which we were not aware. The labyrinth becomes so intricate, that the most sagacious can lay hold on no clue to guide him through it: He finds himself embarrassed, and at a loss how to act.—In public and in private life, in managing our own concerns, and in directing those of others. the doubt started by the wise

man frequently occurs; *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?* While thus fatigued with conjecture, we remain perplexed and undetermined in our choice; we are at the same time pulled to different sides, by the various emotions which belong to our nature. On one hand, pleasure allures us to what is agreeable; on the other, interest weighs us down towards what seems gainful. Honour attracts us towards what is splendid; and indolence inclines us to what is easy. In the consultations which we hold with our own mind, concerning our conduct, how often are we thus divided within ourselves; puzzled by the uncertainty of future events, and distracted by the contest of different inclinations?

It is in such situations as these, that the principle of integrity interposes to give light and direction. While worldly men fluctuate in the midst of those perplexities which I have described, the virtuous man has one Oracle, to which he resorts in every dubious case, and whose decisions he holds to be infallible. He consults his conscience. He listens to the voice of God. Were it only on a few occasions that this Oracle could be consulted, its value would be less. But it is a mistake to imagine, that its responses are seldom given. Hardly is there any material transaction whatever in human life, any important question that holds us in suspense as to practice, but the difference between right and wrong will shew itself; and the principle of integrity will, if we listen to it impartially, give a clear decision. Whenever the mind is divided within itself, conscience is seldom or never neutral. There is always one side or other to which it leans. There is always one scale of the balance, into which it throws the weight of *some virtue, or some praise*; of something that is *just and true, lovely, honest, and of good report*.—These are the forms, which rise to the observation of the upright man. By others they may be unseen, or overlooked; but, in his eye, the lustre of virtue outshines all other brightness. Wherever this pole-star directs him, he steadily holds his course.—Let the issue of that course be ever so uncertain; let his friends differ from him in opinion; let his enemies clamor; he is not moved; his purpose is fixed. He asks but one question of his heart, What is the most worthy and honourable part? What is the part most becoming the station which he possesses, the character which he wishes to bear, the expectations which good men entertain of him? Being once decided as to this, he hesitates no more. He shuts his ears against every solicitation. He pursues the direct line of integrity, without *turning either to the right hand or to the left*. “It is the Lord who calleth. Him “I follow. Let him order what seemeth good in his sight.—It is in this manner that the *integrity of the upright acts as their guide.*”

BUT as, upon a superficial view, it may appear hazardous to place ourselves entirely under such a guide. let us now proceed to consider what can be said in defence of this plan of conduct, and what advantages serve to recommend it.

In the *first* place, I affirm, that the guidance of integrity is the safest under which we can be placed; that the road in which it leads us is, upon the whole, the freest from dangers. Perfect immunity from danger is not to be expected in this life. We can choose no path, in which we may not meet with disappointments and misfortunes. Our life, at the best, is a pilgrimage, and perils surround it. Against these perils, the men of the world imagine that craft and dexterity furnish the best defence; and if, in any instance, they overreach the upright, they consider it as a manifest decision in favour of their plan. But, instead of resting on a few instances, let us take an extensive survey of the course of human affairs. Let us enquire who the persons are that, in all the different lines of life, have gone through the world with most success; and we shall find, that the men of probity and honour form by far the most considerable part of the list; we shall find that men of plain understanding, acting upon fair and direct views, have much oftener prospered, than men of the deepest policy, who were devoid of principle. How few are the instances of persons who, by fidelity, worth, and steadfast adherence to their duty, have either lost their fortunes, or incurred general displeasure, in times when human affairs were proceeding in their ordinary train? But how numerous and frequent are the examples of those whose prospects have been blasted, whose circumstances have been ruined, and their names sunk into contempt, by vice and dishonesty?

The man of the world aims; at higher things, and more rapid success, than the man of moderation and virtue. But, at the same time, he incurs greater risks and dangers. No calculation of probabilities can insure safety to him who is acting a deceitful part. Amidst the unforeseen vicissitudes of the world, he has to dread not only disappointment to his plans, but the miseries also which detected fallacies may bring on his head. He walks on the edge of precipices, where a single false step may be fatal. He follows a wandering light, which, if it fail of guiding him by a short path to the palace of ambition, lands him in the pit, or the lake. Whereas, he who follows the guidance of integrity, walks in the high road on which the light of the sun shines. He sees before him the habitation of peace, to which his steps are directed; and if he be longer in arriving at it, he is sure of neither wandering far astray, nor of meeting on his road with any forms of unusual terror.—Let it be always remembered, that the principle of integrity which directs a good man, is far from excluding prudence in the conduct of



life. It implies no improvident or thoughtless simplicity. On the contrary, it is closely connected with true wisdom. A man of enlarged capacity, and extensive views, is always upright. Craft is merely the supplement of inferior abilities. It characterizes a narrow comprehension, and a little mind.—As the path of integrity is on the whole the safest path of conduct; so,

In the *second* place, it is unquestionably the most honourable. Integrity is the foundation of all that is high in character among mankind. Other qualities may add to its splendour; but, if this essential requisite be wanting, all their lustre fades. Were I drawing the character of one who claimed the admiration of the world; and after I had ascribed to him eloquence, valour, and every endowment that is most shining and captivating, did I add, that he was a man of too much art to be trusted, I appeal to every one, whether, by this single stroke, the whole character would not be sunk and degraded? An interested and crafty man may perhaps rise into influence and high station; he may be a rich and a powerful, but will never be a great man. He may be feared, and externally honoured and courted; but in the secret thoughts of men he finds no respect. We all feel, that magnanimous sentiments cannot dwell in the same breast with selfishness and deceit.

He who rests upon an internal principle of virtue and honour, will act with dignity and a boldness, of which they are incapable who are wholly guided by interest. He is above those timid suspicions, and cautious restraints, which fetter and embarrass their conduct. That firmness which the consciousness of rectitude inspires, gives vigour and force to his exertions on every great occasion. It adds double weight to all the abilities of which he is possessed. It even supplies the place of those abilities in which he is defective. They who oppose him are obliged to honour him. They look up to him with a secret awe, as to one who moves above them in a superior sphere; regardless of their good or ill opinion, of their promise or their threatenings: like one of those celestial luminaries which holds its course through its orbit, without being affected by any commotions among the elements below. Such a man is trusted, and relied upon, as well as esteemed, because all know where to find him, and upon what system he acts. He attaches friends and followers to himself, without courting them; and though his progress towards fame should be slow, and interrupted at first by crooked arts, it is nevertheless certain and sure. The public may be misled for a while, in judging of real merit; but it is seldom unjust at the last. As persons continue to come forward to view, and to act their part in trying circumstances, their

characters are at length fully ascertained; and, almost always, rated as they deserve. How corrupt soever the world may be, they cannot withhold approbation from him whose conduct is marked by uniform integrity and honour. Enemies he will have, but the public favours him; the multitude of men wish him success; and destine him, in their thoughts, to every step of his preferment, before he arrives at it.

In the *third* place, the plan of conduct on which the man of integrity proceeds, is the most comfortable; that is, attended with the greatest satisfaction in a man's own mind. Amidst the various and perplexing events of life, it is of singular advantage to be kept free from doubt, as to the part most proper to be chosen. He who consults nothing but worldly interest, must, upon every turn of fortune, undergo much painful suspense. He is obliged to listen with anxious ear to every whisper of report; and, upon every new aspect which the face of affairs assumes, must study how to place himself in a new posture of defence. But the man of principle is a stranger to these inward troubles. His time is not lost, nor his temper fretted, by long and anxious consultations. One light always shines upon him from above. One path, the path of integrity, always opens clear and distinct to his view.—But this is not his only advantage, to be freed from embarrassment, by having placed himself under the charge of one constant guide. He is also rewarded with the sense of having chosen his guide well and wisely. He is delivered from all inward upbraidings, from all misgivings of mind, from all alarms founded on the dread of discovery and disgrace. A good conscience enables him to look back on the part which he has acted, with satisfaction; and to look forward to the issue which it may bring, without concern. It is in the case of one issue only, that the man who acts from worldly interest can enjoy satisfaction; that is, when his designs have succeeded according to his wish. But it is the felicity of the man who acts under the direction of integrity, that, in every issue, he has something to comfort him. Though success has failed him, the consolation remains of having done his duty, and studied to approve himself to God.

This reference of all his actions to Divine approbation, furnishes another source of satisfaction and peace. He looks up, with pleasing hope, to a Protector in the Heavens, who *loveth righteousness, and whose countenance beholdeth the upright*. The man of worldly wisdom is conscious of having no title to the favour of that high administration which rules the universe. By quitting the path of righteousness, he has left that straight road, in which God had appointed him to walk. He has taken the direction of his way to himself, and chosen to be his own guide

and master. To his own abilities, therefore, such as they are, he must trust; and is become wholly responsible for the issue of his conduct. But the man of virtue hath *committed his way to the Lord*. He follows the divine signal. He co-operates with the Divine purpose. The power which sways the universe, is engaged on his side. By natural consequence, he has ground to expect that any seeming disappointments which he may now incur, shall be over-ruled at the end to some salutary effect. Hence that *peace of God keeping the heart*, to which worldly men are strangers. Hence a degree of firmness and resolution in conduct, which it is impossible for them to possess. Especial-ly when we add,

IN the *fourth* and last place, that he who thus pursues a course of integrity, has always in his view the prospect of immortal rewards. That surely is the wisest direction of conduct, which is most amply recompensed at last. But what recompense can worldly wisdom bestow, comparable to what is promised by the gospel to them who, *by patient continuance in well-doing, look for glory, honour, and immortality*.—The recompense indeed is distant, but the hope of it is present; and hope is one of the most powerful principles of human action. Let a man be firm in the belief that he is acting under the immediate protection of Heaven, and that through all eternity he shall be rewarded for what he now performs; and as far as this belief is prevalent, his conduct will be steady and determined. Wherever religion directs him to hold his course, he will advance with intrepidity. He will submit to restraints without reluctance. He will meet dangers without fear. To every motive which reason suggests in favour of virtue, the hope of life eternal adds supernatural strength.—Accordingly, in the behaviour of many holy men, under the most trying circumstances of distress, we behold this effect eminently exemplified. It appears, with much lustre, in the spirited and magnanimous sentiments of the Apostle Paul, when he had the prospect of death before him. *Behold I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy.\* I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.†*

\* Acts, xx. 22, 23, 24.

† 2 Timothy, iv 6, 7, 8.

THUS I have endeavoured to shew in what manner the *integrity of the upright guides them*; and what the advantages are, of placing ourselves under its guidance. If it be the line of safety, or the line of honour, which we choose to pursue; if we consult our present comfort, or look forward to future rewards; in all these respects, the course which integrity points out is by far the most eligible.

It is a great recommendation of the guidance offered to us by integrity, that it is easily understood by all men. Plans of worldly policy are deep and intricate; and experience shows how often the ablest persons are mistaken in the measures which they adopt for carrying them on. But when men's intentions are fair and upright, it will be found, that a moderate share of understanding and attention is all that is requisite, for conducting themselves with safety and propriety. Providence never intended, that the art of living happily in this world should depend on that deep penetration, that acute sagacity, and those refinements of thought, which few possess. It has dealt more graciously with us; and made happiness to depend on uprightness of intention, much more than on extent of capacity. For the most part, the first sentiment which strikes a good man, concerning what he ought, or ought not to do, is the soundest, and suggests the best and wisest counsel. When he hesitates, and begins to deliberate how far his duty, or his honour, can be reconciled to what seems his interest, he is on the point of deviating into a dangerous path.—At the same time, it is of great consequence, that he who seeks to surrender his conduct to the direction of integrity should be well apprized of what true integrity requires. Let him guard against burdening conscience unnecessarily; lest a superstitious regard to trifles lead him to relax in matters of higher obligation. Let him avoid minute scrupulosity, on the one hand. Let him keep at a distance from loose casuistry, on the other. But when he is satisfied that his conscience has been well informed, let him, without wavering, adhere to its dictates in the whole of his conduct. This will prove the truest wisdom both for this world and the next.—For *he who walketh uprightly, walketh surely. The path of the just is as the shining light: And it shall shine more and more unto the perfect day.*

## SERMON LXVI.

ON SUBMISSION TO THE DIVINE WILL.

---

—*Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*—JOB, ii. 10.

FEW subjects of religious exhortation are of more general concern, than those which respect the distresses incident to human life. For no society, no family, no person, can expect to be long exempted from them; and when we speak of the prosperous, we can only mean those who are more rarely subject to them than others. Now, under those distresses, religion performs two offices: it teaches us how we ought to bear them; and it assists us in thus bearing them. Materials for both are found in the words of the text, which contain a sentiment so natural and just, as to carry conviction to every reasonable mind. They were the words of Job, at a time when, to his other calamities, this domestic affliction was added, that one who ought to have assauged and soothed his sorrows, provoked his indignation by an impious speech. *Thou speakest*, Job replies, *as one of the foolish women speaketh: What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?* Three instructions naturally arise from the text: First, that this life is a mixed state of good and evil: Secondly, That both the goods and the evils in it proceed from God: And, thirdly, That there are just reasons for our receiving with patience the evils of life, from the same hand which bestows its goods.

I. THIS life is a mixed state of good and evil. This is a matter of fact, which will be denied by none, and on which it is not necessary to bestow much illustration. It is evident to the slightest inspection, that nothing here is unallayed and pure. Every man's state is chequered with alternate griefs and joys, disappointment and success. No condition is altogether stable.

No life preserves always the same tenor. The vicissitudes of the world sometimes bring forward the afflicted into more comfortable circumstances; and often trouble the joy of the prosperous. This is the train in which human affairs have ever been found to proceed; and in which we may expect them always to go on.

But though this be universally admitted in speculation, and often confessed in discourse, the misfortune is, that few think of applying it to their own case. The bulk of mankind discover as much confidence in prosperity, and as much impatience under the least reverse, as if Providence had first given them assurance that their prosperity was never to change, and afterwards had cheated their hopes. Whereas, what reason ought to teach us, is to adjust our mind to the mixed state in which we find ourselves placed; never to presume, never to despair; to be thankful for the goods which at present we enjoy, and to expect the evils that may succeed.—Thou hast been admitted to partake of the feast of life. Its good things are distributed, in various portions, among the guests. Thou hast had thine allotted share. Complain not, when thy portion is removed. It is not permitted to any one, to remain always at the banquet.

II. WE are taught by the text, that both the goods and the evils which compose this mixed state, come from the hand of God. A little reflection may convince us, that, in God's world, neither good nor evil can happen by chance. If there were any one moment, in which God quitted the reins of the universe, and suffered any power to interfere with his administration, it is evident, that, from that moment, the measures of his government must become disjointed and incomplete. He who governs all things, must govern continually; and govern the least things as well as the greatest. *He never slumbers, nor sleeps.* There are no void spaces, no broken plans, in his administration; no blessings that drop upon us without his intention; nor any crosses that visit us, unsent by him. *I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness. I make peace, and create evil. I the Lord do all these things.\**

How it has come to pass, that this life should contain such a mixture of goods and evils, and that the mixture too should be of God's appointment, gives rise to a difficult enquiry. For how can any thing but what is good, proceed from the God of love? Can darkness issue from the source of light? or can it be any satisfaction to the *Father of mercies*, to behold the sorrows of creatures whom he has made?—Here there was room for much perplexity, till revelation informed us, that the mixture of evils in man's estate is owing to man himself. Had he continued as

\* Isaiah, xlv. 6, 7.

God originally made him, he would have received nothing but good from his Creator. His apostacy and corruption opened the gates of the tabernacle of darkness. Misery issued forth, and has ever since pursued him. In the present condition of his nature, that misery is partly punishment, partly trial. He is become incapable of bearing uninterrupted prosperity; and, by the mixture of evils in his lot, merciful designs are carried on for his improvement and restoration.

What the text leads us at present to consider is, the effect that will follow from imitating the example of Job, and referring to the hand of the Almighty, the evils which we suffer, as well as the goods which we enjoy. Such a reference of the distressful events of our life to the appointment of Heaven, not only is a duty which piety requires, but tends also to mitigate distress, and to suggest consolation. For to dwell, as is too commonly done, upon the instruments and subordinate means of our trouble, is frequently the cause of much grief, and much sin.—When we view our sufferings as proceeding merely from our fellow-creatures, the part which they have acted in bringing them upon us, is often more grating than the suffering itself. The unreasonableness, perhaps, of an enemy, the treachery of a friend, the ingratitude or insolence of one whom we had much obliged, add weight to a load laid upon us by means so provoking. The thoughts of their malignity, or of our own neglect in guarding against it, serve to poison the sore. Whereas, if, instead of looking to men, we behold the cross as coming from God, these aggravating circumstances would effect us less; we would feel no more than a proper burden; we would submit to it more patiently; and many resources would open to us, as shall in a little be shewn, from thinking of the hand that lays it on. Had Job, when dispoiled of all his substance, thought of nothing but the Chaldeans and Sabeans who robbed him, with what violent passions would he have been transported, and with what eager desires of revenge tormented? Whereas, considering them as rods and instruments only in the divine hand, and receiving the correction as from the Almighty himself, the tumult of his mind subsided; and with respectful composure he could say, *The Lord gave; and the Lord hath taken away: Blessed be the name of the Lord!* This leads me,

III. To consider the last, and most important instruction, arising from the text; namely, that there are many reasons why we, who receive good from the hand of God, should receive with patience the evils which he is pleased to inflict. This is strongly conveyed by that interrogatory form of speech, in which the sentiment of Job is expressed: *What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?* In order to unfold all that is contained in this appeal made to every man's conscience, let us consider.

IN the *first* place, that the good things which God has bestowed, afford sufficient evidence for our believing, that the evils which he sends, are not causelessly or wantonly inflicted. Did we live in a world which bore the marks of a malicious or cruel governor, there might be reason for distrusting every step of his conduct. But in the world which we inhabit, we behold, on the contrary, plain marks of predominant goodness. We behold the structure of the universe, the order of nature, the general course of Providence, obviously arranged with a benevolent regard to the welfare of men. All the art and contrivance of which the divine works are full, point to this end; and the more they are explored, create the firmer belief, that the goodness of the Deity gave rise to the system of creation.—What is the conclusion to be thence drawn, but that, in such parts of the divine administration as appear to us harsh and severe, the same goodness continues to preside, though exercised in a hidden and mysterious manner.

Let me desire you to consider, whether, if some powerful friend had placed you in an opulent and comfortable station, and in the general conduct of your affairs, had discovered the most disinterested kindness, you would not ascribe any occasional discouragements you received, to some unknown reason or cause, rather than to his unfaithfulness or cruelty? Ought not the experience which we have had, and the discovery which all nature affords, of the divine goodness, to lead us to put a like construction on the evils which we suffer from a hand that hath so frequently loaded us with good?—Have we forgotten, in the midst of our complaints, who brought us into the light of day; who watched over our helpless infancy; who reared our growing childhood; and, through ten thousand surrounding dangers, has been our protector and guardian until this day? How often has he rescued us from sickness and death, and made our hearts glad with unexpected comforts? Now, that some cloud is thrown over our prosperity, or some blessing withdrawn, in which for a time we had rejoiced, can we imagine that there is no good cause for this change of his proceeding? Shall we suspect that his nature is entirely altered? *Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies!* No; let us say with the Psalmist, *This is my infirmity; but I will remember the works of the Lord. I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.\** One signal work of the Most High, at least, let us remember, and rejoice in the remembrance of it; even that final remedy which he has provided for all the evils occasioned by sin, in the redemption of the world accomplished by Jesus Christ. *He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, will he,*

\* Psalm lxxvij. 9, 10.



in any case, wantonly afflict the children of men with superfluous and unnecessary sorrows? Is not this a proof so satisfactory, so express and demonstrative, of the gracious purposes of God, as should dispose us to take in good part every thing which proceeds from him? Consider,

IN the *second* place, that the good things we receive from God are undeserved, the evils we suffer are justly merited. Every reasonable person must feel the weight of this consideration, for producing patience and submission. For, though to suffer at any rate be grievous, yet to suffer unjustly is doubly galling. Whereas, when one receives a mixed portion, whereof the goods are above his deserts, and the evils below his deserts, to complain, in such a case, is unreasonable; there is more ground for being thankful. All, it is true, have not deserved evil equally. Yet all of us deserve it more or less; and to merit good at the hand of the Lord, is what none of us can pretend. At the best, we are but *unprofitable servants*. Even this is more than we are entitled to claim. For if God were to *enter into judgment* with us, who could stand before him? who could justify himself in his sight? When the most inoffensive compare their conduct with God's holy law; when they reflect upon the duties they have omitted, and the actual guilt they have contracted, they will find more reason to accuse themselves, than to complain of the divine chastisement. Whatever innocence any of us may plead, nay, whatever merit we may claim, with respect to men and the world, we suffer no more than what we deserve from the Governor of the world; and of his displeasure, we know that the wrath of man is no other than the instrument.

Not only all of us have done evil, but what ought to be particularly attended to, God has a just title to punish us for it.—Although a man know that he deserves punishment, yet he will not allow every one to inflict it. A child will submit to his parents, a servant to his master, a subject to the magistrate, when he would not bear correction from another hand. But no parent can have so complete a right to authority over his children, no master over his servants, no magistrate over his subjects, as the Almighty hath over us. When we were born, we brought nothing with us into God's word. During our continuance in it, we have lived on the good things which God has pleased to lend us; and of which, God and our own conscience know that we have made but a sorry improvement. When he thinks proper to take any of them away, no wrong is done us; for they were not ours. To have enjoyed them so long, was a favour. To enjoy them always was what we neither deserved, nor had any title to expect.

IN the *third* place, the good things which at different times we have received and enjoyed, are much greater than the evils

which we suffer. Of this fact, I am sensible it will be difficult to persuade the afflicted. But would they weigh, in a fair balance, the whole of their circumstances, they would find it true. Whatever persons feel at the present, makes so strong an impression upon them, as very common to obliterate the memory of all the past. When one is impressed with some painful disease in his body, or wrung with some sore distress of mind, every former comfort, at that moment, goes for nothing.—Life is beheld in all its gloom. A dark cloud seems to hang over it; and it is reviled, as no other than a scene of wretchedness and sorrow. But this is to be unjust to human life, as well as ungrateful to its author.—Let me only desire you to think how many days, how many months, how many years, you have passed in health, and ease, and comfort; how many pleasurable feelings you have had; how many friends you have enjoyed; how many blessings, in short, of different kinds you have tasted; and you will be forced to acknowledge, that more materials of thanksgiving present themselves, than of lamentation and complaint.—These blessings, you will say, are past. But though past, ought they to be gone from your remembrance? Do they merit no place, in the comparative estimate of the goods and evils of your state? Did you, could you expect, that, in this mutable world, any temporal joy was to last for ever?—Has gratitude no influence, to form your minds to a calm acquiescence in your benefactor's appointments? What can be more reasonable than to say, "Having in former times received " so " many good things from the hand of God, shall I not now, " without murmuring, receive the few evils which it pleases him " to send."

In the *fourth* place, not only the goods of life are, upon the whole, greater than its evils; but the evils which we suffer are seldom, or never, without some mixture of good. As there is no condition on earth of pure unmixed felicity, so there is none so miserable, as to be destitute of every comfort. Entire, and complete misery, if ever it take place, is of our own procuring, not of God's sending. None but the most gross and atrocious sinners can be in such a situation, as to discover no ray of relief or hope. In the ordinary distresses of life, it is generally our own folly and infirmity which, upon the loss of some one blessing that we had highly prized, deprives us of satisfaction in all other things. Many of our calamities are purely imaginary, and self-created; arising from rivalry or competition with others, and from false opinions of the importance of objects, to which custom and fashion have annexed an ideal value. Were these mistaken opinions once corrected by reason, the evil would disappear and contentment would resume its place. With respect to those calamities which are inflicted by God, his Provi-

dence has made this wise and merciful constitution, that after the first shock, the burden by degrees is lightened. Time brings a gentle and powerful opiate to all misfortune. What is very violent, cannot last long; and what lasts long, we become accustomed to bear. Every situation that is permanent, at length is felt to be tolerable. The mind accommodates itself to it; and by degrees regains its usual tranquillity. Hence the greatest part of the evils of life are more terrible in the previous apprehension, than in the actual feeling; and it seldom happens but, in one corner or other, something is found on which the mind can lay hold for its relief.

How many, for instance, do we behold around us, straitened in their worldly circumstances, and yet finding the means to live cheerfully, with poverty and peace in the same habitation? If we are deprived of friends whom we tenderly loved, are there not still some remaining, from whom we may expect much comfort? If our bodies are afflicted with sore disease, have we not reason to be thankful that our mind continues vigorous and entire; that we are in a situation to look around us for whatever can afford us ease; and that, after the decay of this frail and mouldering tabernacle, we can look forward to a *house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens?*—In the midst of all distresses, there remains to every sincere Christian, that mixture of pure and genuine consolation, which springs from the promises and hopes of the gospel. Consider, I beseech you, what a singularly happy distinction this makes in your situation, beyond the state of those who, under the various troubles of life, are left *without hope, and without God in the world*; without any thing to look to, but a train of unknown causes and accidents, in which they see no light nor comfort.—Thank the Father of mercies, that into all the evils he sends he infuses this joyful hope, that *the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in the end, to the virtuous and good.*

IN the *fifth* and last place, as the evils which we suffer are thus alleviated by a mixture of good; so we have reason to believe, that the evils themselves are, in many respects, good.—When borne with patience and dignity, they improve and ennoble our character. They bring into exercise several of the manly and heroic virtues; and, by the constancy and fidelity with which we support our trials on earth, prepare us for the highest rewards in heaven.—It has always been found, that the present constitution of human nature cannot bear uninterrupted prosperity, without being corrupted by it. The poisonous weeds which spring up in that too luxuriant soil, require the hand of adversity to exterminate them. It is the experience of sorrow and distress that subdues the arrogance of pride, tames the violence of passion, softens the hardness of the selfish heart, and human-

izes the temper to feel for the woes of others. Many have had reason to say, that *it was good for them to be afflicted*.\* *When men take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ, they are apt to say unto God, Depart from us for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty that we should serve him? But when they are holden in cords of affliction, then he sheweth them their work and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline and commandeth that they return from iniquity.*† Is his case to be deplored as highly calamitous, who, by forfeiting some transient enjoyments of the world, purchases lasting improvement in piety and virtue, and exchanges a few of the good things of this life for the better things of another?

INFLUENCED by such considerations as these, let us look up with reverence to the great Disposer of events; and under any distress with which he is pleased to visit us, let us utter no other voice but this; *Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*—Men are too often ingenious in making themselves miserable, by aggravating to their own fancy, beyond bounds, all the evils which they endure. They compare themselves with none but those whom they imagine to be more happy; and complain that upon them alone has fallen the whole load of human sorrows. Would they look with a more impartial eye on the world, they would see themselves surrounded with sufferers; and find that they are only drinking out of that mixed cup which Providence has prepared for us all. “I will restore your daughter again to life,” said the Eastern sage to a Prince who grieved immoderately for the loss of a beloved child, “provided you are able to engrave on her tomb the names of three persons who have never mourned.” The prince made inquiry after such persons; but found the inquiry vain and was silent.

To every reasonable person, who retains the belief of religious principles, many alleviating circumstances, and many arguments for patience, will occur under every distress. If we rest on this firm persuasion, that there is a wise and just Providence which disposes of all events, we shall have reason to conclude, that nothing happens to us here without some good design. Trusting that a happy termination shall at last arrive to the disorders of our present state, we shall be enabled, amidst all the varieties of fortune, to preserve that equanimity which befits Christians, and under every trial to say, *It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth good in his sight.*

\* Ps. lxxv. 71,

† Job, xxi. 12.—xxxvi. 8.

## SERMON LXVII.

### ON FRIENDSHIP.

---

*Thine own friend, and thy father's friend forsake not.*

PROVERBS, XXVII. 10.

WHATEVER relates to the behaviour of men in their social character is of great importance in religion. The duties which spring from that character, form many branches of the great law of charity, which is the favourite precept of Christianity. They, therefore, who would separate such duties from a religious spirit, or who at most treat them as only the inferior parts of it, do a real injury to religion. They are mistaken friends of piety, who, under the notion of exalting it, place it in a sort of insulated corner, disjoined from the ordinary affairs of the world, and the connections of men with one another. On the contrary, true piety influences them all. It acts as a vivifying spirit, which animates and enlivens, which rectifies and conducts them. It is no less friendly to men than zealous for the honour of God; and by the generous affections which it nourishes, and the beneficent influence which it exerts on the whole of conduct, is fully vindicated from every reproach which the infidel would throw upon it.—In this view, I am now to discourse on the nature and duties of virtuous friendship, as closely connected with the true spirit of religion. It is a subject which the inspired philosopher, who is the author of this book of Proverbs, has thought worthy of his repeated notice; and in many passages has bestowed the highest eulogiums on friendship among good men. *As ointment and perfume rejoice the heart, so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel. As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. Make sure of thy friend; for faithful are the wounds of a friend. A friend loveth at all times; and a brother is born for adversity. There*

*is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, it is said in the text, forsake not.*

I MUST begin the subject, by observing, that there are among mankind friendships of different kinds, or at least, connections which assume that name. When they are no more than confederacies of bad men, they ought to be called conspiracies rather than friendships. Some bond of common interest, some league against the innocent and unsuspecting, may have united them for a time. But they are held together only by a rope of sand. At bottom they are all rivals, and hostile to one another. Their friendship can subsist no longer than interest cements them. Every one looks with a jealous eye on his supposed friend; and watches the first favourable opportunity to desert, or to betray.

Friendships too there are of a different kind, and of a more respectable nature, formed by the connection of political parties. It is not, perhaps, on selfish or crooked designs that such friendships are originally founded. Men have been associated together, by some public interest, or general cause, or for defence against some real or imagined danger; and connections thus formed, often draw men into close union, and inspire for a season no small degree of cordial attachment. When upon just and honourable principles this union is founded, it has proved, on various occasions, favourable to the cause of liberty and good order among mankind. At the same time, nothing is more ready to be abused than the name of public spirit, and a public cause. It is a name, under which private interest is often sheltered, and selfish designs are carried on. The unwary are allured by a specious appearance; and the heat of faction usurps the place of the generous warmth of friendship.

It is not of such friendships, whether of the laudable or the suspicious kind, that I am now to discourse: but of private friendships, which grow neither out of interested designs nor party zeal; but which flow from that similarity of dispositions, that corresponding harmony of minds, which endears some person to our heart, and makes us take as much part in his circumstances, fortunes, and fate, as if they were our own. *The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David; and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.\** Such friendships certainly are not unreal; and, for the honour of human nature, it is to be hoped, are not altogether unfrequent, among mankind.—Happy it is, when they take root in our early years; and are engrafted on the ingenuous sensibility of youth. Friendships, then contracted, retain to the last a tenderness and warmth, seldom possessed by friendships that are formed in the riper periods of life. The remembrance of ancient and youthful connections melts every hu-

\* 1 Samuel, xviii. 1.

man heart; and the dissolution of them is, perhaps, the most painful feeling to which we are exposed here below.—But at whatever period of life friendships are formed, as long as they continue sincere and affectionate, they form, undoubtedly, one of the greatest blessings we can enjoy. By the pleasing communications of all our sentiments which they prompt, they are justly said to double our pleasures and to divide our sorrows. They give a brighter sunshine to the gay incidents of life; and they enlighten the gloom of its darker hours. *A faithful friend*, it is justly and beautifully said, by one of the Apocryphal writers, *is the medicine of life*.\* A variety of occasions happen, when to pour forth the heart to one whom we love and trust, is the chief comfort, perhaps the only relief, we can enjoy. Miserable is he who, shut up within the narrow inclosure of selfish interest, has no person to whom he can at all times, with full confidence, expand his soul.

SINCE cordial friendship is so great a blessing to human life, let us proceed to consider what duties it requires, and by what methods it may be cultivated to most advantage. The fundamental qualities of true friendship are, constancy and fidelity. Without these material ingredients it is of no value. An inconstant man is not capable of friendship. He may perhaps have affections which occasionally glow in his heart; which excite fondness for amiable qualities; or connect him with seeming attachment to one whom he esteems or to whom he has been obliged. But after these feelings have lasted for a little, either fancied interest alienates him, or some new object attracts him; and he is no longer the same person to those whom he once loved. A man of this inconstant mind cannot be said to have any mind at all. For where there is no fixedness of moral principle, occasional feelings are of no value: mind is of no effect; and with such persons it is never desirable to have any connection. Where constancy is wanting there can be no fidelity, which is the other basis of friendship. For all friendship supposes entire confidence and trust; supposes the seal of secrecy to be inviolable; supposes promises and engagements to be sacred; and no advantage of our own to be pursued, at the expense of our friend's honour. An inconstant man is despicable. A faithless man is base.

But supposing neither constancy nor fidelity to be altogether wanting, still however friendship is in hazard of suffering from the follies, and unreasonable humours, to which all of us are liable. It is to be regarded as a tender plant in an unfavourable soil, which, in order to its flourishing, requires to be reared and nursed with care. The following directions may be of use for

\* Ecclesiasticus, vi. 16

promoting its cultivation, and preserving it from whatever might be apt to blast and wither it.

IN the *first* place, let me advise you not to expect perfection in any with whom you contract friendship. It holds in general with respect to all wordly pursuits, that the more moderate our expectations are, they are likely to be the more successful. If in any situation of life, we hope to possess complete happiness, we may depend on receiving mortifications. If, in any person, we trust to find nothing but perfection, we may be assured that, on longer acquaintance, we shall meet with disappointments. In the case of friendship, this admonition is the more necessary to be given, as a certain warmth and enthusiasm belong to it, which are apt to carry us beyond the bounds of nature. In young minds, especially, a disposition of this kind is often found to take place. They form to themselves romantic ideas, gathered perhaps from fictitious histories, of the high and heroic qualities which belong to human nature. All those qualities they ascribe, without reserve or limitation, to the person with whom they wish to enter into intimate friendship; and on the least failure appearing, alienation instantly follows. Hence many a friendship, hastily perhaps contracted, is as hastily dissolved, and disgust succeeds to violent attachment.—Remember, my friends, that a faultless character on earth is a mere chimera. Many failings you experience in yourselves. Be not surprised when you discover the like in others, of whom you had formed the highest opinion. The best and most estimable persons are they, in whom the fewest material defects are found; and whose great and solid qualities counterbalance the common infirmities of men. It is to these qualities you are to look in forming friendships; to good sense and prudence which constitute the basis of every respectable character; to virtue, to good temper, to steadiness of affection; and according to the union of these dispositions, esteem yourselves happy in the friend whom you choose.

IN the *second* place, I must admonish you not to be hurt by differences of opinion arising in intercourse with your friends. It is impossible for these not to occur. Perhaps no two persons were ever cast so exactly in the same mould, as to think always in the same manner on every subject. It was wisely contrived by Providence, that diversity of sentiment should take place among men, on purpose to exercise our faculties, and to give variety to human life. Perpetual uniformity of thought would become monotonous and insipid.—When it is with regard to trifles that diversity or contrariety of opinion shows itself, it is childish in the last degree, if this become the ground of estranged affection. When from such a cause there arises any breach of friendship, human weakness is then discovered in a mortifying light. In matters of serious moment, the sentiments of the best



and worthiest may vary from those of their friends, according as their lines of life diverge, or as their temper and habits of thought present objects under different points of view. But, among candid and liberal minds, unity of affection will still be preserved. No man has any title to erect his own opinions into an universal and infallible standard; and the more enlarged that any man's mind is, the more readily he will overlook differences in sentiments, as long as he is persuaded that the mind of his friend is upright, and that he follows the dictates of conscience and integrity.

IN the *third* place, it is material to the preservation of friendship, that openness of temper and manners, on both hands, be cultivated. Nothing more certainly dissolves friendship, than the jealousy which arises from darkness and concealment. If your situation oblige you to take a different side from your friend, do it openly. Avow your conduct; avow your motives; as far as honour allows, disclose yourselves frankly; seek no cover from unnecessary and mysterious secrecy. Mutual confidence is the soul of friendship. As soon as that is destroyed, or even impaired, it is only a show of friendship that remains. What was once cordial intimacy, degenerates first into formal civility. Constraint on both sides next succeeds; and disgust or hatred soon follow.—The maxim that has been laid down by certain crooked politicians, to behave to a friend with the same guarded caution as we would do to an enemy, because it is possible that he may one day become such, discovers a mind which never was made for the enjoyments of friendship. It is a maxim which, not unreasonably I admit, may find place in those political and party friendships, of which I before spoke, where personal advancement is always in view. But it is altogether inconsistent with the spirit of those friendships, which are formed, and understood to be nourished by the heart.

THE *fourth* advice which I give is, To cultivate, in all intercourse among friends, gentle and obliging manners. It is a common error to suppose, that familiar intimacy supercedes attention to the lesser duties of behaviour; and that, under the notion of freedom, it may excuse a careless, or even a rough demeanor. On the contrary, an intimate connection can only be kept up by a constant wish to be pleasing and agreeable. The nearer and closer that men are brought together, the more frequent that the points of contact between them become, there is the greater necessity for the surface being smooth, and every thing being removed that can grate or offend.—Let no harshness, no appearance of neglect, no supercilious affectation of superiority, occur in the intercourse of friends. A tart reply, a proneness to rebuke a captious and contradictory spirit, are often known to embitter domestic life, and to set friends at va-

riance. In those smaller articles of behaviour, where men are too apt to be careless, and to indulge their humour without restraint, the real character is often understood to break forth and shew itself. It is by no means enough, that in all matters of serious interest, we think ourselves ready to prove the sincerity of our friendship. These occur more rarely. The ordinary tenor of life is composed of small duties and offices, which men have occasion daily to perform; and it is only by rendering daily behaviour agreeable, that we can long preserve the comforts of friendship.

In the *fifth* place, Let me caution you not to listen rashly to evil reports against your friends. When upon proper grounds you have formed a connection, be slow of believing any thing against the friend whom you have chosen. Remember, that there is among mankind a spirit of malignity, which too often takes pleasure in disturbing the society, of those who appear to enjoy one another. The Scripture hath warned us, that there is *a whisper who separateth chief friends; there is a false witness who soweth discord among brethren.* Give not therefore a ready ear to the officious insinuations of those who, under the guise of friendly concern, come to admonish you, that you ought to stand on your guard against those whom they see you disposed to trust. Consider, whether, under this fair appearance, there may not lurk some secret envy and rivalry, or some concealed interest. Chase not every flying report. Suffer not the poison of jealousy easily to taint your mind, and break your peace. A wide difference there is between that weak credulity which allows itself to be imposed upon blindly, and that dark and suspicious spirit which is always inclined to the evil side. It forms part of the character of a wise and good man, that he is not prone to *take up a reproach against his neighbour.*

In the *sixth*, and last place, Let me exhort you not to desert your friend in danger or distress. Too many there are in the world, whose attachment to those they call their friends is confined to the day of their prosperity. As long as that continues, they are, or appear to be, affectionate and cordial. But as soon as their friend is under a cloud, they begin to withdraw, and to separate their interests from his. In friendship of this sort, the heart, assuredly, has never had much concern. For the greatest of true friendship is constancy in the hour of danger, adherence in the season of distress.—When your friend is calumniated, then is the time, openly and boldly to espouse his cause.—When his situation is changed, or his fortunes are falling, then is the time of affording prompt and zealous aid. When sickness or infirmity occasion him to be neglected by others, that is the opportunity which every real friend will seize, of redoubling all the affectionate attentions which love suggests. These are the

important duties, the sacred claims of friendship, which religion and virtue enforce on every worthy mind.—To show yourselves warm, after this manner, in the cause of your friend, commands esteem, even from those who have personal interest in opposing him. This honourable zeal of friendship has, in every age, attracted the veneration of mankind. It has consecrated to the latest posterity the names of those who have given up their fortunes, and have even exposed their lives, in behalf of the friends whom they loved; while ignominy and disgrace have ever been the portion of them, who deserted their friends in the evil day. *Thine own friend forsake not.*

BEFORE concluding, it must not be forgotten, that the injunction of the Wise Man in the text is accompanied with this remarkable expression; not only *thine own friend*, but also, *thy father's friend, forsake not.* These words bring back to our remembrance the days of former years; and suggested a sentiment which cannot but touch every feeling heart. *Thine own friend* may be dear; *thy father's friend* ought to be sacred. As long as life remains in any human breast, the memory of those ancient ties should remain, which connected us once with our father, and our father's house. Thy father has perhaps, long ago gone down to the dust. But when you recall the innocent days of childhood and youth; when you think of those family transactions, which once gladdened your hearts; your father's friend, in the midst of these, will rise to your remembrance. There was a time when you accosted him with respect, or looked up to him with fondness, and was made happy by his kindly notice. Does such a one now survive, and shall he not receive from you some portion of filial reverence and honour? To disregard and neglect him, is to spurn your father's memory; is to insult the ashes of him who now sleeps in the grave; is to transmit yourselves to those who shall succeed you, as unfeeling and base. *Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not.*

I HAVE pointed out some of the chief duties which belong to virtuous friendship; and some of the principal means by which this sacred bond should be preserved unbroken; this holy flame should be kept alive in the human breast. The spirit, and sentiments, which I have studied to inspire, are such as virtue breathes, and such as true piety should increase. It is thus we fulfil that great law of love which our Divine Master taught. It is thus we prepare ourselves for those happy regions, where *charity never faileth*; where, in the presence of the God of love eternal and invariable friendships unite together all the blessed; friendships, which by no human infirmity disturbed, by death never separated, shall continue, throughout endless ages, a great and distinguished portion of the celestial felicity.

## SERMON LXVIII.

ON THE CONDUCT TO BE HELD WITH REGARD TO FUTURE  
EVENTS.

---

*Boast not thyself of to-morrow ; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.*—PROVERBS, xxvii. 1.

FROM these words I purpose to discourse of the proper conduct which we ought to hold, with regard to futurity, amidst the present uncertainties of life. Time and life are always going on, and to each of us are preparing changes in our state. What these may be, whether for the better or for the worse, we cannot tell ; as it hath pleased the wisdom of Providence, to cover futurity with a veil which no mortal can lift up. In the mean time, none of us can avoid forming designs, and, and laying plans, for the time to come. The present moment is never sufficient to give full employment to the active mind of man, without some excursions into futurity ; and in these excursions, the present is often wholly spent. It is therefore the highest consequence, that a proper direction be given to the mind, in its employments of thought relating to futurity. Otherwise, in the prospects which we take of that unknown, region false hopes, or ill-grounded fears, shall flatter or torment us in vain. *We know not*, as the Wise Man tells us, *what a day may bring forth*. It may, very probably, produce something that we had not looked for ; and therefore, instead of *boasting ourselves of to-morrow*, as the multitude are apt to do, it becomes us to be disciplined and prepared, for whatever it may bring.

It is needless to spend much time in confirming the truth, which is the foundation of the admonition in the text ; in proving, either that change and mutability belong to our present state, or that the changes of it cannot be foreseen by us. These

are truths so obvious and confessed, that an attempt to confirm them is like proving that all men are to die. At the same time, obvious as they are, it were to be wished, that the thoughts of men dwelt upon them more. For by a strange but prevailing deception, it would seem, from the general conduct of mankind, that almost every one thinks his own case an exception from the general law; and that he may build plans with as much confidence on his present situation, as if some assurance had been given him that it were never to change. Hence it has been often observed by serious persons, that there is no more general cause to which the vices of men can be ascribed, their forgetfulness of God and their neglect of duty, than to their presuming upon the continuance of life, of pleasure, and prosperity.

Look but a little way, my friends, into your own state; and you must unavoidably perceive that, from the beginning, it has been so contrived by Providence, that there should be no permanent stability to man's condition on earth. The seeds of alteration are every where sown. In your health, life, possessions, connexions, pleasures, there are causes of decay imperceptibly working; secretly undermining the foundations of what appears to you the most stable; continually tending to abolish the present form of things, and to bring forward new appearances, and new objects in their order: So that nothing is, or can be stationary on earth. All changes, and passes. It is a stream which is ever flowing; a wheel which is ever turning round. When you behold the tree covered with blossoms in the spring, or loaded with fruit in the autumn, as well may you imagine, that those blossoms, or that fruit, are to remain in their place through the whole year, as believe that human affairs are to continue, for to-day and to-morrow, for this year and the next, proceeding in the same tenour. To render this reflection still more serious, think, I pray you, on what small and inconsiderable causes those changes depend, which affect the fortunes of men, throughout their whole lives. How soon is evil done! There needs no great bustle or stir, no long preparation of events, to overturn what seems most secure, and to blast what appears most flourishing. A gale of wind rises on the ocean; and the vessel which carried our friends, or our fortunes, is overwhelmed in the deep. A spark of a candle falls by night in some neglected corner; and the whole substance of families is consumed in flames before the morning. A casual blow, or a sudden fall, deranges some of our internal parts; and the rest of life is distress and misery. It is awful to think, at the mercy of how many seeming contingencies we perpetually lie, for what we call happiness in this world.

In the midst, however, of all these apparent contingencies, plans and designs for the future are every day formed; pursuits

are undertaken; and life proceeds in its usual train. Fit and proper it is, that life should thus proceed. For the uncertainty of to-morrow was never designed by Providence, to deter us from acting or planning to-day; but only to admonish us, that we ought to plan, and to act soberly and wisely.—What that wise and sober conduct is which becomes us, what the rules and precautions are, which, in such a state as ours, respect futurity, I now proceed to show. They may be comprehended in the following directions. Boast not thyself of to-morrow; Despair not of to-morrow; Delay not till to-morrow what is proper to be done to-day; Prepare thyself for whatever to-morrow may bring forth; Build thy hopes of happiness on something more solid and lasting than what either to-day or to-morrow will produce.

I. IN the words of the text, *Boast not thyself of to-morrow*; that is, never presume arrogantly on futurity; in the most fair and promising state of fortune, beware of pride and vanity; beware of resting wholly upon yourselves, and forgetting Him who directs the changes of this mutable state. If there be any virtues which the uncertain condition of the world inculcates on man, they are, assuredly, moderation and humility. Man was for this end, placed in a world, where he knows so little of what is before him, that he might be impressed with a sense of his dependence on the Ruler of the world; that he might feel the importance of acquiring favour and protection from Heaven, by a life of piety and virtue; and that, not knowing how soon his own condition may be the same with that of the most wretched, he might be prompted to act towards all his brethren the humane and friendly part.—The favours which Providence bestows upon him at present, he ought to receive with thankfulness, and may enjoy with cheerfulness. Though commanded not to *boast himself of to-morrow*, the meaning of the precept is not, that he must be sad to-day. Rejoice he may in the day of prosperity; but certainly, *Rejoice with trembling*, is the inscription that should be written on all human pleasures.

As for them who, intoxicated with those pleasures, become giddy and insolent; who, flattered by the illusions of prosperity, make light of every serious admonition which the changes of the world give them, what can I say too strong to alarm them of their danger?—They have said to themselves, *My mountain stands strong, and shall never be moved. To-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundantly. I shall never see adversity.* Rash and wretched men! are you sensible how impious such words are? To the world, perhaps, you dare not utter them; but they speak the secret language of your hearts. Know, you are usurping upon Providence; you are setting Heaven at defiance; you are not only preparing sharper stings for yourselves;

when the changes of life shall come, but you are accelerating those changes ; you are fast bringing ruin upon your own heads. For God will not suffer pride in man ; and the experience of all ages hath shown, how careful he is to check it. In a thousand memorable instances, the course of his government has been visibly pointed against it. *He showeth strength with his arm, and scattereth the proud in the imaginations of their hearts, The day of the Lord is upon every one that is proud and lifted up ; to humble the lofty looks of man, and to stain the pride of all glory.\** Some of the ministers of divine displeasure are commissioned to go forth ; and to humble, without delay, the *boasters of to-morrow.*

II. As we are not to boast, so neither are we to despair, of to-morrow. The former admonition was directed to those whom prosperity had elated with vain hopes. This is designed for those whom a more adverse situation in life has filled with fears and alarms of what is to come. The reason of both admonitions is the same, *thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.* It may bring forth some unexpected misfortunes ; and therefore thou shouldst be humble in prosperity. It may bring forth some unforeseen relief ; and therefore thou shouldst hope under distress.—It is too common with mankind, to be totally engrossed and overcome by present events. Their present condition whatever it is, they are apt to imagine, will never change ; and hence by prosperity they are lifted up, and by adversity are dejected and broken ; prone, in the one case to forget God ; in the other to repine against him. Whereas, the doctrine, which the changes of the world perpetually inculcate, is, that no state of external things should appear so important, or should so affect and agitate our spirits, as to deprive us of a calm, an equal, and a steady mind. Man knoweth neither the good, nor the evil, which is before him. In your *patience, therefore, possess your souls ;* trusting in the day of sorrow, that God hath not *forgotten to be gracious ;* and that, *though weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh to the upright in the morning.*

Distress not yourselves, then, with anxious fears about to-morrow. Let me exhort you to dismiss all solicitude, which goes beyond the bounds of prudent precaution. Anxiety, when it seizes the heart, is a dangerous disease, productive both of much sin, and much misery. It acts as a corrosive of the mind. It eats out our present enjoyments, and substitutes, in their place, many an acute pain.—The Wise Man, in the text, has advised us *not to boast of to-morrow :* and our Saviour has instructed us to *take no thought for to-morrow.†* Both these directions, properly understood, are entirely consistent ; and the great rule of conduct, respecting futurity, is compounded of them both ;

\* Luke, i. 15. Isaiah, ii. 11. xxiii. 9.

† Matth. vi. 34.

requiring us, neither arrogantly to presume on to-morrow, nor to be anxiously and fearfully solicitous about it. *To-morrow*, says our Saviour, *shall take thought for the things of itself*. We shall be better able to judge of the course most proper for us to hold, when events have begun to come forward in their order. Their presence often suggests wiser counsels and more successful expedients, than it is possible for us to contrive at a distance. By excess of solicitude beforehand, we frequently introduce that confusion of mind, and that hurry and disorder of spirits, which bring us into the most unfavourable state for judging soundly.—Wherefore, never indulge either anxiety, or despair about futurity. Affright not yourselves with imaginary terrors. Anticipate not evils, which perhaps may never come. Make the best which you can of this day, in the fear of God, and in the practice of your duty; and, having done so, leave to-morrow to itself. *Sufficient for the day, when it comes, will be the evil thereof*.

III. Delay not till to-morrow any thing which is fit and proper to be done to-day. Remember that thou art not the lord of to-morrow. Thou art so far from having any title to dispose of it, that thou art ignorant of the most material circumstances relating to it; not only of what it shall bring forth, but whether thou shalt live to see it.—Notwithstanding the uncontrovertible evidence of this truth, procrastination has, throughout every age, been the ruin of mankind. Dwelling amidst endless projects of what they are hereafter to do, they cannot so properly be said to live, as to be always about to live; and the future has ever been the gulph in which the present is swallowed up and lost.—Hence arise many of those misfortunes which befall men in their worldly concerns. What might at present be arranged in their circumstances with advantage, being delayed to another opportunity, cannot be arranged at all. To-morrow being loaded with the concerns of to-day, in addition to its own, is clogged and embarrassed. Affairs, which have been postponed, multiply and crowd upon one; till at last, they prove so intricate and perplexed, and the pressure of business becomes so great, that nothing is left, but to sink under the burden. Of him, therefore, who indulges this lingering and delaying spirit in worldly matters, it is easy to prognosticate that the ruin is not far off.

Evils of the same kind, arising from the same cause, overtake men, in their moral and spiritual interests. There are few, but who are sensible of some thing in their character and behaviour, which ought to be corrected, and which, at one time or other, they intend to correct; some headstrong passion, which they design to subdue; some bad habit, which they purpose to reform; some dangerous connection, which they are resolved to break off. But the convenient season for these reformatations is not



yet come. Certain obstacles are in the way, which they expect by and by to surmount; and therefore they go on in peace for the present, in their usual courses, trusting, at a future day, to begin their designed improvement. In the mean time the angel of death descends; and, in the midst of their distant plans, executes his commission, and carries them away.—Guard against delusions of this kind, which have been fatal to so many.—Thou art now in tranquillity, in health, in possession of a calm mind, Improve these advantages, for performing all that becomes thee, as a man, and as a Christian; for, who can tell how long thou shalt be permitted to enjoy them? New alterations of fortune may be just coming forward; new troubles in public, or in private life, about to arise; new exigencies ready to throw thee into some condition, which shall leave thee neither leisure nor opportunity to execute any of the good purposes thou hast at present in thy mind. Wherefore, trifle no longer with what is so serious, and what may be so critical; but *to-day, while it is called to-day*, listen to the voice of God, and do his works. *Do now*, as the Wise Man advises, *with thy might, whatsoever thy hand findeth to do; for there is no work, nor device, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.*\*—Instead of delaying till to-morrow what ought to be done to-day, let me exhort you,

IV. To be every day prepared for whatever to-morrow may bring forth. There is a certain preparation for the vicissitudes of life, in which the multitude are sufficiently busied; providing, as they think, against whatever may happen, by increasing their riches, and strengthening themselves by friends, connections, and worldly honours. But these bulwarks which they erect, are totally insufficient against the dreaded storm. It is to some other quarter we must look for our defence; for when it is the world itself, whose changes we have reason to dread, the world, and the things of it, cannot afford us protection. The best preparation for all the uncertainties of futurity consists, in a well-ordered mind, a good conscience, and a cheerful submission to the will of Heaven. You know not what shall be on to-morrow. But there is one who knows it well; for his decree hath fixed it. To him look up with reverence; and say, “*Not my will, but thine be done*; what thou appointest is ever wise, and just, and good.” Seek to fulfil the part which he hath assigned you; to do the things which he hath commanded you to do; and leave all the rest to him. Whatever to-morrow brings forth, let it find you employed *in doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with your God*; and then you shall meet to-morrow without fear, when you meet it without the upbraidings of guilt.

\* Eccles. ix. 10.

If it shall bring forth to you any unexpected good, prepare to receive it with gratitude, temperance, and modesty. If it shall bring forth evil, prepare to receive it with manly fortitude. Let no events of any kind derange your equanimity, or shake your constancy. Contract your desires, and moderate your hopes. Expect not more from the world than it is able to afford you. Take it for granted, that what is naturally mutable, will one day change; that what was designed to be transient, will pass away.—Look forward to futurity without impatience. Be not desirous to know it. It belongs to God. Let him bring forward the events of the world, in his own way. Imagine that you continually hear those words, which our Lord once addressed to Peter, when he was inquiring about what was to happen to a fellow-disciple. *What is that to thee, ? Follow thou me.* Amidst all the uncertainty of future events, this road of clear and plain duty lies before you; follow Christ, and enquire no farther. Seek no crooked path, in order to avoid impending dangers. *Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left; but commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring to pass the desires of thy heart.*

V. BUILD your hopes of happiness on somewhat more solid and lasting than what either to-day or to-morrow are likely to produce. From what has been said, you may clearly perceive, that he who rests wholly upon this world, builds his house upon the sand. This life, by means of wisdom and virtue, may be rendered to a good man, a tolerable, nay a comfortable state. But he who expects complete happiness from it, will be greatly deceived. Man, in his most flourishing condition, were much to be pitied, if he was destitute of every higher hope. Rolling from change to change, throughout all the days of his life, with a dark and unknown prospect always before him in futurity, what would avail a few short interrupted glimpses of happiness, which from time to time he was permitted to enjoy? Can we believe, that only for such a state as this, man was designed by his great and good Creator?—No: Let us *bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again into a lively hope, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.* Here is the Rock on which the mind, however tossed by the storms of life, can securely rest. Here is the object to which a wise man will bend his chief attention, that, after having acted his part on earth with fidelity and honour, he may be enabled, through the merits of his Saviour, to look for a place in the mansions of eternal and untroubled peace. This prospect is the great corrective of the present vanity of human life. It gives significancy and importance to its most transitory scenes; and, in the midst of its mutability, discovers one fixed point of

rest. He who is habitually influenced by the hope of immortality, will be able to look without dismay on the changes of the world. He will neither boast of to-morrow, nor be afraid of it; but will pass through the varieties of life with a manly and unbroken mind; with a noble superiority to those fears and expectations, those cares and sorrows, which agitate the multitude.—Such are the native effects of Christian faith and hope. To them alone it belongs to surmount all the discouragements to which we are now exposed; to render our life comfortable, and our death blessed; nay, to make *the day of our death better than the day of our birth.*

## SERMON LXIX.

ON FOLLOWING THE MULTITUDE TO DO EVIL.

---

*Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.*—EXODUS, xxiii. 2.

IN this world, we are placed as companions and assistants to one another. Depending, for most of the comforts of life, on mutual intercourse and aid, it was necessary, that we should be formed to desire the company, and to take pleasure in the goodwill, of our fellows. But this sociability of man, though essential to his present condition, has, like many other good principles, been unhappily warped from its original purpose; and in the present state of the world, has proved the cause of much evil. For, as vice has abounded in every age, it hath propagated itself much more easily by the assistance of this social disposition. We naturally mould ourselves on the pattern of prevailing manners; and corruption is communicated from one to another. By mutually giving, and taking, the example of sinful liberties, licentiousness spreads and grows; each justifies himself by his neighbour; and the multitude of sinners strengthens one another's hands to commit iniquity. In all the ages of the world, custom has had more power than reason. Few take the trouble of enquiring what is the right path; the greater part content themselves with following that in which the multitude have gone before them. No exhortation, therefore, is more necessary to be frequently given, and to be seriously enforced, than that which we receive from the text; *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.*

To acquire a full view of any danger to which we are exposed, is the first measure to be taken in order to our safety. Let us then begin the subject with considering how much we are in hazard of being misled into vice by the general manners which we behold around us.—No virtue is more necessary to a

Christian, but scarcely is there any more difficult to be put in practice, than that firmness of mind which can enable a man to maintain his principles, and stand his ground against the torrent of custom, fashion, and example. Example has upon all minds a secret and insinuating influence, even when we ourselves are insensible of its operation. We imperceptibly slide into some resemblance of the manners of those with whom we have frequent intercourse. This often shows itself, in the most indifferent things. But the resemblance is still more readily contracted, when there is something within ourselves, that leans to the same side which is countenanced by the practice of others. We are always glad to find any apology for indulging our inclinations and passions; and the example of the multitude too readily suggests that apology. Even before corruption has made great progress in our hearts, sometimes mere complaisance and good-nature incline us to fall in with the ways of others. Sometimes timidity and false shame prevent our differing from them: Frequently expectation and interest impel us strongly to comply. How great is the danger we incur, when, in times of prevailing vice, all these principles of imitation and compliance unite together against our virtue?

The world is too justly said by Scripture, to *lie in wickedness*: it is a school wherein every vice is taught, and too easily learned. Even from our earliest childhood, false sentiments are instilled into our minds. We are bred up in admiration of the external show of life. We are accustomed, as soon as we can understand any thing, to hear riches and honours spoken of as the chief goods of men, and proposed to us as the objects to which our future pursuits are to be directed. We see the measures of outward respect and deference taken from these alone. Religion and virtue are recommended to us, in a formal manner, by our teachers and instructors; but all improvements of the mind and heart are visibly placed, by the world, in an inferior rank to the advantages of fortune. Vices that chance to be fashionable, are treated as slight failings; and coloured over, in common discourse, with those soft and gentle names which express no condemnation. We enter, perhaps, on the world, with good principles, and an aversion to downright vice. But when, as we advance in life, we become initiated in that mystery of iniquity, which is called the way of the world; when we meet with deceit and artifice in all ranks of men; when we behold iniquity, authorised by great names, and often rewarded with success and advancement, our original good impressions too soon decay. The practice of the multitude renders vice familiar to our thoughts, and gradually wears off the abhorrence with which we once beheld it. We begin to think, that what is so very general, cannot be highly criminal. The malignity of sin appears

diminished, by so many being sharers in the reproach; and instead of men's vices detracting, as they ought to do, from our good opinion of the men. our attachment to the men oftener reconciles us to the vices of which they are guilty.

The countenance which sin receives from the practice of the multitude, not only removes the restraints which are imposed by modesty and shame; but, such is the degeneracy of the world, the shame is too often employed against the cause of religion and virtue. The ridicule of the giddy and unthinking bears down the conviction of the sober and modest. Against their own belief, they appear to adopt the notions of the infidel; and against their own choice, they join in the vices of the libertine; that they may not be reproached as persons of a narrow mind, and still enslaved to the prejudices of education. How much reason is there to believe that, merely from this timidity of temper, many, whose principles are on the side of religion and virtue, are nevertheless found *walking in the way of sinners, and sitting in the chair of the scornful?*—Interest, too, often coincides with this weakness of disposition, in tempting such persons to follow the multitude. To fall in with the prevailing taste, to suit themselves to the passions of the great, or to the humours of the low, with whom they chance to be connected, appears the readiest way to rise in the world. Hence they are naturally led to relinquish the firmness of an upright character, for that supple and versable turn, which accommodates itself to the times, and assumes whatever appearance seems most convenient for interest.—Such are the dangers to which we are exposed, in times of corruption, of *following the multitude to do evil*; dangers which require our most serious attention and care, in order to guard ourselves against them.—I proceed to lay such considerations before you as may be useful for that purpose.

IN the *first* place, Let us remember that the multitude are very bad guides; are so far from having a title to implicit regard, that he who blindly follows them may be presumed to err. For prejudice and passion are known to sway the crowd. They are struck by the outside of things; they inquire superficially, admire false appearances, and pursue false goods. Their opinions are for the most part hastily formed, and of course are variable, floating, and inconsistent. In every age, how small is the number of those who are guided by reason and calm inquiry? How few do we find, who have the wisdom to think and judge for themselves, and have steadiness to follow out their own judgment? Ignorance and low education, darken the views of the vulgar. Fashion and prejudice, vanity and pleasure, corrupt the sentiments of the great. The example of neither affords any standard of what is right and wise. If the philosopher, when employed in the pursuit of truth, finds it necessary to disregard

established prejudices and popular opinion, shall we, in the more important inquiry after the rule of life, submit to such blind guidance as the practice of the many; esteeming whatever they admire, and following wherever they lead? Be assured, that he who sets up the general opinion as the standard of truth, or the general practice as the measure of right, is likely, upon such a foundation, to build no other superstructure except vice and folly.—If the practice of the multitude be a good pattern for our imitation, their opinions surely should be as good a rule for our belief. Upon this principle, we must exchange Christianity for Paganism or Mahometanism, and the light of the Reformation for the superstitions of Popery; for these latter have ever had, and still have, the numbers and the multitude on their side.—Our Saviour has sufficiently characterized the way of the world, when he describes *the broad road* in which the multitudes go, as the *road which leads to destruction*; and the path, which leads to happiness, as a *narrow path*, which fewer find. From which it is an easy inference, that to have the multitude on our side, is so far from affording any presumption of our being safe, that it should lead us to suspect that we are holding the course of danger.

IN the *second* place, As the practice of the multitude is no argument of a good practice, so it cannot afford us either justification, or safety, in what is evil.—It affords us, I say, no justification. Truth and error, virtue and vice, are things of immutable nature. The difference between them is grounded on that basis of eternal reason, which no opinions or customs of men can affect or alter. Whether virtue be esteemed or not, in the world, this makes it neither more nor less estimable in itself. It carries always a divine authority, which men cannot impair. It shines with an essential lustre, which praise cannot brighten, nor reproach tarnish. It has a right to regulate the opinions of men; but by their opinions cannot be controlled. Its nature continues invariably the same, though all the multitude of fools should concur in endeavouring to turn it into ridicule. *Woe unto them*, says the prophet Isaiah, *that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!—Their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust; because they have cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.\**

As the practice of the multitude furnishes no justification to the sinner, so neither does it afford him any safety. Religion is altogether a matter of personal concern. God hath delivered to every man the rule of life; and every man must think and act

\* Isaiah, v. 20, 24.

for himself; because for himself he is to answer. If others be wicked, it will be the worse for them; but it will not, on that account, be the better for us, if we shall be evil also. Let vice be ever so prevalent, it is still that *evil thing which the Lord abhorreth*; and, *though hand join in hand*, the wicked shall not escape unpunished. So far is the number of offenders from furnishing any ground of safety, that it calls more loudly for divine justice to interpose. It is as easy for the Almighty arm to crush a whole guilty society, as to punish a single individual; and when the disobedient subjects of God countenance and strengthen one another in licentiousness, by transgressing in troops and bands, it becomes high time for his government to exert itself, and let its vengeance forth.—One could scarcely think that any professor of Christian faith would fancy to himself any apology from the way of the world, when he knows that the declared design of his religion was, to distinguish him from the world, which is said to *lie in sin*; and that Christ came to call out for himself a *peculiar people*, whose character it should be, *not to be conformed to the world, but transformed by the renewing of their minds*.—So little, indeed, can the practice of the world either justify or extenuate vice, that it deserves our serious consideration.

IN the *third* place, Whether there be not several circumstances which peculiarly aggravate the guilt of those who follow the multitude in evil? Do you not, thereby, strengthen the power of sin, and perpetuate the pernicious influence of bad example? By striking off from the corrupted crowd, you might be eminently useful; you might animate and recover many, whom weakness and timidity keep under bondage to the customs of the world: Whereas, by tamely yielding to the current of vice, you render that current stronger for carrying others along; you add weight and stability to the bad cause; you lend to the multitude all the force of your example, for drawing others after them to the commission of evil.—While you are thus accessory to the ruin of others, you are, at the same time, stamping your own character with the foulest and deepest impressions of corruption. By surrendering your judgment, and your conscience, to the multitude, you betray the rights, and degrade the honour, of the rational nature. Nothing great or worthy can be expected of him, who instead of considering what is right in itself, and what part it is fittest for one in his station to act, is only considering what the world will think, or say of him; what sort of behaviour will pass with the fairest show, and be most calculated to please the many. When a man has thus given up the liberty and independence of his mind, we can no longer reckon upon him in any thing. We cannot tell how far he may be carried in vice. There is too much ground to dread, that he will lie, dissemble, and betray; changing himself, without scruple, into every shape that



will find favour among those whom he seeks to gain.—While this servility to the world infers baseness towards men, it involves also the highest impiety towards God. It shows that we yield to the world that reverence and submission which is only due to the divine law. We treat the government of the Almighty with scorn ; as if his precepts deserved to be obeyed, only when they suited the caprice and the follies of the multitude ; and were entitled to no regard, as soon as they contradicted the reigning customs and fashions of the world.—While such conduct carries in it so much wickedness and folly, let us observe,

IN the *fourth* place, that the most excellent and honourable character which can adorn a man and a Christian, is acquired by resisting the torrent of vice, and adhering to the cause of God and virtue, against a corrupted multitude. It will be found to hold, in general, that all those who, in any of the great lines of life, have distinguished themselves for thinking profoundly, and acting nobly, have despised popular prejudices, and departed, in several things, from the common ways of the world. On no occasion is this more requisite for true honour, than where religion and morality are concerned. In times of prevailing licentiousness, to maintain unblemished virtue, and uncorrupted integrity ; in a public or private cause, to stand firm by what is fair and just, amidst discouragements and opposition ; despising groundless censure and reproach ; disdaining all compliance with public manners, when they are vicious and unlawful ; and never ashamed of the punctual discharge of every duty towards God and man ;—this is what shows true greatness of spirit, and will force approbation even from the degenerate multitude themselves. “ This is the man,” their conscience will oblige them to acknowledge, “ whom we are unable to bend to mean concessions. We see it in vain either to flatter or to threaten him ; he rests on a principle within, which we cannot shake. To this man you may, on any occasion, safely commit your cause. He is incapable of betraying his trust, or deserting his friend, or denying his faith.” *Thus his righteousness comes forth as the light, and his judgment as the noon day.*

It is, accordingly, this steady inflexible virtue, this regard to principle, superior to all custom and opinion, which peculiarly mark the character of those, in any age, who have shone as saints or heroes ; and has consecrated their memory to all posterity. It was this that obtained to ancient *Enoch* the most singular testimony of honour from Heaven. He continued to *walk with God*, when the world apostatised from him. He pleased God, and was beloved of him ; so that living among sinners, he was translated to heaven without seeing death ; *Yea, speedily was he taken away, lest wickedness should have altered his under-*

*standing, or deceit beguiled his soul.\** When Sodom could not furnish ten righteous men to save it, *Lot* remained unspotted amidst the contagion. He lived like an angel among spirits of darkness; and the destroying flame was not permitted to go forth, till the good man was called away by a heavenly messenger from his devoted city. When *all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth*, then lived *Noah*, a righteous man, and a preacher of righteousness. He stood alone, and was scoffed by the profane crew. But they by the deluge were swept away; while on him, Providence conferred the immortal honour, of being the restorer of a better race, and the father of a new world. Such examples as these, and such honours conferred by God on them who withstood the multitude of evil doers, should often be present to our minds. Let us oppose them to the numbers of low and corrupt examples, which we behold around us; and when we are in hazard of being swayed by such, let us fortify our virtue, by thinking of those who, in former times, shone like stars in the midst of surrounding darkness, and are now shining in the kingdom of heaven, *as the brightness of the firmament, for ever and ever.*—As our honour is thus deeply concerned in our acting a steadfast and virtuous part, let us also consider,

In the *fifth* place, How little, in point of interest, can be gained by the favour of the multitude. and how much will certainly be lost, by following them to do evil. We may thereby render ourselves more agreeable to some with whom we are connected; and by artful compliances, may please ourselves with the prospect of promoting our fortune. But these advantages, such as they are, remain doubtful and uncertain. The wind of popular opinion is ever shifting. It will often leave us at a loss what course to steer; and, after all our trouble and anxiety to catch the favourable gale, it may on a sudden forsake us. For the versatility of character, the meanness and inconsistency of conduct, into which a dependent on the multitude is betrayed, frequently render him, in the end, an object of contempt to those whom he sought to please. But supposing him successful in his views, no worldly advantages, which are purchased by dishonourable means, can be either solid or lasting. They bring no genuine satisfaction to a man, who is conscious to himself of having given up his principles to serve the world. As long as he could be satisfied with his own conduct, he might bear up under undeserved discouragement; but when he becomes despicable in his own eyes, worldly honours lose their lustre.—What can the multitude do for you, after you have followed them in evil? They cannot restore to you the peace of an innocent mind, nor heal the sorrows of a wounded spirit, nor shield you from the displea-

\* Wisdom of Solomon, iv. 11.

sure of God. They can do little to support you in the hour of affliction, and nothing to deliver your souls in the day of death. Forsaken and disconsolate, the world, for the most part, casts off its votaries in the end; and when you compute the final amount, it will prove a very small consolation, that, as you have had sharers in guilt, you shall have companions also in punishment.

Look forward to the issue of things. The multitude of men possess now, in a great measure, the distribution of praise and censure, of success and disappointment, according to their caprice. But this confused and promiscuous distribution is not always to subsist. The day cometh, when we all are to appear before a more discerning Judge, and a more impartial tribunal. The day cometh, when our Lord Jesus Christ shall descend from heaven in all the glory of his Father, to unveil every character, and to *render to every man according to his works*. At that day, how shall he lift up his head, who hath been all his life the slave of the world's opinion; who hath moulded his principles, and his practice, solely to please the multitude; who hath been *ashamed of his Saviour and his words*; and, to gain favour with men, hath apostatised from the native sentiments and dictates of his heart?—To say all in one word: there is a contest now between God and the world. These form the opposite sides which divide mankind. Consider well, to which of these you will choose to adhere. On the one side, lie your allegiance, your honour, and your interest: on the other, lie your guilt and your shame. For the one, conscience and reason; for the other, passion and inclination, plead. On the one hand are the approbation of God, immortal honour, and divine rewards; on the other,—remember and beware!—are the stings of conscience, endless punishment, and endless infamy.

## SERMON LXX.

### ON THE WISDOM OF GOD.\*

---

*Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory, for ever and ever ! Amen.—1 TIMOTHY, 1. 17.*

IT is of the highest importance to religious conduct, that our minds be filled with suitable conceptions of the attributes of God. They are the foundations of our reverence for him ; and reverence is the foundation of religion. All the divine perfections are interesting to man. Almighty power, in conjunction with Eternity and Omnipresence, naturally inspires solemn awe. Infinite Goodness relieves the mind from that oppression which Power alone would produce ; and, from our experience of present benefits, and our remembrance of the past, creates love, gratitude, and trust. In the middle between these stands the contemplation of Divine Wisdom, which conjoins impressions of awe with those of comfort ; and, while it humbles us into profound submission, encourages, at the same time, our reliance on that *King eternal, immortal, invisible*, who is justly stiled in the text, *the only wise God*.

Among men, wisdom is a quality entirely different from cunning or craft. It always supposes good and fair intention in the person who possesses it ; and imports, that laudable ends are pursued by proper and justifiable means. In like manner, wisdom in the Supreme Being cannot be separated from the rectitude of his nature— It is, in him, an exertion of benevolence ; and imports, that the purposes of justice and goodness are car-

\* This discourse was chiefly intended to be a general recapitulation of instances of the wisdom of Providence, several of which have been more fully illustrated in some of the preceding Sermons.

ried on and accomplished by means the most effectual. To meditate on some of those instances in which this divine wisdom is displayed cannot but be highly favourable to the impressions both of piety and of virtue.

IT is difficult to say, whether the natural, or the moral world affords the most conspicuous and striking displays of the wisdom of God. Not one, nor many discourses, nor indeed the study and labour of a whole life, were, in any degree, sufficient to explore them. Of the proofs of wisdom which the natural world affords I cannot attempt now to discourse. Any illustration of these would lead to discussions of a scientific kind, which more properly belong to the philosopher; and on which philosophy has often employed itself, with much utility and honour. I shall only take notice, that, in proportion as human knowledge hath enlarged its sphere of research and discovery, in the same proportion hath the wisdom of the Creator struck the minds of all enquirers and observers, with the highest admiration. All nature is in truth a scene of wonders. In the disposition of the heavenly bodies, and the general arrangement of the system of the universe; in the structure of the earth; in the endless variety of living creatures that fill it; and in the provision made for them all, to enable them to fulfil the ends of their being; it is not easy to determine, whether power, wisdom, or goodness, be most conspicuous. It belongs not only to *the heavens to declare the glory of God, and to the firmament to shew forth his handy work*; in the smallest and most inconsiderable, as well as in the most illustrious works of God, equal marks appear of profound design and consummate art. It has been justly said, that there is not a vegetable that grows, nor an insect that moves, but what is sufficient to confound the atheist, and to afford the candid observer endless materials of devout adoration and praise.

WHEN we turn to the moral world, the field of admiration which opens to us is no less extensive and striking. I can only mention a few instances of that exquisite wisdom which every where meet us.

IN the *first* place, let us attend to the constitution of human nature. Though we are taught by revelation to consider it as now impaired by the fall, yet as it stands we behold the traces of a noble structure, planned and executed with the highest skill. All the powers and faculties bestowed on man are such, as perfectly suit his condition, and adapt him to the purposes for which he was designed. Senses were given him, that he might distinguish what is necessary for the preservation and welfare of his body.—Now, suppose that any one of those senses, the sight, for instance, or the hearing, or the touch, had been in a considerable degree either more blunt, or more acute, than it is at present, what an unhappy change would this have made upon

our state? On the one hand, greater imperfection of the organs would have deprived us of all the comfort and advantage which we now enjoy from such powers. On the other hand, a greater degree of exquisite sensibility in them would have rendered life a burden to us. Our senses, instead of being inlets to knowledge and pleasure, would then have become constant avenues to uneasiness and pain. Their powers, therefore, are skilfully adjusted to that measure of strength, which allows them to answer the purposes of health, safety, and comfort; without either falling short of this line of usefulness, or improperly, and hurtfully, stretching beyond it.

In the mind, appetites and passions were placed, as the moving powers of the soul, to impel its activity. But as their impulse required regulation and restraint, reason was, at the same time, conferred as the directing power.—Of all our passions, self-love and the desire of self-preservation were, with the utmost propriety, made the strongest, for a reason which the meanest capacity may comprehend. Every man is most immediately committed by Providence to his own care and charge. He knows his own situation best; and has more opportunities of promoting his own happiness, than he can have of advancing the happiness of any other person. It was therefore fit and wise, that, by the strongest instinct, he should be prompted to attend to himself.—At the same time, as no man standing alone is sufficient for his own welfare, it was necessary that by mutual sympathy and social instincts, we should be drawn to give aid to one another. Here it deserves our particular notice, that the force of those social instincts is, with admirable propriety, proportioned by Providence to the degree of their usefulness and importance.\* Thus, that parental affection, which the helpless state of infancy and childhood renders so needful, is made the strongest of them all. Next, come those ties of blood, which prompt mutual kindness among those who are intimately joined together by brotherhood, and other family connections. To these succeeds that valuable instinct of pity, which impels us to assist the distressed, wherever we behold them. To take part with others in their good fortune belongs to man's social nature, and increases the sum of happiness. At the same time, to take part with the prosperous is less necessary than to sympathize with the unhappy; and therefore the principle which prompts us to *rejoice with them that rejoice*, is made not to be so strong, as that which impels us to *weep with them that weep*.

But they are not only the laudable and important parts of our disposition, which discover the wisdom of the Author of our frame: even our imperfections and follies are by him rendered

\* See Serm. XXXII.

subservient to useful ends.—Amidst those inequalities of condition, for instance, which the state of human life required, where it was necessary that some should be rich, and others poor, that some should be eminent and distinguished, and others obscure and mean, how reasonable is that good opinion, which every one entertains of himself, that self-complacency with which he compares himself to others; and that fond hope, which is ever pleasing him with the prospect of future pleasures and advantages in life? Without those flattering sensations, vain as they often are, how totally insupportable would this world become to many of its inhabitants? Whereas, by means of them, Providence hath contrived to balance, in a great measure, the inequalities of condition among mankind. It hath contrived to diffuse pleasure through all ranks; and to bring the high and the low nearer to a level with each other, than might at first be supposed. It hath smoothed the most rugged tracts of human life; and hath gilded with rays of borrowed light its most dreary scenes.

One instance of Divine Wisdom, in framing our nature, is so remarkable as to demand particular attention; that is, the measure according to which God hath dispensed knowledge and ignorance to man. There is nothing of which we are more ready to complain, than of our narrow and confined views of nature, and of Providence, and of all things around us: And yet upon examination, it will be found, that our views extend, on every side, just as far as they ought; and that, to see and know more than is allowed us, instead of bringing any advantage, would produce certain misery.\*—We pry, for instance, with impatient curiosity, into future events. Happily for us, they are veiled and covered up; and one peep behind that veil, were it permitted, would be sufficient to poison the whole comfort of our days, by the anticipation of sorrows to come.—In like manner, we often wish, with eagerness to penetrate into the secrets of nature, to look into the invisible world, and to be made acquainted with the whole destiny of man. Our wish is denied; we are environed on all hands with mystery; and that mystery is our happiness; for, were those great invisible objects fully disclosed, the sight of them would confound and overwhelm us. It would either totally derange our feeble faculties, or would engross our attention to such a degree, as to lay us aside from the business and concerns of this world. It would have the same effect, as if we were carried away from the earth, and mingled among the inhabitants of some other planet.—The knowledge that is allowed to us, was designed to fit us for acting our part in our present state. At the exact point, therefore, where usefulness ends, knowledge stops, and ignorance commences. Light shines upon

\* See Serm. IV. and Serm. LIX.

us, as long as it serves to guide our path ; but forsakes us, as soon as it becomes noxious to the eye ; and salutary darkness is appointed to close the scene. Thoughtless and stupid must that man be, who, in all this furniture of the human mind, in this exact adjustment of its several powers to the great purposes of life, discerns not the hand of adorable wisdom, as well as of infinite Goodness.

In the *second* place, Let us contemplate the same wisdom as exhibiting itself to us in the moral government of the world.—We are informed by revelation, that this life is designed by Providence to be an introductory part of existence to intelligent beings ; a state of education and discipline, where creatures, fallen from their original rank, may gradually recover their rectitude and virtue. Under this view, which is in itself perfectly consonant to all that reason discovers, we shall find the general course of human affairs, confused as it may sometimes appear, to have been ordered with exquisite wisdom.—It was necessary to such a state, that all the active powers of man should be brought forth into exercise, and completely tried.—It became proper, therefore, that there should be a mixture of characters in the world, and that men should be shewn in a variety of situations.\* Hence that diversity of tempers and dispositions which are found in society ; those inequalities in rank and station, which we see taking place ; and those different talents and inclinations which prompt men to different pursuits. By these means, every department in society is filled up ; and every man has some sphere prepared for him, in which he can act. He is brought forth as on a busy stage, where opportunity is given for his character to display itself fully.—His life is, with great propriety, varied by interchanges of prosperity and adversity. Always prosperous, he would become dissipated, indolent and giddy : Always afflicted, he would be fretful, dejected, and sullen. There are few persons, therefore, or none, whose lot shares not of both these states ; in order that every disposition of the heart may be explored, and every mean of improvement afforded.—As man is ultimately designed for a higher state of existence than the present, it was not proper that this world should prove a paradise to him, or should afford him that complete satisfaction which he incessantly pursues. Disappointments, therefore, are often made to blast his hopes ; and, even while the comforts of life last, they are always mixed with some troubles ; in order that an excessive attachment to this world may gradually be loosened. The course of things is evidently so ordered by Providence, that occurrences shall be always happening, to bring down the most prosperous to a level with the

\* See Serm. LIV.



rest of his brethren, and to raise up, in their turn, the low and the distressed.

In the midst of those vicissitudes, which are so obviously conducive to improvement, both wisdom and goodness required, that the Supreme Governor of the world should be seen to protect the interests, and favour the side of virtue. But in the degree of evidence, with which this was to be shewn, it was no less requisite, that a proper temperament should be observed. Had virtue been always completely rewarded, and made happy on earth, men would no longer have had a motive for aspiring to a more blessed state. In the case of every crime, had divine justice interposed to bring complete punishment on the head of the criminal; or had all the felicity which is prepared for the just in a future world, and all the misery which there awaits the wicked, been already displayed to the view, and rendered sensible to the feelings of men; there would have been an end of that state of trial, for which our whole condition on earth was intended. It was necessary therefore, that at present, we should *see through a glass darkly*. A certain degree of mystery and obscurity was, with perfect wisdom, left on the conduct of the Almighty.\*—But, amidst that obscurity, sufficient encouragement and support are in the mean time given to virtue; sufficient ground is afforded for the full belief, that it is what the Deity loves, and will finally reward. His approbation of it is signified to every man by the voice of conscience. Inward satisfaction and peace are made always to belong to it; and general esteem and honour for the most part to attend it. On the other hand, the wicked, in no situation of life, are allowed to be truly happy. Their vices and their passions are made to trouble their prosperity; and their punishment to grow out of their crimes. Let any one attentively recollect the material incidents of his life; and he will, for the most part, be able to trace the chief misfortunes which have befallen him to some guilt he has contracted, or some folly he has committed.† Such is the profound wisdom with which Providence conducts its counsels, that although it does not appear to interpose, men are made to reap from their actions, the fruits which they had deserved; their iniquities to correct them, and their backslidings to reprove them; and while they suffer, they are forced to acknowledge the justice of their punishment.—These are not matters of rare or occasional observation; but deeply interwoven with the texture of human affairs. They discover a regular plan, a formed system, according to which the whole train of Providence proceeds; and which manifests to every serious observer the consummate wis-

\* See Serm. IV.

† See Serm. LXIII.

dom of its Author.—As thus in the constitution of human nature and in the moral government of the world, Divine wisdom so remarkably appears, I must observe,

IN the *third* place, That in the redemption of the world, and in the economy of grace, it shines no less conspicuously. The subject which opens to us here is too extensive to be fully illustrated at present; but the great lines of it are obvious.\*—In carrying on a plan, by which forgiveness was to be dispensed to an offending race, wisdom required that the authority of the legislator should be fully preserved, and no such relaxation be introduced into government, as might give licence or encouragement to offenders. Accordingly, the most admirable provision was made for these important purposes by the interposition of the Son of God, suffering and dying for sinners. The sovereign awe of justice is maintained, while justice is tempered with mercy. Men are bound to righteousness, under the highest sanctions; and ample security and consolation are, at the same time, afforded to the penitent. By the instructions, and example, of their Saviour, they are instructed in their duty; and through a Mediator and Intercessor, they are encouraged to offer their worship and prayers to the Almighty. They are assured that, in whatever is too arduous for human nature to perform, they shall be assisted by a Divine spirit; and under all trials and difficulties, they are supported by the express promise of that eternal life which is brought to light by the Gospel.—It is not possible for the understanding to conceive any method of salvation, planned with more goodness and executed with more wisdom, than what is shewn in the gospel of Christ. The consideration of this constitution alone, gives us full reason to join in that exclamation of the Apostle: *Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*†

FROM this short survey which we have taken of Divine wisdom, as discovering itself, in the whole complex frame of the moral world; in the constitution of human nature; in the government of human affairs; and in the redemption of the human race; we cannot but perceive how much reason we have to prostrate ourselves before God, and with all humility to worship and adore.—When we view that immense structure of the universe in which we dwell, when we think of Him, whose wisdom has planned the whole system of being; whose mind comprehends, whose counsels direct, the whole course of events, from the beginning to the end of time; by whom nothing is so inconsiderable as to be overlooked, or so transient as to be forgotten; who attends to the concerns of the poor man in his cottage, while he is steering the

\* See Sermon V.—Sermon XX.—Sermon XXX.—Sermon LV. † Rom. xi. 33.

sun and the moon in their course through the heavens; into what astonishment and self-annihilation do we fall! Before him all our boasted knowledge is ignorance and our wisdom is folly. Wherever we cast our eyes on his works and ways, we find all things adjusted in *number, weight, and measure*; and after all that we can survey, Lo! these are but a part of his ways; and *how small a portion is heard of him!*

It is the power of God, which produces among the multitude of men any impressions of religion. When thunder roars in the heavens, or an earthquake shakes the ground, they are struck with awe, and disposed to worship an invisible power. But such impressions of Deity are occasional and transitory. The lasting reverence of a Supreme Being arises, in a well informed mind, from the display of that infinite wisdom which all the universe presents. Its operations are constantly, though silently, going on around us. We may view it in the peaceful and sedate state of the universe, as well as in its greatest commotions; we behold it in every insect that moves on the ground, at the same time that we admire it in the revolutions of the celestial bodies. Happy for us if the contemplation shall nourish that temper of habitual devotion, which so well becomes dependent beings and is so intimately connected with all virtue.\*

But the chief effect that ought to be produced by meditation on the divine wisdom, is perfect resignation to the Governor of the universe, and entire trust in his administration. Our private misfortunes and disappointments are too often the subject of querulous complaints, and even of unjust suspicions of Providence. But when in the whole natural and moral world, we behold an arrangement of things which plainly discovers the most consummate wisdom, can we believe, that in the arrangement of our petty concerns, this wisdom is dormant and neglectful? How much more reason is there to think, that our ignorance of the Divine plans misleads our judgment, than that the wisdom of the Almighty has erred in directing our private affairs?—Divine wisdom, as I observed in the beginning, is an exertion of Divine benevolence. It has, it can have, no other scope than to accomplish the best ends by the most proper means. Let the wisdom therefore, and the goodness of the Deity, be ever conjoined in our idea. Let every new discovery of Divine wisdom, be a new ground of hope, of joy, and of cordial submission, to every virtuous man. Let him be thankful that he lives in a world, where nothing happens to him by chance, or at random; but where a great, a wise, and beneficent Mind, continually superintends every event.

\* See Serm. XLIX.

Under the faith of this great principle of religion, let us proceed in the course of our duty, with steadfast and undismayed mind. Let us retain faithful allegiance to our Creator and our Redeemer; and then we may always hope the best; and *cast our care upon him who careth for us. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart. Although thou sayest thou canst not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him.*—Let us begin every undertaking with an humble dependence on his assistance for enabling us to prosecute it to the end. When our undertakings are finished, and the close of life approaches, with praise to him let us conclude all our labours.

*Unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen*

## SERMON LXXI.

### THE COMPASSION AND BENEFICENCE OF THE DEITY.

[Preached before the Society for the Benefit of the Sons of the Clergy of the Established Church of Scotland, 20th May, 1796.]

---

*Leave thy fatherless children ; I will preserve them alive ; and let thy widows trust in me.—JEREMIAH, xlix. 11.*

NO subject is more open to general observation, or more confirmed by manifold experience, than the goodness of God. The contemplation of the universe, in which we dwell, presents it perpetually to our view. Amidst the vast extent of creation, we discover no instance of mere pomp or useless grandeur but behold every thing contributing to the general good, and rendered subservient to the welfare of the rational or sensible world. In the administration of Providence, the same principle of beneficence is conspicuous. The seasons are made regularly to return, and the earth to flourish ; supply is bountifully provided for the wants of all creatures ; and numberless comforts are prepared to sweeten human life. Most justly is he who hath established, and who upholds, this admirable order of things, to be esteemed the Father of mercies ; and, accordingly, in this view, he is often celebrated in Scripture. *The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. His tender mercies are over all his works. His mercy is great unto the heavens, and it endureth for ever.*

It appears worthy of particular observation that there is one light, in which more frequently than in any other, the goodness of God is presented to us in the Sacred Writings, namely, the light of compassion to the distresses of mankind. Most of the situations are mentioned in which men are considered as most forlorn ; and in some passages of Scripture, God is represented as interesting himself, in a peculiar manner, for those who are

in such situations. Particular emphasis is always laid upon this circumstance, in the general views which are given of his goodness. He is the *Hearer of prayer, unto whom all flesh shall come*. But he is described as listening with particular attention to the *cry of the poor*; and *regarding the prayer of the destitute*; *He will prepare their heart, and cause his ear to hear*. All creatures are the objects of his providential care. But *the widow and the fatherless, the bowed down and the broken in heart*, are particularly attended to, and commiserated by him. *The Lord executeth judgment for the oppressed; the Lord preserveth the stranger; he loseth the prisoner, and giveth food to the hungry. He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor hides he his face from them; but hears when they cry unto him.*\* In short, when we are deprived of all human consolation and aid, the Almighty is represented as then most accessible to our prayers, and most disposed to help and relieve us.

The words which I have chosen for the text afford a very amiable view of that compassion which scripture so often ascribes to the Supreme Being. The context in which they stand contains much dark and mysterious prophecy relating to nations in the neighbourhood of Judea, but leads to no particular illustration of the text. The words of it, taken by themselves, are plainly to be understood as spoken by God to an aged parent, who, in the view of approaching dissolution, is anxious about the future condition of his family in the world; and they present a most affecting display of God's compassionate regard to the children of those who have been his faithful servants on earth.—*Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.*—It will be worthy of our attention at present, to enquire into the reasons why the Almighty is pleased to represent himself so often to us under this view; not only as the just and good Ruler of the universe, which is the first and leading idea we naturally form of him, but as the Patron and Friend of the distressed part of Mankind.

It will be found that there are two very important purposes which such discoveries of the Divine nature serve. First, they furnish particular ground for trusting in God, amidst all the vicissitudes of human life; and next, they exhibit the pattern of that disposition, which we ought, in our measure, humbly to follow and imitate.

I. THE discoveries of Divine compassion were purposely intended to furnish to us particular ground for trust in God, amidst all the vicissitudes of human life. Man, during his abode on earth, is exposed to various distresses. Even in his most flourishing state, his condition is extremely precarious. Pros-

\* Ps. cii. 17.: x. 17.: lviii. 5.; lxix. 33.; cxlvi. 7.; xxii. 24.; &c. &c.

perous as he may at one time seem to be, he cannot tell how soon, by some unforeseen vicissitude, he may be humbled to the dust, and still less can he tell what may in future befall his children, to whose fortunes he often looks with anxious solicitude. In the moments when his mind is oppressed, either by the immediate feelings of sorrows, or by the dread of impending evils, it is natural for him to fly to that Supreme Being under whose direction all human events are placed, and earnestly to implore protection from him.—But though he hold the belief that justice and goodness are ever to be found at the throne of the Almighty, yet; even there, particular discouragements meet him. For that Supreme Being to whom he looks up, is a great and awful Being. His nature is, to us, unknown. He dwells in the secret place of Eternity; and is surrounded with clouds and darkness. We hear his tremendous voice in the thunder; and in every commotion of the elements we behold the irresistible hand of his power. A nature so infinitely superior to our own, cannot be looked up to without some measure of dismay. It is overwhelming to the timid apprehensions of the distressed. It is contemplated with that awful and mysterious reverence which overpowers confidence and trust.

It is for this reason that, in condescension to human weakness, God has been pleased so often to represent himself as actuated by a principle of compassion and pity. This gives a shade and softening to the awful greatness of the Divinity. It brings down his goodness to the level of our conception, and fits it to be the object of our trust. Compassion is a principle which we all feel and know. We know that it is the strongest of all benevolent instincts in our nature, and that it tends directly to interest us in behalf of those who need our aid. We are taught to believe that a similar attribute belongs to the Divine nature; in order that, from that species of goodness which we are best acquainted with, and which we can most rely upon, we may be trained both to love our Almighty Benefactor, and as long as we are in the practice of our duty, to trust to his protection, amidst every distress. When we hear such a voice of tenderness, as that which my text utters, proceeding from the Almighty, our hearts are comforted. Distrust and dismay are removed. We are no longer oppressed by his greatness. We can draw near to him as to a Father in Heaven, before whom we can, with humble confidence, pour out our sorrows; and can trust that, though all our earthly friends should neglect us, our prayers will attract his compassionate regard.

Compassion to the unfortunate, as it is exerted among men, is indeed accompanied with certain disturbed and painful feelings, arising from sympathy with those whom we pity. But every such feeling we must remove from our thoughts, when we

ascribe an affection of this nature to the Deity. It is true, that, in Scripture language, the Divine compassion is sometimes figured by strong allusions to the relenting struggles and passionate meltings of the human heart. But we easily perceive that such representations are to be understood with the allowances which figurative language requires. All that is amiable in compassion, belongs to God; but all that is imperfect in it must be left to man. In the Supreme Being, there can be no perturbation or uneasiness; no contrast of feelings, nor fluctuation of purpose. His compassion imports a kind regard to the circumstances of the unhappy. But still it is such a regard as suits the perfection of the great Governor of the universe, whose benignity, undisturbed by any violent emotion, ever maintains the same tranquil tenour, like the unruffled and uninterrupted serenity of the highest heavens.

It is important to observe, that this pity and compassion of our heavenly Father, extends itself to our moral and spiritual concerns, in like manner as to our natural and external distresses. In that great dispensation of the redemption of the world by his Son Jesus Christ, he is always represented in Scripture as moved by pity for our fallen and wretched estate. The same principle which leads him to regard with compassion the widow and the fatherless, led him to look down with compassion on an helpless and forlorn race, degraded from their original honour. From infinite mercy he sent his Son *to seek and to save that which was lost*. According to the prophetic language of the Old Testament, *He looked upon us; and his time was a time of love. He saw that there was no man; He beheld that there was no intercessor, and his own arm brought Salvation. He laid his help on one who was mighty to save. He saw us in our blood, and said, Live.*\*—Agreeable to this spirit of compassion, displayed in our redemption, is the whole dispensation of Divine grace towards man in his present state of infirmity. It speaks continually the doctrine of consolation and merciful aid; *grace to be sufficient for us, and strength to be made perfect in our weakness. As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him: for he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.*†

I cannot conclude this head without observing how much it adds to the value of the Christian religion, that it hath discovered the Deity to us in a light so amiable. When the nations of the earth worshipped a God unknown, or one whom they arrayed in nothing but vengeful thunders, the true God hath come forth from behind the cloud, and made himself known to us; known not only as a just and good Ruler, but as a compassion-

\* Ezek. xvi. 8. Isaiah, lix. 16.

† 2 Cor. xii. 9. Psal. ciii. 17.



ate Father, in whom, amidst all their distresses, the virtuous may trust and hope. I now proceed to observe,

II. THAT such discoveries of the Divine nature were designed not only to administer encouragement and consolation, but also to exhibit the pattern of that disposition which we are bound, in our measure, to imitate and follow. To this purpose tend the repeated exhortations of Scripture, *to be followers of God, as dear children; to be merciful, as our Father in heaven is merciful.* That hardness of heart which renders men insensible to the distresses of their brethren, that insolence of prosperity which inspires them with contempt of those who are fallen below them, are always represented in Scripture as dispositions most opposite to the nature of God, and most hateful in his sight. In order to make this appear in the strongest light, he hath turned his goodness chiefly into the channel of compassionate regard to those whom the selfish and the proud despise. He hath avowedly taken up their cause, that he might state himself as an antagonist to such as would bear them down; that he might confound and put to the blush that arrogance of men which makes them slight any of their own brethren. *For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord, to set them in safety from him that puffeth at them.\** Lord, says the Psalmist, *thou hast heard the desire of the humble; thou wilt arise to judge the fatherless, and the oppressed, that the man of earth may oppress no more.†*

Consider, I beseech you, whether any virtue can admit of any higher recommendation than its being that disposition under the character of which the Almighty chooses to be peculiarly known to us: How can we claim any relation to the Father of mercies, or how look up to him for compassion and grace, if we show no bowels of mercy, gentleness, and kindness, to one another?—The whole plan, indeed, on which he hath formed human nature, and all the circumstances in which he hath placed us on earth, are plainly contrived to excite affections of benevolence, and to enforce works of mercy. Not only hath he planted compassion in the human breast, as one of the strongest instincts there, but he hath so connected us in society, as necessarily to require that our benevolent instincts should be brought into exercise. For it is apparent that no man, in any rank of life, even the highest, is sufficient for his own well-being. He can neither supply his own wants, nor provide for his own comforts, without the co-operation of others. The dependence here is mutual between the high and the low, the rich and the poor. Each in one way or other, calls on each for aid. All are so linked together, as

\* Psal. xii, 5.

† Psal. x 17, 18.

to be impelled by a thousand motives to assist one another in the time of need. This is what nature, what society, what providence, all speak with a loud voice ; a voice which may be said to have gone forth even to the ends of the earth, and to have been heard and understood by the most barbarous tribes of men. For among savage and uncultivated nations, no less than among the most civilized and polished, the energy of compassion is felt, and its claims are recognized, and obeyed.

In the course of human life, innumerable occasions present themselves for all the exercises of that humanity and benignity, to which we are so powerfully prompted. The diversities of rank among men, the changes of fortune to which all, in every rank, are liable, the necessities of the poor, the wants of helpless youth, the infirmities of declining age, are always giving opportunities for the display of humane affections. There is perhaps no form in which benevolence appears more interesting, than when it is employed in providing relief for the families and children of those who stand in need of aid, in order that the young may be trained up by proper education for acting an useful part in the world. Benefits conveyed by this channel are often more important than any other acts of liberality. Besides the great advantage which they bring to society, they have the pleasing effect of awakening all the virtuous sensibilities of the heart, both in those who confer, and in those who receive them. They are often felt with warmer relish by a family in distress, and productive of more tender gratitude, than could have been raised by any other mode of beneficence. This is rendered sensible to every heart by that beautiful expression of the Divine compassion in the text ; *Leave thy fatherless children ; I will preserve them alive ; and let thy widows trust in me.*

By the train of sentiment we have pursued, your thoughts, my brethren, will now be naturally led to the consideration of that institution which has given occasion to the meeting of this day ; *The society formed for the benefit of the Sons of the Clergy of the Established Church of Scotland.*

In entering on this part of the subject, I trust that I may be permitted to say a few words concerning that order of men, in behalf of whose descendants the favour of the public is now requested. Though belonging myself to that order, yet as my advanced age and long experience may reasonably be supposed to have corrected the prejudices and cooled the ardour of partiality, some weight, I hope, will be allowed to my testimony ; when now, in the fifty-fourth year of my ministry, after having seen successions of ministers, in various parts of the country, rise and fall, and after long acquaintance with many, of divided sentiments, among my brethren, I can with confidence declare it as my opinion, that there exists not any where a more respectable

and useful class of men than the Clergy of the church of Scotland. Among such a numerous body, I readily admit that some exceptions will be found to the character which I now give of them. Considering human frailty, this is no more than was naturally to be expected. But, taking the ministers of this church in general, I can venture to assert that they are a well-informed and enlightened set of men; decent and irreproachable in their behaviour, conscientious in the discharge of their pastoral duties, and very generally esteemed by the people under their care.— There was a time, when the Presbyterian clergy lay under the imputation of being sour in their tempers, narrow in their opinions, severe and intolerant in their principles. But as, together with the diffusion of knowledge, a more liberal spirit has pervaded the clerical order in this part of Britain, it will be found that their manners now are conciliating; that they study to promote harmony and good order in their parishes; that they have shown themselves addicted to useful literature, and in several branches of it have eminently distinguished themselves; and that while they are edifying and consolatory to the lowest, they have acquired just respect from the higher classes of men.

As long, therefore, as this country shall be preserved from the contagion of that false philosophy, which, by overthrowing all religious establishments, has engendered so much impiety, and wrought so much mischief, in a neighbouring land; as long as the existence of Christian faith, and of religious principles, shall be considered as essential to the welfare of a nation, it may reasonably, I think, be expected, that such a body of men as I have mentioned shall be held entitled to the regard and good-will of their fellow-citizens and countrymen.

Circumstances there are, which give particular occasion for this regard and good-will to be called forth. You all know the nature of that provision which is made by the public for the established clergy of this country. It is such as is suited to that sober and frugal manner of living which is expected from ministers of the gospel. Though in consideration of the growing prosperity of the country, and of its natural consequence, the increased rate of every expense, it has been found reasonable that, of late years, some addition should be made to the provision of many of the ministers, yet still their condition approaches not to what can be termed opulence in any degree. It is such as to raise them above contempt; such as to afford a decent subsistence for themselves and their families; but such as seldom or never can enable them, without some other sources of revenue, to make provision for their children when going forth into the world, especially if their family be numerous.

It was the consideration of this circumstance that lately gave rise to the Society in favour of the sons of the Clergy. Many a

minister who, for a tract of years, has faithfully laboured in the discharge of every duty to his flock, has felt, towards the close of his days, what a blessing it would have proved to him, if such a society had existed in his time, to which he could have looked for aid.—Represent to yourselves, my friends, one of this character—and the representation which I am now to give is not the work of fancy, but founded upon what often in fact takes place.—Figure, I say, a worthy Clergyman, now in the decline of life, foreseeing the end of his labours drawing near, surrounded with a family of children, to whom his chief care had been devoted, and in whom his heart had long been bound up. Their education, from their earliest years, he had conducted, or at least superintended himself, with paternal fondness. Whatever his scanty stores could afford, he had cheerfully expended, in giving all the advantage to their education which his own village, or which the nearest county town could yield. He had made every preparation that was in his power to make, for their acting a proper part in future life. But the time of preparation is finished. The gay season of childhood is over. The period is arrived when they must go forth; must leave that paternal mansion where, in the midst of their youthful companions, they had spent many happy days; must go to provide for themselves, the best they can, in a world, which to them is unknown. And whither are they to go?—Of the few friends their father ever had, some are now gone down to the dust. Others, with whom he once lived in familiar intimacy, lifted up now with the pride of opulence, have forgotten him and his family. One of his sons, at least, he fondly wished to have educated for that profession to which he himself had been so long attached. But, living at a distance from any of the seats of learning, and having no protector to whose assistance he could look, he feels with regret that he is unable for the attempt. Some of his children he must send away to seek their fortune in a distant land. Others must be consigned to the dangers of the ocean, or be reduced to gain their bread by following some of the mean and laborious occupations of life. Viewing the dark and discouraging prospect that is before them, the father's heart is sore, when he bids adieu to his children. With tears in his eyes, he gives them his blessing as they depart. Little more it is in his power to give them; but he commits them to the protection of their father's God.—How happy, if in these mournful moments, a voice of such a nature as this could reach his ears: *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.*

ANIMATED by the desire of imitating that spirit of Divine compassion which breathes in these words, a few respectable gentlemen in this city, formed six years ago, the plan of a Society for assisting the Sons of the Clergy. The institution, as

soon as it was known, met with public approbation and favour. It was early distinguished, and amply assisted by Royal munificence. It was incorporated by royal charter; and, through the generosity of the public, has prospered so far, that the Society has already been enabled to give aid to a considerable number of the sons of clergymen of this church. The aid which the society, in an infant state could as yet give, has been small; as it is confined to what the interest of their capital allows them to bestow. They earnestly wish to become more effectually useful, by enlarging their provision for the education of sons; and hope to be enabled, in due time, to give assistance to the daughters, as well as to the sons of ministers; so as to afford comfort to a widowed mother, and to the whole of a disconsolate family. For it is to be observed, that it is not merely to a literary education, or to preparation for the church, that the intentions of the Society are directed. They mean so to apply their beneficence, that the families of ministers may be assisted to acquire the necessary qualifications for pursuing any useful employment in the world, for which they appear to be most fitted.

Among other inducements which may encourage the public to promote this beneficent plan, there is one which I cannot, on this occasion, omit to mention; that is, the signal success with which many sons of Scots clergymen have been blessed, in filling with honour several of the important departments of society. As I have not myself the honour of belonging to that class, I can speak with more freedom on this topic than some other of my brethren. Not to mention the well known and distinguished names of several who at present possess, with much dignity, stations in the church, and chairs in the universities, and some now gone, who will be long remembered, as having done no small honour, by their literary productions, to this part of the island; let me desire you to look round on the most respectable stations of busy life, and to consider how many of those who now make a high figure at the bar, some on the bench, many in the commercial, the military, and the naval professions, were born and bred under the humble roof of a minister.—Nor is this success to be ascribed to any favourable coincidence of circumstances at this time more than any other. It is the natural result of the manner in which they were brought up. Educated in good principles, and formed to sober manners, by pious and virtuous parents, they enter on the world less tainted than others by fashionable vices and follies. By the situation of their parents they were inured, from their earliest youth, to temperance and habits of application. They come forward, not altogether ignorant and unlettered, like the children of the meaner classes of men, but with the foundations of good education and useful know-

ledge. At the same time, they see and know that it is not to fortune and to friends, but to their own industry and exertions, they must trust for future success; and that only according to the opinion entertained of their merit, they can hope to be patronized by others. Hence it comes to pass that young persons of this description often advance themselves more quickly, and act their part more successfully, than others who, from their birth and fortune, have enjoyed the benefits of a more improved and ornamented education; but whose opulence sometimes supersedes labour, encourages indolence, and perhaps fosters dissipation and love of pleasure.

These are considerations which tend to bespeak public favour in behalf of the institution which I now recommend. Consider, my friends, that by befriending and assisting it, you contribute to bring forward a new race, who, like those of the same rank that have gone before them, may come, in their day, to be beneficial to their country and to the world. It must not be forgotten, that assistance to bring them forward becomes now more necessary than it was to the former race, in consequence of the great additional expense which is well known now to attend every part of education. By seasonable generosity, on this occasion, you may be ripening in secret the seeds of future genius; you may be bringing forward to maturity those young plants which shall flourish hereafter in the land; and which may perhaps attain such strength, and rise to such a height, as to protect others under their shade.

To the honour of the present age, it must be acknowledged not to be deficient in a spirit of humanity. Frequent instances both of public and private beneficence come forth on every proper occasion. In this city, many a noble monument appears of charitable foundations and institutions; some destined to educate the children of the needy; others to furnish maintenance for the poor, to provide for the aged, or to receive and relieve the sick and the distressed. By their means much timely succour is given, and many a distress is mitigated. The institution for the sake of which we are now assembled, partaking of the same benevolent spirit with the others, reaches to a more respectable class of men, and aims at a more extensive object. Its purpose is, to prevent those evils which would arise to the public, from the children of worthy parents being left to languish in that hopeless indigence which throws them first as a burden on society, and may afterwards render them a dangerous nuisance to it. Instead of this, it aims at bringing them into such a state as affords a reasonable prospect of their proving useful members of the community, and perhaps of their ranking among its ornaments and supports.

So good a design Providence has already begun to favour, and we hope will continue to bless. After we are laid in the dust, the generation that succeeds us may experience its happy effects. They who now contribute by their generosity to carry it forward will, in the mean time, enjoy the satisfaction of having adopted the benevolent spirit of the Christian religion; they will enjoy the satisfaction of having imitated, as they could, that compassion of our heavenly Father, which, in so affecting a manner, is expressed by the words of the text; words, which I hope will continue to dwell, with a lasting and tender impression, on all our hearts; *Leave your fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me!*

## SERMON LXXII.

ON HOPE AND DISAPPOINTMENTS.

---

*The hope of the Righteous shall be gladness ; but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.*—PROVERBS, X. 28.

ATTACHMENT to futurity has a remarkable influence on the operations of the human mind. The present, whatever it be, seldom engages our attention so much as what is to come. Remembrance of the past may sometimes occupy our thoughts; but what for the most part fills them, is the anticipation of the future. The present is apt to be considered as an evanescent scene, just about to pass away; and in the midst of wishes and desires, of hopes and fears, which all respect futurity, we may be said to dwell. As on these the life of man is so much suspended, it becomes a very material part both of wisdom and of duty to attend to any regulations by which they may be properly conducted. For if expectations and hopes on one hand, and fears and alarms on the other, are suffered to arise with groundless precipitancy, and to acquire an undue ascendant, it is evident that they will produce much delusion in conduct, and often will engender much vice and guilt. As there is a *hope of the Righteous which shall be gladness*, so there is *an expectation of the Wicked which shall perish*. The anticipations of the former, conducted by prudence, and regulated by piety, mislead him not from his duty, and afford him satisfaction in the end. While the expectations of the latter, arising from fantastic imaginary prospects, delude him for a while with vanity, and terminate in misery. It will therefore be an useful subject of meditation, to consider, in a few instances, of what we may, and of what we may not, reasonably expect from the world, when we look forward to what is most likely to happen, in the ordinary course of human affairs.



I. We are not to expect the uninterrupted continuance of any measure of health, prosperity, or comfort, which we now enjoy. There is the greater reason for beginning with this admonition, as there is a strong propensity in human nature to imagine that what we at present possess, is always to remain. When no warnings of any approaching change appear, we are all inclined to look forward to futurity with a smile; and to indulge the hope that *to-morrow shall be as this day* and even *more abundantly*. Hence, in the lives of thoughtless men, there breaks forth so much folly and presumption, so much pride and levity, and often so much impiety and contempt of religion. *What is the Almighty that we should serve him? Or what profit shall we have, if we pray unto him? Our mountain stands strong; and shall never be moved.*

On the lot of some men Providence is pleased to bestow a longer continuance of prosperity than on that of others. But as the term of that continuance is hidden from us, all flattering and confident expectations are without foundation. At one period or another, it is certain that the calm is to be troubled, and the dark cloud is to arise; and how soon that period is to come, you cannot tell. In your health, or your fortune, or among your connexions and friends, be assured that some trial awaits you. For human life never stands still for any long time. It is by no means a fixed and steady object, like the mountain or the rock which you always find in the same situation; it is a river continually moving and flowing. Neither is it the still and smooth stream which glides along with the same constant tenor; but a river which for a time may hold a regular course within its banks, till, being interrupted by rocks, it foams into a torrent, or, swollen by foreign currents, it lays waste the neighbouring plains. Amidst such vicissitudes of time and life, who has any title to reckon upon the future?—To faults, all are subject; to troubles, all are exposed. As that man is the most virtuous who can be charged with the fewest faults, so that life is the happiest which suffers the fewest troubles. To look for entire exemption from them, is to court disappointment.

At the sametime, I do not mean to hold it forth as any precept to religion or wisdom, that we ought always to sadden the present hour by dwelling on the thoughts of future disappointment. What is given us, let us cheerfully enjoy, and render thanks to him who bestows it. Virtue, conjoined with prudence, may reasonably afford the prospect of good days to come. *For God giveth to a man that it is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.\** Such a prospect therefore he may innocently indulge, if he preserve always that temperance and mo-

\* Eccles. ii. 26.

deration, that modesty and humility, which becomes one who knows that his state is ever in hazard of changing. But I mean to warn those, who, giving way to the elation of giddy hopes, lose the command of themselves, that by this intoxication of mind they are preparing the way for an alteration of state; they are pushing forward the wheels of advancing change; they are accelerating their own downfall. To them belongs that admonition of the wise man, would they seriously listen to it; *If a man live many years and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness. for they shall be many: all that cometh is vanity.\**

II. WE are not to expect from our intercourse with others, all that satisfaction which we fondly wish. What the individual either enjoys or suffers by himself, exhibits only an imperfect view of his condition. In the present state of human affairs, we are all closely interwoven with one another, that a very material part of our happiness or misery arises from the connexions which we have with those who are around us, and the relations in which we stand to them. These, therefore, open a field within which our wishes and expectations find an ample range. One of the first objects of wish to every one, is to maintain a proper place and rank in society; not to fall behind his equals; but rather, if he can, to surpass them, so as to command consideration and respect from his neighbours. This, among the vain and ambitious, is always the favourite aim. With them it arises to immoderate expectations, founded on their supposed talents and imagined merits. But perhaps, in the hearts of all men, some wish of this nature lurks; some wish not to be overlooked in the crowd, but to attain that degree of distinction which they conceive they might reasonably claim.

With respect to claims of this sort, it is to be apprehended, that, among persons of all characters and descriptions, many an *expectation must perish*, and many a disappointment be endured. For such is the power which the sophistry of self-love exercises over us, that almost every one may be assured that he measures himself by a deceitful scale; that he places the point of his own merit at a higher degree than others will admit that it reaches. All are jealous of the high pretensions of others. He who suspects a rival in his neighbour, will study every method of bringing him down to what he takes to be his proper level; nay, often of deprecating him below it. Hence the endless mortifications which the vain and self-conceited suffer. Hence the spleen and resentment which is so often breaking forth, disturbing the peace of society, and involving it in crimes and miseries. Were expectations more moderate,

\* Eccles. xi. 8.

they would be more favourably received. Did we more rarely attempt to push ourselves into notice, the world would more readily allow us, nay sometimes assist us, to come forward. Were we content sometimes to remain in the shade, we would with more advantage come forth into sunshine, and find the brightness interrupted by fewer clouds.

In the closer connections which men form of intimate friendship and domestic life, there is still more reason for due moderation in our expectations and hopes. For the nearer that men approach to each other, the more numerous the points of contact are in which they touch, the greater indeed will be the pleasure of perfect symphony and agreements of feelings; but, at the same time, if any harsh and repulsive sensations take place, the more grating and pungent will be the pain.—If you look for a friend, or a partner of your life, in whose temper there is not to be found the least inequality, who upon no occasion is to be hurt or offended by any frailties you discover, whose feelings are to harmonize in every trifle with yours, whose countenance is always to reflect the image of your own, you look for a pleasing phantom, which is never, or at most very rarely, to be found; and if disappointment sour your mind, you have your own folly to blame. You ought to have considered that you live in a region of human infirmity, where every one has imperfections and failings. You assuredly have your own. What reason had you to imagine, that the person whom you love and esteem was to be the only exception from the common fate? Here, if any where, it becomes you to overlook and forbear; and never to allow small failings to dwell on your attention so much as to deface the whole of an amiable character. From trifling misunderstandings arising from the most frivolous causes, springs much of the misery of social and domestic life. Hence is blasted many a pleasing blossom of hope; and many an *expectation*, which once promised unbroken harmony, is left to *perish*. I shall only mention,

III. ANOTHER instance of what we are not to expect in the ordinary course of human affairs; that is, constant gratitude, from those whom we have most obliged and served.—I am far from saying that gratitude is an unknown, or even a rare virtue among mankind; I think not so ill of human nature. On the contrary, it is my belief, that grateful sensations for favours received are very generally felt; and, when no strong passion counteracts those sensations, that grateful returns are generally intended, and often are actually made. But then, our expectations of proper returns must be kept within moderate bounds. We must not carry them so far as to imagine, that gratitude is to produce unlimited compliance with every desire which we choose to indulge; or that they whom we have obliged will al-

together desert their own interest for the sake of their benefactors. Many circumstances, it is to be remembered, tend to cool the grateful emotion. Time always deadens the memory of benefits. Sometimes they are considered as having been fully recompensed, and the debt of gratitude repaid. As benefits conferred, are often under-rated by those who receive them, so they are sometimes over-valued by those who confer them. On persons of light and careless minds, no moral sentiment makes any deep impression; with such, the remembrance of both benefit and benefactor is apt to pass speedily away. With the proud spirit, which claims every thing as its due, gratitude is in a great measure incompatible. From persons of this character, we are never to expect it; and indeed from persons of any character, we are not to be surprised, if, in the present state of the world, it rises not so high as we thought we had reason to hope.

HAVING thus shown in some material instances what we have no reason to expect in the ordinary course of human affairs, I turn next to the brighter side of the subject, and shall show what a wise and good man may reasonably expect from human life. *His hope shall be gladness, though the expectation of fools shall perish.*

I. WHATEVER course the affairs of the world take, he may justly hope to enjoy peace of mind. I am sensible that by the sceptic and the profligate, this will be held as a very inconsiderable object of expectation or hope. To them every enjoyment which is of mental and intellectual nature appears of small value. Give them affluent fortune and flourishing health, and they account themselves sure of felicity. But to these very persons I appeal, whether there have not been many occasions, when the want of a peaceful and self-approving mind has not blasted all the enjoyment they possessed? In the midst of the pomps and luxuries of life, have they never experienced the pangs of a *wounded spirit*? Have they never felt what it was to be tormented by the sense of past follies, and to be stung with the reproaches of an angry conscience? Dare they say, that in the midst of those feelings they were happy? Will they not be constrained to own, that in such moments of inward pain, they would willingly have exchanged conditions with an innocent peasant? Let them then learn the value of that object of hope which they affect to contemn, by recollecting what they have suffered from the want of it.—Assuredly, the peace of an approving conscience is one of the chief ingredients of human happiness; one of the most grateful of all sensations to the heart of man: provided always that this self-approbation rest upon proper grounds; that it be tempered with due humility, and regulated by Christian faith; that it never swell into an arrogant opinion of our virtue, or into con-

fidence in our own merits, as if they were sufficient, without any higher intervention; to render us acceptable to God.

He, whose study it is to preserve a conscience void of offence towards God and man, who upon just principles can be satisfied that he is walking in the path which was appointed by God, will have, in every state of fortune, a ground of hope which may justly be denominated *gladness*; for peace of mind will not forsake him. Let the world vibrate around him as it will, and repeat all its vicissitudes, he will not be shaken by them. He has always somewhat to rest upon for comfort. Wrapped up in his own integrity, he remains sound and entire within himself; and with a firm mind awaits the coming storm. *He is not afraid of evil tidings; for his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.\** As he can look up to a Supreme Power with good hope, so he can look every man in the face without uneasiness, when he is conscious that no man can reproach him with having entrenched upon his neighbour's rights, or having causelessly provoked and attacked him. Hence, a calm mind by day, and undisturbed slumbers by night. Hence, the hope of that continued protection of Heaven which watches over the righteous. *In the time of trouble He shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; He shall set me upon a rock.†* Besides this expectation of internal peace.

II. A GOOD man has ground to expect that any external condition into which, in the course of human affairs, he may pass, shall by means of virtue and wisdom, be rendered, if not perfectly agreeable, yet tolerably easy to him. That distresses of various kinds are scattered through the life of every mortal man, there can be no doubt. But it is also to be remembered, that to many distresses there are remedies which it is in our power to apply; and that with all sorrows some comforts are mixed.—So many loud complaints we hear of the inequalities of fortune in the world, that one would imagine the rich and the great to be the only persons who had the privilege of being happy; and that the mean and the poor were doomed, without exception, to be miserable. Be assured, my friends, that the inequality of real happiness is not to be measured by the inequality of outward estate. When you see the peasant cheerful in his cottage, and the labourer singing in the fields, you may discern that there is some power in the mind superior to external condition; that more depends on the man himself, than on the situation in which the world has placed him. Would you estimate justly the sum of happiness that he enjoys, or the degree of unhappiness that he feels? The questions you are to put, if the man be in prosperity are not, How much wealth does such a man possess? but, How

\* Psalm, cxii. 7.

† Psalm, xxvii. 5.

does he enjoy it? If he be in adversity, not What is his distress? but, How does he bear it?

Hence arises the hope to a wise and good man, of either finding, or making his estate tolerable to himself. If he be not wanting to himself, he is never left without resources to assist those exertions which he makes in his own behalf. Roses indeed are not always strewed in his path; but from the fields that are seeming waste, flowers may be gathered by those who look carefully around them. Seldom or never do all good things forsake, and all evils beset a man, at once. In some corner of our lot there are always comforts that may be found, if we be not so foolish as to overlook them. Even in the intervals of sickness and pain, satisfactions may be enjoyed. Returns of relief are often felt with a more lively sensation of pleasure, than what we taste in unbroken health. It has been often observed, that what is very severe of any kind, seldom lasts long; and the uneasiness which lasts we become accustomed to bear. Time and continuance reconcile us gradually to many things that were at first believed to be insupportable. Providence has in mercy provided this gentle opiat to assuage various sorrows of human life. What we behold others around us bearing, we learn to think may also be borne by us. *The spirit of man will long sustain his infirmities.* From the treasures of his own mind in reflection and meditation, much relief will arise to the virtuous; and at the bottom of the most disconsolate estate, there lies always a secret hope that better day's may come. From such circumstances as these, the expectation of passing through life with some measure of comfort, may reasonably be entertained by such as are not wanting to themselves in propriety of conduct. In looking forward to futurity, the prospect we are to take of the world is not that which is sometimes gloomily indulged, of a forlorn region, where nothing is to be beheld but dreary and inhospitable wastes, and no objects are to be met with but serpents that hiss, and wild beasts that devour. The prospect is rather that of a mixed region, where indeed rugged rocks are seen, and deserts extend, over which the tempest sometimes scowls; but where also many peaceful habitations and fruitful fields occur to refresh the sight. Once more.

III. WE have ground to expect from the ordinary course of human affairs, that if we persevere in studying to do our duty towards God and man, we shall meet with the esteem, the love, and confidence of those who are around us. I before observed that in our expectations of receiving what we think due respect and consideration from the world, we shall be often disappointed. But that observation was applied to the claims we make on others on account of talents, abilities, and superior merits.—To such claims the world is seldom disposed to give a favoura-

ble reception. We live amidst rivals and competitors, whose self-estimation prompts them to depreciate us, and of course subjects us to many a mortification. The case is different with respect to moral qualifications. There the world is more ready to do justice to character. No man is hurt, at least few are so, by hearing his neighbour esteemed a worthy and honourable man. This praise will be bestowed, without grudging, by many who value themselves on the possession of qualities, which they conceive to be of superior importance in the judgment of the world.

But whatever they may think, it is certain that the basis of all lasting reputation is laid in moral worth. Great parts and endowments may sparkle for a while in the public eye. The world looks up to them with wonder, as to an extraordinary comet, or a blazing star. Distinguished virtue and worth create less astonishment; but, like the fixed luminaries of heaven, they shine with more steady and permanent lustre. Unaffected piety conjoined with inviolable uprightness and integrity in conduct, command a degree of respect which approaches to veneration. Candor and fairness never fail to attract esteem and trust. Kindness and benevolence conciliate love and create warm friendships. The best character may indeed for a time be accidentally obscured and misunderstood. But the world commonly judges soundly in the end. After a man has acted his part for a while among his fellows, he is known upon trial to be what he is; and if his worth be real and genuine, *his righteousness comes forth as the light, and his judgment as the noon-day.*

This is what a good man has always ground to look for, even in evil times; and surely, there are few things which he can more desire, than the prospect of being valued and esteemed by those among whom he lives. This counterbalances many a disadvantage of outward fortune, and puts into his hand many opportunities of satisfaction and comfort. He is likely to possess many friends and well-wishers, and to have few enemies. The more he is known, the more will the favour of those who surround him grow; and the prospect is before him, of having his *hoary head crowned with honour.*

Thus, in several instances, I have briefly pointed out what may, or may not, be expected from the world, when we look forward to the ordinary course of human affairs: Not an uninterrupted enjoyment of all the comforts of prosperity; not undisturbed satisfaction in our various intercourses with society; not grateful returns from all whom we have obliged or served: But what we may expect, if we keep a good conscience and study to do our duty, is peace of mind; a tolerable easy and comfortable state, amidst the vicissitudes of life; and the love and

esteem of those with whom we are connected.—*The hopes of the righteous shall be gladness.*

THE present subject has led me to consider only what the righteous man has to hope for in the ordinary course of the world, but I have now to observe, that he has before him a much higher object of hope than any which I have yet mentioned; a hope which arises not from the ordinary course of human affairs, but from an extraordinary interposition of divine grace and mercy conveyed to us by the gospel; even the *hope which is laid up for him in heaven*; the assured expectation of a better life in a higher and a better world. Put the case of the servant of God being overwhelmed with all the disappointments which the world can bring upon him, here is an *expectation* which will be always *gladness*; with which he can perpetually solace himself. Through the present state of existence he is no more than a passenger. If he can render it in any degree tolerable and easy to himself, it is well; it is all that he expects. His home, his place of rest, is in those habitations to which, through the merits of his Redeemer, he is taught and encouraged to aspire. He knows that *in due season he shall reap, if he faint not*.<sup>\*</sup> That when the *earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, he shall have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*;<sup>†</sup> for *to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, God will render eternal life*.<sup>‡</sup> Hence, whether you consider him in this life, or consider him as looking forward to another, his hope is perpetual gladness, while *the expectations of the wicked shall perish.*

\* Galat. vi. 9.    † 2 Corinth. v. 1.    ‡ Rom. ii. 7



## SERMON LXXIII.

ON THE PROPER DISPOSITION OF THE HEART  
TOWARDS GOD.

---

*In him we live, and move, and have our Being.*—ACTS, XVII. 28.

THERE is nothing which all nature more loudly proclaims, than that some Supreme Being has framed and rules this universe. *Day uttereth speech of it to-day, and night sheweth knowledge of it to-night.* Our birth and our life, our sensations and our actions, the objects which we behold, and the pleasures which we enjoy, all conspire to testify that some wonderful intelligence has disposed and arranged, and still supports and animates the whole frame of nature. This is what scarcely any man of sober mind ever called in question. It was the dictate of nature to the most savage and barbarous, as well as to the most civilized nations. The American and the Indian in his desert, as well as the Grecian sage and the Roman conqueror, adored, each, after his own mode, a Sovereign of the Universe. The Psalmist observes, that *the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.*\* Among the follies, however, with which the human race is chargeable, this is one which, in the course of ages, seemed to have made the smallest progress. It was reserved for modern times and evil days, to engender, in one region of the earth, a system of false philosophy, which should revive the exploded principles of atheism, and study to pour forth their poison among the nations, not only to the extinction of religion, but to the subversion of established governments, and of good order among mankind.

Dismissing all delusions of this nature as unworthy the attention of any reasonable unperverted mind; holding it for certain that nothing can be more real than the existence of a Su-

\* Psalm, xiv. 1.

preme Divinity, it follows of course from this belief, that there are dispositions correspondent to Him which ought to be found in every human mind, among the young and the old, among the high and the low, the rich and the poor. It is absurd to suppose that while the relations in which we stand to our fellow-creatures, whether as equals, superiors, or inferiors, naturally call forth certain sentiments and affections, there should be none which properly correspond to the first and greatest of all Beings; to Him, whom, though we see him not, we all recognise; to Him, *in whom*, as it is beautifully expressed in my text, *we live, and move, and have our being*.

THE proper disposition of mind with respect to God, is generally expressed by the term of Love to him. This is very justly founded on the solemn injunction of our blessed Lord.\* *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; this is the first and great commandment.* Hence, it is common among religious writers to include the whole of pious affections towards God in Love. But when this term is applied to the Almighty, we must be careful to understand aright what it imports. We all know what it is to love any of our fellow-creatures; but such an affection as we bear to them, cannot in a literal sense be transferred to God. Among them it is sometimes connected with the fervency of passion, it commonly imports some similarity of nature, and some degree of fond and intimate attachment; all which it were highly improper in us to affect towards the Supreme Being, *whose ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts.* I am afraid that the application of Love in a strict sense, and sometimes in too fervent and passionate a strain towards God, has, among some serious and well-disposed minds, given rise to no little enthusiasm in religion.

When therefore we treat of Love as applied to God, it must be analysed or resolved into those sentiments which are proper and suitable for us to encourage towards the God whom we adore. That Love of him which religion requires, and which our Saviour has so solemnly enjoined, is a compounded affection, and the dispositions which it includes are principally three; reverence, gratitude, submission. Of the nature and foundation of each of these I am to treat in the sequel of this Discourse, and shall endeavour to illustrate them as forming that temper and disposition of mind, which we ought always to preserve towards the Great Author of our existence.

I. THE foundation of every proper disposition towards God must be laid in Reverence, that is, admiration mixed with awe; what, in its lower degrees among men, is called Respect:

\* Matth. xxii. 37

but carried to its highest point with relation to God, may be termed profound veneration. In this disposition towards Him we ought habitually to be found, not only in the exercises of immediate devotion, but amidst the ordinary occurrences of life. Every thing indeed that we see around us gives perpetual occasion for it. We find ourselves in an immense universe, where it is impossible for us, without astonishment and awe, to contemplate the glory and the power of Him who hath created it. From the greatest to the least object that we behold, from the star that glitters in the heavens, to the insect that creeps upon the ground, from the thunder that rolls in the skies to the flower that blossoms in the fields, all things testify a profound and mysterious wisdom, a mighty and all powerful hand, before which we must tremble and adore. Neither the causes nor the issues of the events which we behold, is it in our power to trace; neither how we came into this world, nor whither we go when we retire from it, are we able of ourselves to tell; but in the mean time find ourselves surrounded with astonishing magnificence on every hand. We walk through the earth, as through the apartments of a vast palace, which fill every attentive spectator with wonder. All the works which our power can erect, all the ornaments which our art can contrive, are feeble and trifling in comparison with those glories which nature every where presents to our view. The immense arch of the heavens, the splendor of the sun in his meridian brightness, or the beauty of his rising and setting hours, the rich landscape of the fields, and the boundless expanse of the ocean, are scenes which mock every rival attempt of human skill or labour. Nor is it only in the splendid appearances of nature, but amidst its rudest forms, that we trace the hand of the Divinity. In the solitary desert, and the high mountain, in the hanging precipice, the roaring torrent, and the aged forest, though there be nothing to cheer, there is much to strike the mind with awe, to give rise to those solemn and sublime sensations which elevate the heart to an Almighty, All-creating power.

In short, we can no where cast our eyes around us without meeting what is sufficient to awaken reverence of the Deity.— This reverence becomes the more profound, that the Great Being who is the object of it, is to us invisible and unknown. We may seek to discover him, but he hides himself from us; his footsteps we clearly trace, but his face we can never behold.— *We go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but we cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he worketh, but we cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand that we cannot see him.\** We know that *he is not far from every one*

\* Job, xxiii. 8. 9

of us ; yet he shrouds himself in the darkness of his pavilion ; he *answereth from the secret place of thunder*.<sup>\*</sup> Before this incomprehensible Being, this God terrible and strong, we become in a manner annihilated ; we are sensible that in his sight we are only as the *drop of the bucket*, and the *small dust in the balance* ; and in his presence can only *rejoice with trembling*. For we know that the mighty arm which upholds the universe, and which surrounds us with wonders on every side can in a moment crush us to the dust, if we become objects of displeasure to heaven. Awful are the operations of the Divine Power which we are constantly beholding in the moral as well as in the natural world. The Almighty rules among the nations, as well as over individuals ; on his pleasure depend all the great revolutions of the earth ; the interpositions of his Providence are frequently apparent to the world, in bringing down the mighty, and raising up the fallen. In the books of the law and the prophets, we hear his threatenings against rebellious sinners denounced with a tremendous voice ; and in the dispensation of the gospel, a most striking instance is exhibited to us of the strict justice of his government, in the expiation that was required for the apostacy of a guilty world. So that both the law and the gospel, the works of nature and the conduct of Providence unite in uttering that solemn voice which ought often to resound in our ears : *Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen ; I will be exalted in the earth. Fear before him all ye nations : Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name. For honour and majesty are before him, strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. He alone doeth great things and unsearchable ; marvellous things without number.*<sup>†</sup>

On this head of discourse I have insisted the more, because I apprehend that such sentiments as I have now been inculcating occur too rarely among many professed Christians. Did an awful reverence for the Supreme Being dwell on all our minds with a properly impressive sense, its effects would oftener appear in conduct. On many occasions, it would check a wanton levity of spirits. It would infuse more solemnity into our religious acts. It would inspire greater respect for the temples of God, and for all the forms of sacred worship. It would banish that profanation of the name of God, which we so often hear from unhallowed lips.—Let it be remembered, that the *fear of God* is, throughout much of the Scripture, employed as the term descriptive of the whole of religion. It is not the fear which slaves are constrained to feel for a tyrant, but the reverence which children have for the best parent, or subjects for the best sovereign ; the veneration which necessarily enters into the love we bear to a Being of superior order : it is to *fear*

<sup>\*</sup> Ps. lxxxi. 7.    <sup>†</sup> Ps. xlvii. 10. Ps. xcvi. 6—8. Job, v. 9.

*the Lord and his goodness*, as it is emphatically expressed by one of the Prophets.\* This fear of God, therefore, is not only consistent with the love of him, but forms a material part of it. The pretended love of God, disjoined from reverence of him, would no longer be genuine love, but would rise into arrogant presumption. I proceed to observe,

II. THAT gratitude forms an essential part of that disposition which we ought to bear towards God. This implies an affectionate sense of God upon the mind, and enters directly into love, understood in its most common acceptance. It were a gross mistake to imagine, that the reverence of which I have discoursed has any tendency to check gratitude : on the contrary it heightens it, by uniting the sense of our benefactor's condescension with the benefits which he conveys. The more eminent the qualities of a benefactor are, and the higher the rank is in which he stands, our hearts are warmed the more by the feeling of his goodness.

It is impossible to think of God at all, without conceiving him as the benefactor of mankind. Mysterious as this world is in many of its appearances, it nevertheless carries, on the whole, a strongly marked character of goodness and benignity in its author. We behold a vast system obviously contrived to provide, not food and nourishment only, but comfort also and enjoyment to an infinite number of inhabitants. The more that philosophy has enlarged our views of nature, the more it has been discovered that, throughout the wide extent of creation, there is no useless profusion of magnificence, but that every thing has been rendered subservient to the welfare of the rational or sensible world ; nay, that many objects, which were once considered as not only superfluous but noxious, hold an useful place in the general system. Such provision has been made for our entertainment on this earth, such care has been taken to store the world with a variety of pleasures to cheer our senses and enliven our imagination, that he whose eye opens on all the beauty of nature, must be of insensible heart indeed, if he feels no gratitude to that Being who has brought him forth to enjoy this wonderful scene.

But the gratitude of a good man will naturally go farther than this. He will think not only of the benefits which he enjoys in common with the rest of his fellow-creatures, but of those which are appropriated particularly to himself.—Who is there amongst us, my brethren, but in fairly reviewing the events of his life from infancy to this day, in thinking of the comforts he enjoys, and recollecting the dangers from which he has been delivered : who is there, I say, that has not cause to acknowledge an invisible guardian, who has all along watched over his frail estate, has pro-

\* Hosea, iii. 5.

tected and blessed him:—Perhaps, of the blessings which you enjoy, or the deliverances you have received, you are more disposed to trace some human cause; one favourable distinction you ascribe to your birth, your parents, or your education; for some other happy circumstance you think yourself solely indebted to the kindness of an earthly friend, or you refer it to the exertions of your own dexterity and talents.—Thoughtless and inconsiderate man! Have you forgotten that there is a First Cause of all, a Supreme Lord, who, from the beginning, has arranged and prepared the whole series of causes and effects, of whose destination and agency men are no more than the secondary instruments? To what but to the original plan of his goodness, do you owe the favourable circumstances of your birth or your education, the kindness which he ordained to spring up in the breast of your friend, or the talents and abilities which he implanted within you, in order to favour your success?

But an exhortation to gratitude, you perhaps consider as coming unseasonably in your present situation. 'The time was, when the light of the Divine countenance shone upon you, and, looking up to a Benefactor in heaven, with a grateful heart you acknowledged your blessings to be derived from Him; but that time is now past; you are left desolate and forsaken, bereaved of the chief comforts on which you had set your hearts.—And, because many of the favours of Heaven are past, ought they to be gone from your remembrance? Are there not still some others remaining, for which you have reason to give thanks? Have you forgotten all the blessings you have continued to enjoy ever since the day that you came forth a helpless infant into the world? Be assured that a gratitude of that sort, which dies away as soon as it ceases to be fed by the usual stream of benefits, which has regard to present favours only, and none to those that are past, is not true gratitude, but the symptom of a selfish and mercenary spirit. If you be disposed to thank God only when he is giving you all the desires of your hearts, what praise have ye? Do not publicans and sinners the same? Men who have little either of religion or sensibility of heart. But when Providence shrouds itself in a dark cloud, and some of your favourite enjoyments are carried away, if still, with calm and patient mind, you continue to bless the name of the Lord, and still retain a thankful sense of the blessings you have so long, and so far beyond your deserts, been permitted to enjoy; this is to be truly grateful; this is to shew yourselves the dutiful children of a Father in Heaven.

In reviewing the grounds which we have for gratitude to God, it becomes us to attend, not only to those blessings which appertain individually to each of us, but to those also which we enjoy in common with others of our brethren. How much reason have we, for instance, to bless God for having cast our lot in a land

where we enjoy all the advantages of mild and equal government, and all the comforts of tranquillity and peace, while many a nation around us is oppressed by the hand of tyrannical power, disturbed with the alarms and terrors of war, or suffering from the ravages of the hostile spoiler? What higher reason still to be grateful for having our lot cast where the joyful sound of the gospel is heard where the glad tidings of *peace upon earth, and goodwill to the sons of men*, are announced to us by the Son of God, who came to bring pardon and salvation to the guilty world? What everlasting ground of thankfulness is afforded by the blessed hope that is given us of life immortal; of *a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved; of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*, ascertained to all good men by the death and the resurrection of our blessed Redeemer! *Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me, bless his holy name, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies.\** Let us now add,

III. ENTIRE and profound submission, as a disposition most necessary to be preserved on our part towards God. This includes submission of the understanding to the discoveries which God has been pleased to make; submission of the inclinations to the laws which he has promulgated for our conduct; submission of the will to the dispensations of his Providence, as they affect the events of our life. It is not submission constrained merely by a power against which we know that it is in vain to struggle; it is submission arising from reverence compounded with gratitude; submission to One whose supreme perfection entitles Him to absolute obedience, whose experienced goodness affords ground for implicit trust.

In the present imperfect state of human nature, there will be often found no small reluctance to that entire resignation to God which religion requires. The pride of human understanding will sometimes revolt against the discoveries which God has made in his word, as deficient and unsatisfactory; the struggles of passion will frequently rise against the restraints imposed on us by his laws, and the severities inflicted by his Providence. But in the heart of a pious man all such opposition is checked and borne down, by a steady faith that, under the administration of the Almighty, all is ordered for the best, though for several steps of that high administration we are unable at present to account. Hence that calm tranquillity he preserves, and that resolute and magnanimous submission he

\* Psalm ciii. 1, 2, 3.

maintains, amidst the most unpromising circumstances. He knows that in this stupendous universe, there must be many things that lie beyond our comprehension.—As yet thou seest no more than the rise of the Divine government, the beginnings of a great plan which is not to be completed until the course of ages shall end. Meanwhile darkness must be allowed, for wise reasons, to remain upon many things; severe restraints must be imposed on conduct, and occasional sufferings must be endured. If thou sufferest, sigh, and be silent; wait, and be patient. Presume not to exalt thy weak reason against the revelations of Heaven, nor to give vent to thy impatient complaints against the ordinations of thy Supreme Governor. Think with awe, and speak with caution, of what is so much above thee. Wait till thy being shall be unfolded; till it shall have passed through the necessary steps that shall gradually prepare thee for beholding the secrets of the universe; for understanding the counsels of the God who made it. In the meantime, be content to submit and to adore. Let no other voice be heard from thee but this; “Thou hast made me, Oh God! and I am thine, for *in thee I live and move, and have my being*. Wherever thou commandest me to go, I follow. Whatever thou appointest me to suffer, I bear without murmur. It is my part to persevere in my duty; all the rest I leave to Thee; to Thee, whose wisdom I revere, whose goodness I have so often experienced; in whom therefore I repose implicit trust that all shall end well, and the righteous be made finally happy.”—*Good is the word which the Lord hath spoken. Not my will, but His be done. Behold, here I am. Let him do to his servant as seemeth good to him.\**

Such are the principal dispositions which it becomes us to preserve towards God; to preserve towards Him at all times; not in the solemn hours of devotion only, but when we act in the busy world, or when we walk in retirement amidst the scenes of nature. If this union of reverence, gratitude, and submission, habitually possess our minds, they will of course shoot forth into what is termed *delighting ourselves in God*; thinking of him with peculiar complacency and warmth of affection; and elevating us sometimes into a sacred transport when we draw nigh to him in acts of immediate worship, in prayer and praise. Then is the season when the fulness of the soul gives rise to those sublime and pathetic effusions of piety which are recorded of saints in former times: *My soul thirsteth for God; for the living God: when shall I come and appear before him? I will lift up my hands in thy name; my soul shall be satisfied as*

\* 2 Kings, xx. 19. Luke xxi 2 Sam. xv. 26.



*with marrow and with fatness, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee. O, that I know where to find him, that I might come even to his seat !\**—When such sentiments as these, of ardent affection towards God, chastened by reverence and submission, as well as warmed by gratitude, predominate in our hearts, and when they exert their proper influence in purifying and regulating our life, we may then be truly said to *love the Lord our God, with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind.*

\* Ps. xlii. 2. Ps. lxi. 5, 6. Ps. lxxv. 4. Job, xxxiii. 3.

## SERMON LXXIV.

ON THE MORAL CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

---

*Jesus of Nazareth—who went about doing good.*—ACTS, x. 36.

THERE are two great aspects under which we may contemplate the appearance of our blessed Lord on the earth. One is, his coming into the world in order to make expiation to Divine justice, by his sufferings and death for the guilt of the human race. The other is, his coming to act as the enlightener and reformer of the world, by his doctrine and his life. The first of those views is the most sublime ; as on the atonement which he made for us, depended all our hopes of the pardon of sin, and of life eternal. In the other view, it is also of high importance that all Christians should frequently consider him, in order to the proper regulation of their conduct: the observation of his example is no less necessary for this purpose, than attention to his doctrine ; as by his doctrine he taught us what we are bound to do, so in his example he shewed us what we ought to be.

Hence the example of our blessed Lord has been ever held up by serious writers to Christians for their instruction and imitation. It obviously possesses many advantages above any other standard of conduct. It carries peculiar obligations from gratitude, interest, and duty, to enforce the imitation of it ; and it is the only example, in following which we are certain never to err. It has also another peculiar advantage attending it, which is not so commonly thought of ; that is, the universality of its use. It evidently appears that our Lord himself had this benefit to his followers in view, from the train of living which he chose to adopt. He had pitched upon any one station of life, the influence of his example would have been much more limited. The integrity, for instance, of Sa-

muel as a judge, the devotion of David on the throne, the fortitude of Daniel in the midst of a corrupt court, hold forth indeed splendid instances of virtue, but they hold them out only to a few; whereas when Christ appeared on earth, he confined himself to no one state of fortune or line of life; he did not addict himself to any particular calling; he did not even fix his residence in one place; but he gives us opportunity of viewing him in different places and situations, in all that variety of lights which indiscriminately regard the bulk of mankind: his life was divided between the contemplative and the active; devotion and business equally shared it. We behold him in private life among his disciples, like a father in the midst of his family. We behold him in public life, acting with authority in the discharge of his high commission, assuming the dignity which belonged to his office, and boldly reproving the great and the powerful. We see him sometimes in poverty and obscurity, contemned and persecuted. We see him at other times elevated into public favour, followed by applauding crowds, and entering Jerusalem in triumph. We can challenge all history, sacred or profane, to shew us any eminent personage, saint, philosopher, or hero, whose character was so thoroughly tried, and so fully exhibited to admiration, as that of our Saviour. What adds greatly to the lustre of his example, it was marked by no affected singularities nor peculiar austerities. He did not seclude himself from ordinary society, but conversed among men with that sort of modest piety and virtue which suits itself to the level of human infirmity, and is conspicuous for the discharge of the plain and substantial duties of a good life.

It is not my intention at present to attempt a full survey of all the graces and virtues which distinguished our Lord's life, and ennobled his sufferings and death; as this would lead into a field too extensive for one discourse: I mean to confine myself to the manner in which he fulfilled the social duties, and exercised his benevolence as a man among men. This will afford an instructive view of what may be termed the moral character of Christ in his ordinary intercourse with the world, and will point out a proper model of our behaviour towards one another. The most studied and laboured encomiums never drew a more amiable character than what is contained in the few and plain words of the text; *Jesus of Nazareth, went about doing good*. Let us consider in what manner he fulfilled this character.

I. WE are to attend to his assiduity and alacrity in seeking out and embracing every opportunity of doing good; this is the most substantial part of the great virtue of charity. There is a sort of negative goodness with which most men are ready to be satisfied; they applaud themselves if they have kept their

hands free from unjust deeds, and no man can reproach them for working mischief to their neighbour ; but with respect to his welfare they are totally indifferent. They remain in a sort of torpid apathy about the concerns of others, without either rejoicing in their prosperity, or being affected with their distresses ; this is far below what is required of a good man. We were all designed by our Creator to be parts of one body, members of one great society, where every one was to contribute his part towards the common benefit, and to be made happy by studying to make others so. In proportion indeed as our ability and influence extend, the obligation to be extensively beneficial also grows ; but hardly is there any sphere so narrow and circumscribed, as not to afford some opportunities of being useful.—In thy humble and obscure station, thou art apt to think thyself entirely insignificant and lost to the world. To thee, indeed, it may not belong to heal the diseased, to raise the fallen, to supply the indigent, or to bring forward the deserving. But is there none whose spirit thou canst cheer, or whose infirmities thou canst help to lighten ? Hast thou no parent, no child, no brother, no friend, to whom thou canst speak the words of comfort in the hour of sorrow, whose mistakes thou canst rectify, or whose erring steps thou canst turn into the right path ?

Here let the example of Christ, as far as thy sphere admits it, be before thine eyes, to quicken thy activity and animate thy zeal. The whole history of his life is the history of active and diffusive benignity. Wherever he was present, we find him employed in doing good ; either relieving men from their distresses, or making them wise and happy by his instructions. The whole country around him seemed to be his family, and if in a literal sense he had been the father of them all, they could not have exercised his care, or shared his bounty more. The hungry were fed, and the sick were cured, the blind saw, and the lame walked, wherever he came. His miracles never were mere ostentations of power, but always expressions of goodness. Often he prevented the supplications of the distressed, and, unasked, conferred his favours ; but never did any person apply to him for aid and relief without receiving it, whether he was Jew or Heathen, friend or foe. What is especially remarkable in his beneficence is, that it was continued and persevering in the midst of ingratitude. This is one of the hardest trials of virtue, not to be soured by the perversity of men, and which persons even of generous spirits find it the most difficult to bear. But though Christ had to deal with a most untoward and stubborn generation, whom no evidence could convince, and no goodness could mollify ; though of all the great numbers who had been objects of his beneficence, we read of few who thankfully acknowledged, his kindness, fewer who became his followers, and none who

rose up to assert his cause when born down by unjust persecution; yet, seeking to do good only for its own sake, he persevered to the last in unwearied beneficence. He *overcame evil with good*: it had been his principle, and, it would appear, a noted saying of his, which his disciples remembered and quoted after his death; *it is more blessed to give, than to receive.*\*

II. WE ought to propose for imitation that humanity of manners, that gentleness and affability which appeared in the whole of our Lord's behaviour. This relates to the manner of conferring benefits, which is often as material as the benefits themselves are. These are sometimes conferred so ungraciously, as to carry the air of insults rather than benefits; whereas, when they bear the marks of proceeding from real kindness, their value is heightened, and they are received with double pleasure. There are numberless occasions, when the discovery of a humane temper, and the lesser offices of obliging and courteous behaviour, contribute essentially to the happiness of others, and supply the place of greater benefits, which may not be in our power to bestow.—For this amiable spirit our Lord was remarkably distinguished. He was open and affable to all, and easier of access than his own disciples. On different occasions we find him checking his disciples, when they restrained the forwardness of the multitude who pressed upon him, seeking relief. Nay, he rebuked them for forbidding little children to come to him, whom the fondness of the parents sought to introduce to his presence. He took the children into his arms and blessed them, and propounded them to his disciples as emblems of that innocence and simplicity which are requisite for our entering into the kingdom of heaven.†—He conversed familiarly with all sorts of people, and readily answered the questions they put to him. He had nothing of that haughty and distant reserve which we so often see maintained by men of the world, and which prevents them from holding intercourse with any whom they consider as their inferiors in reputation or in rank. On the contrary, as our Lord was ready to do good to all, so he disdained not to receive kindness from others; complying cheerfully with the desire of those who invited him to their houses, and accepting in good part the proffered tokens of their well intended respect. For such instances of courtesy he was reproached by the Jews as one who wanted that external severity of manners which they imagined to belong to a professed reformer of the world. But He, who knew what was in the heart of man, saw that gentleness and condescension were more effectual methods of gaining men over to goodness, than harshness and austerity; and therefore did not decline all conversation with men of doubtful or ble-

\* Acts, xx. 35.

† Mark, x. 14.

mished lives, as long as there was any hope of making them better. It was indeed true that he was, as they reproached him, *a friend to publicans and sinners*; for he was a friend to every one to whom he could do good.—At the same time, it is of importance to remark, that this benignity of our Lord's manners never betrayed him into the opposite extreme, never degenerated into that easiness of good-nature, which too often leads men to slide into the manners and habits of those with whom they converse, though they cannot approve of them. Wherever the interests of virtue were concerned, our Saviour was inflexibly firm. He boldly lifted up his voice, and testified against vice and corruption wherever he beheld them. He freely reprov'd the greatest men of the nation for their hypocritical and assumed shows of sanctity; and the civility with which he was entertained in the house of a Pharisee, did not prevent him from inveighing severely against the vices of that sect in their own presence.\*

III. WE are to consider our Lord in the light of a faithful and affectionate friend, and his example as the pattern of all the offices that belong to virtuous friendship. The Apostles whom he chose for his intimate companions and friends, were men of honest and candid minds, and of great plainness and simplicity of character; men who, from real esteem, and from conviction of the truth of his mission, had become his followers, and who, notwithstanding the disadvantages of his fortune in the world, continued to follow him to the last. At the same time, together with those essential principles of worth, they had also great defects. They were most of them of timid and fearful disposition, of slow understanding, backward to apprehend spiritual things, and still prepossessed with the favourite prejudice of their nation, that the promised Messiah was to be a great conqueror, who was to rescue their country from foreign subjection, and raise it to empire and grandeur.—Among these men our Lord passed all the hours of his private life, acting every part of an affectionate and faithful friend, commending, advising, and reprov'ing, with great sincerity, and at the same time, with great tenderness. In his manner of living he put himself perfectly on a level with them. Some of them he honoured with greater intimacy than others; but like a prudent father in his family, he allowed none of them to affect superiority over the rest, and checked all that tended to rivalry among them. He never flattered them in their failings. He never soothed them with vain hopes. He never concealed the disagreeable consequences that would follow from adherence to his cause. Again and again he inculcated what they were backward and unwilling to believe concerning himself; and though the questions they put often discovered a de-

\* Luke, xi. 37.

gree of gross ignorance, he answered them all without passion or impatience, training them up by degrees to the events that were to happen after his decease, and to the high part they were destined then to act in the world.

How happy would it be for mankind, if more attention were given to this noble pattern of fidelity and complacency which ought to prevail among friends, and of the indulgence due to the failings of those who are, in their general character, worthy and estimable persons! This amiable indulgence he carried so far, that in one of the most critical seasons of his life, during his agony in the garden, when he had left his disciples for a short time, with a strict charge to watch till he should return, but upon his returning found them asleep, all the reproof which their negligence at so important a juncture, drew from him, was no more than this, *What, could ye not watch with me for one hour?\**—Of the tenderness of our Lord's affections, and the constancy of his friendship, we have a very memorable instance, in that mixture of friendship and filial piety which he discovered during the cruelty of his last sufferings. It is recorded, that when he hung upon the cross, beholding John his beloved disciple, and Mary his mother, standing as spectators below, he said to John, *Behold thy mother*; and to Mary, *Behold thy son*; thus committing his forlorn mother to the charge of his friend John, as the most sacred and honourable pledge he could leave him of their ancient friendship. The heart of his friend melted: and, from that hour, we are told, *he took her home with him to his own house.* It is John himself who has recorded to us this honourable testimony of his master's friendship.†

IV. THE example of Christ holds forth for our imitation his steady command of temper amidst the highest provocations, and his ready forgiveness of injuries. Though he had revenge always in his power, he constantly declined it. On one occasion, when his disciples wished him to call down fire from heaven to punish the inhospitality of the Samaritans, *he turned and rebuked them, saying, 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 he was reviled, *he reviled not again; when he suffered he threatened not.* The insults which he often received from a brutal multitude, had no power to alter the meekness and generosity of his disposition: he continued to beseech and entreat them, when they sought to chase him away from amongst them. When they accused him of being in confederacy with evil spirits, he answered their injurious defamation only with mild and calm reasoning, that if he by means *of Satan did cast out Satan, his kingdom must be divided against itself, and could not stand.* At his trial

\* Matth. xxvi. 40.

† John, xix. 26, 27.

‡ Luke, ix. 55

before the High Priest, when he was most injuriously treated, and contrary to all law was, in face of the court, struck by one of the High Priest's officers, what could be spoken more meekly and reasonably than his return to this usage, at a time when all circumstances concurred to exasperate the spirit of an innocent man; *if I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?*\*—When his enemies were completing the last scene of their cruelty in putting him to death, all their barbarous usage and scurrilous taunts on that occasion, provoked not one revengeful thought in his breast, nor drew from his lips one misbecoming expression; but on the contrary, the last accents of his expiring breath went forth in that affectionate prayer for their forgiveness; *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!*—Shall we, my friends, who have before our eyes such an example of generous magnanimity, of continued self-command amidst the most trying situations, not be ashamed of giving vent to passion on every trifling provocation, and fiercely demanding reparation for the smallest injury; we, who, from the remembrance of our own failings, have so many motives for mutual forbearance and forgiveness; while He, on the other hand, had done no wrong, had never given offence to any, but had the justest title to expect friendship from every human being?

V. LET US attend to the sympathy and compassion which our Lord discovered for the sufferings of mankind. It was not with a cold unfeeling disposition that he performed the office of relieving the distressed. His manner of bestowing relief clearly showed with what sensibility he entered into the sorrows of others. How affecting, for instance, is the account of his restoring to life the son of the widow of Nain, as it is related in the beautiful simplicity of the evangelical historian? *When he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow; and much people of the city was with her.* All the circumstances in this incident are moving and affecting; and it presently appeared with what tender sensibility our Lord was touched at the sight of so mournful a procession. *And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not; and he came and touched the bier, (and they that bare him stood still,) and he said, Young man, I say unto thee, arise. And he that was dead, sat up, and began to speak; and he delivered him to his mother.*† The whole scene of raising Lazarus from the grave, places our Saviour's sympathy in the strongest light. As soon as he came among the mourning friends, although he knew the cause of their mourning was speedily to be removed, he could not for-

\* John, xviii. 27.

† Luke, vii. 12—16.



bear partaking of their sorrows ; *He groaned and was troubled in spirits* ; and when surrounded by a crowd of tears, he approached to the grave of his deceased friend, it is expressly recorded to the eternal honour of his feelings, *Jesus wept* ; and the *Jews said, Behold, how he loved him.*\*—In like manner, when, for the last time, he was about to enter into Jerusalem, though the certain knowledge of all the cruelties which were prepared for him there would have filled the breast of any ordinary person with indignation and hatred, instead of such emotions, the foresight of the direful calamities which hung over that devoted city, melted his heart ; and when he drew near to it and beheld it, *he wept* ; pouring fourth that pathetic lamentation ; *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not ! If thou hadst known, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes.*† Thus, as a man, he indulged all the amiable feelings of our nature, teaching us that is our duty to regulate our passions, not to extirpate them.

SUCH was Jesus of Nazareth, the founder of our religion. A part only of his character I have now attempted to delineate ; many other of his eminent graces and virtues have been left in the shade. But in what we have now contemplated of his behaviour as a man among men, we behold a perfect model of the conduct we ought to hold in the ordinary intercourse of society with one another. We have seen him attentive to every opportunity of being beneficent and useful ; in his behaviour to all men, affable and obliging ; to his friends, faithful and indulgent ; to his enemies, generous and forgiving ; to the distressed, full of tenderness and compassion. I might also have dwelt upon the peaceable spirit he displayed on all occasions ; his respect, as a subject, to the civil laws and government of his country ; discouraging a factious and mutinous spirit ; paying tribute when demanded ; exhorting his followers to render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, as unto God those which are God's. Enough has been said to shew what a blessing it would prove to the world, if this illustrious example were generally followed. Men would then become happy in all their connexions with one another.—This world would be a blessed dwelling ; and the society of human beings on earth would approach to the joy and peace of the societies of the just in heaven.

\* John, xi. 35.

† Luke, xiii. 34. xix. 42.

## SERMON LXXV.

### ON THE WOUNDS OF THE HEART.

---

*The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity : but a wounded spirit who can bear ?—PROVERBS, xviii. 14.*

THERE are two classes of goods and evils belonging to man; those which respect his corporeal, and those which respect his spiritual state. Whatever is of an external nature, is sufficiently the object of attention to all men. In the health and vigour of the body, and in the flourishing state of worldly fortune, all rejoice: and whatever diminishes the one or the other is immediately felt and lamented. These are visible and striking objects, on which our senses and imagination are accustomed to dwell. But to procure an equal attention to what is inward and spiritual, is much more difficult. It is not easy to convince men that the soul hath interest of its own, quite distinct from those of the body, and is liable to diseases and wounds as real as any which the body suffers, and often much more grievous. What passes within the hearts of men, is always invisible in the public eye. If it be of the pleasing and satisfactory kind, they have no occasion to disclose it; and if it be of a painful nature it is often their intent to conceal it. In the mean time, *the heart knoweth its own bitterness*: and from its being secreted from public observation and concentrated within the breast, it is felt the more deeply.—*The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity*; the natural vigour and courage of his mind may enable him to surmount the ordinary distresses of life; to bear with patience poverty, sickness, or pain, as long as he is conscious that all is right and sound within. But if within him, the disease rankles in his mind and his heart; if that which should sustain him, serves only to gall and torment him; to what quarter can he then look for relief, or to what medicine apply, when

that which should have cured his other wounds is itself diseased and wounded? *A wounded spirit who can bear?*

The spirit or soul of man is wounded chiefly by three causes; by folly, by Passion, by Guilt.

I. IT is wounded by Folly; that is, by vain, light, and improper pursuits; by a conduct, which though it should not be immediately criminal, yet is unsuitable to one's age, character, or condition in the world. Good sense is no less requisite in our religious and moral behaviour, than it is in our worldly affairs. Whoever departs far from the plain track of sober and reasonable conduct, shall, sooner or later, undergo the consequences of a diseased and wounded spirit. It often happens, that under the notion of innocent pleasure and amusement, of only following their humour and indulging their taste, while, as they say, they hurt no man, and violate no material duty, many go on for a time, in a course of the most egregious follies, and all along conceive themselves to be, if not very virtuous, at least very inoffensive men. The case is the same with the diseases of the mind as with the diseases of the body. They lurk for a time unperceived. The seeds of them may be working within, while the person affected imagines himself to be in perfect health: but at length a crisis comes, which brings the secret venom forth, and makes all its malignity be felt.

In this age of dissipation and luxury in which we live, how many avenues are constantly open that lead to the Temple of Folly? To how many temptations are all, but especially the young and the gay, exposed, to squander their whole time amidst the circles of levity, and haunts of pleasure? By idleness and extravagance, and the vain ambition of emulating others in the splendid show of life, multitudes run into expense beyond their fortune. The time which should be employed in training them for future significance in the world, they lose in frivolous amusements and pursuits; or in the midst of these, bury the fruits of any good education they had already received. Idle associates are ever at hand to aid them in inventing new plans of destroying the time. If that fatal engine of mischief, the gaming table, then attracts and ensnars them, their career of folly will soon be completed; the gulf of destruction opens, and ruin is at hand.

Supposing some incident to befall as befall at some time it must, which shall awaken persons of this description from their dreams of vanity; which shall open their eyes to the time that they have mispent, and the follies which they have committed; then, alas! what mortifying and disquieting views of themselves will arise? How many galling remembrances will crowd upon their minds? They see their youth thrown away in dishonourable or trivial pursuits; those valuable opportunities which they once enjoyed of coming forward with distinction in the world, now irretrieva-

bly lost; their characters tarnished and sunk in the public eye; and the fortune, perhaps, which they had inherited from their ancestors, wasted among idle companions. They behold around them the countenances of their friends angry and displeased. To the grave and the respectable, they dare not look up. They, with whom they once started in the race of life as their equals, have now got far before them; they are obliged to respect them as their superiors, and with shame to view themselves left behind, disgraced and dishonoured—Can any situation be more humbling and mortifying than this? Is not this to suffer in a high degree the misery of a wounded spirit, when a man sees that by mere thoughtlessness and folly, he has exposed and degraded himself; beholds his character, his health, his interest, sinking in the world; and is sensible that with his own hands, and by his own blind and ill-judged conduct, he has brought this ruin on himself?—Conscience now begins to exert its authority, and lift its scourge. At every stroke it inflicts, the wounds of the heart open and bleed; and though it exercise not the same dread severity as when it upbraids us with notorious crimes, yet still it is the voice of God within, rebuking and punishing reasonable creatures for folly as well as for guilt; nor indeed are follies of such a kind as have been described, ever free from many stains of guilt.

II. If by Folly the spirit is thus liable to be wounded, it is exposed by Passion to wounds still more severe. Passions are those strong emotions of the mind which impel it to desire, and to act, with vehemence. When directed towards proper objects, and kept within just bounds, they possess an useful place in our frame; they add vigour and energy to the mind, and enable it, on great occasions, to act with uncommon force and success; but they always require the government and restraint of reason. It is in the mind, just as it is in the body. Every member of the body is useful, and serves some good purpose. But if any one swell to an enormous size, it presently becomes a disease. Thus, when a man's passions go on in a calm and moderate train, and no object has taken an inordinate hold of any of them, his spirit is in this part sound, and his life proceeds with tranquillity. But if any of them have been so far indulged and left without restraint, as to run into excess, a dangerous blow will then be given to the heart.—Supposing, for instance, that some passion, even of the nature of those which are reckoned innocent, shall so far seize a man as to conquer and overpower him, his tranquillity will be destroyed. The balance of his soul is lost; he is no longer his own master, nor is capable of attending properly to the offices of life which are incumbent on him, or of turning his thoughts into any other direction than what passion points out.

He may be sensible of the wound. He feels the dart that is fixed in his breast, but is unable to extract it.

But the case becomes infinitely worse, if the passion which has seized a man be of the vicious and malignant kind. Let him be placed in the most prosperous situation of life; give him external ease and affluence to the full: and let his character be high, and applauded by the world: yet, if into the heart of this man there has stolen some dark jealous suspicion, some rankling envy, some pining discontent, that instant his temper is soured, and poison is scattered over all his joys. He dwells in secret upon his vexations and cares, and while the crowd admires his prosperity, he envies the more peaceful condition of the peasant and the hind. If his passions chance to be of the more fierce and outrageous nature, the painful feelings they produce will be still more intense and acute. By violent passions the heart is not only wounded, but torn and rent. As long as a man is under the workings of raging ambition, disappointed pride, and keen thirst for revenge, he remains under immediate torment. Over his dark and scowling mind, gloomy ideas continually brood. His transient fits of merriment and joy, are like beams of light breaking, occasionally, from the black cloud that carries the thunder. What greatly aggravates the misery of such persons, is, that they dare make no complaints. When the body is diseased or wounded, to our friends we naturally fly; and from their sympathy or assistance expect relief. But the wounds given to the heart by ill governed passions, are of an opprobrious nature, and must be stifled in secret. The slave of passion can unbosom himself to no friend; and, instead of sympathy, dreads meeting with ridicule or contempt.—How intolerably wretched must the condition of Haman have been, when, before all his assembled friends, he was reduced to make this humbling confession of his state; that, in the height of royal favour, and in the midst of the utmost magnificence and grandeur, “all availed him nothing, so long as he saw his rival, Mordecai the Jew, sitting “at the King’s gate!”

III. THE wounds which the heart receives from Guilt are productive of still greater pain and misery, than any which have been already mentioned. If beyond being misled by folly, or overcome by passion, a man be conscious to himself of having deliberately committed deeds of injustice or cruelty; of having, perhaps by wicked arts, seduced the innocent and unwearied, to fall the miserable victims of his licentious pleasures; of having ruined, by his dishonesty, the unsuspecting trusting friend; of having amassed wealth to himself, by fraud and oppression, from the spoils of the industrious; in such and similar cases, deep and lasting is the sting which is sent into the heart.

I am aware of the arts that have been devised by criminal men to shelter themselves from the attacks of conscience; of the sceptical principles to which they have recourse; and of the self-deceiving opinions with which they flatter themselves concerning their own character, and concerning the goodness of God, and the allowances which they hope will be made for human infirmity and strong temptations. But all those palliatives of guilt are no other to the soul, than the empiric medicines that are applied to the diseases of the body; which disguise the disease, without removing it: which procure a little temporary ease, and conceal from the patient the danger of his state; but drive the distemper to the vitals, and make it break forth in the end with redoubled force. Thus may those dangerous opiates of conscience soothe a man for a while, in the days of his prosperity. Amidst the bustle of active life, and as long as the flustry of gay and youthful spirits lasts, he may go on in the commission of many crimes with smoothness and seeming peace. But let the sober and serious hour come, which, sooner or later, must come to all; let the amusements of life be withdrawn, and the man be left alone to his own reflections; the power of truth will soon prove too strong for all that is opposed to it, and pierce into his heart. The voice of nature, of conscience, and of God, will make itself be heard with in him. He will feel that he is a wretch. He will become despicable in his own sight. He will become sensible that all good men have reason to hate him, and that the just Governor of the world has reason to punish him. Conscience, bringing to remembrance all his secret crimes, will hold them up to his view with this fearful inscription written upon them, *God will bring every work into judgment.*—Hence the haggard look, and the restless couch, days never free from bitterness, and nights given up to remorse.

This remorse will prey the deeper on the bad man's heart, if it shall happen, as it sometimes does, that there was a period in his life, when he was a different man; when, having been educated by virtuous parents in sober and religious principles, and being as yet uncorrupted by the world, he passed his days without reproach or blame. The recollection of what he then felt, compared with the state into which he has now brought himself by forfeited integrity and honour, will wring his heart with sad remembrance. "Once I knew what it was to enjoy all the comforts of innocence, and to take pleasure in the thoughts of heaven, when my hands were unstained and my mind was pure. Then I was ever cheerful, easy, and free. Heaven and earth seemed to smile upon me. My nights were peaceful, and my days were pleasant. Innocent joys and comfortable hopes were ever at hand to entertain my solitary hours.—Where

“ now are these gone? Why am I thus so altered and changed  
“ from what I was, and so uneasy to myself? What, alas! have  
“ I gained by those worldly pursuits and ambitious plans which  
“ seduced me from the plain and safe paths of integrity and  
“ virtue !”

SUCH are the wounds of the spirit, occasioned either by folly, by passion or by guilt, and too often by a complication of all the three together. For though they be of separate consideration, and each of them may be felt in a different degree, yet they are seldom parted wholly asunder from one another. Folly gives rise to unrestrained and disorderly passions. These betray men into atrocious crimes; and the wretched sinner is stung as by a three-headed snake; at once, reproached by reason for his folly, agitated by some strong passion, and tortured with a conscious sense of guilt.—When these disorders of the mind arise to their height, they are, of all miseries, the most dreadful. The vulgar misfortunes of life, poverty, sickness, or the loss of friends, in comparison with them, are trivial evils. Under such misfortunes, a man of tolerable spirit, or of a moderate share of virtue, will be able to find some consolation. But, under the other he can find none. What is but too decisive as to the degree in which they surpass all external evils, they are those wounds of the spirit, the shame of folly, the violence of passion, and the remorse for guilt, which have so frequently produced that fatal crime, so much the reproach of our age and our country; which have driven men to the most abhorred of all evils. to death by their own hand, in order to seek relief from a life too embittered to be endured.—Far from each of us be such desperate calamities!—But, if it be the certain tendency of those wounds of the heart, to introduce the greatest disquietude and misery into the life of man, then, from what has been said, let us be taught,

IN the first place, to give the most serious and vigilant attention to the government of our hearts. It may be thought by some, that the formidable representation I have given of the miserable effects of a wounded spirit, attaches only to them who have gone to the utmost lengths in folly or passion; but that, by some more temperate regulation of conduct, indulgence may be given, without harm, to the free gratification of certain favourite desires.—Be assured, my brethren, that, under ideas of this kind, there lies much self-deception. Supposing it in your power to stop at some given point without rushing into the greatest disorders, still you would suffer from the license you had taken to drop the governments of your hearts. The lesser criminal never escapes without his share of punishment. In proportion to the quantity you have drunk out of the poisoned cup of pleasure, you will feel your inward health and soundness impaired;

or, to follow the metaphor of the text, not by a deep wound only, but by every slighter hurt given to the heart, you will suffer in that peace and tranquillity which makes the comfort of life.

But besides this consideration, strict attention is the more requisite to the government of the heart, as the first introduction to those disorders which spread their consequences so deep and wide, is for the most part gradual and insensible, and made by latent steps. Did all the evil clearly shew itself at the beginning, the danger would be less. But we are imperceptibly betrayed, and from one incautious attachment drawn on to another, till the government of our hearts be at last utterly lost; and wounds inflicted there, which are not to be healed without much shame, penitence and remorse.—How much does this call for the attention of youth in particular; whose raw and unexperienced minds are so apt to be caught by every new and enticing object that is held forth to their passions? How much does it concern them to beware of the commencements of evil, and to listen to the admonitions of the grave and the wise, who have gone through those dangerous paths on which they are beginning to enter? Let them never give up their hearts profusely to any attachment, without the countenance or reason and religion. Let them shut their ears to the seductions of folly and vice, and look with wary eye to those rocks on which so many others have split.—Nor is it only to youth that this admonition belongs. To the levities and passions of youth succeed the more sober follies of advancing years; which, under a graver appearance, are no less liable to seize and wound the heart. From the first to the last of man's abode on earth, the discipline is perpetually requisite of *keeping the heart with all diligence*; guarding it from whatever would annoy its healthy and sound estate; *as out of the heart are the issues either of Life or Death.*

In the second place, it clearly appears, from what has been said, how much reason we all have to join prayer to the Almighty God, in addition to our own endeavours of guarding and governing our spirits; beseeching Him who made the heart, and who knows all its errors and wanderings, to aid and prosper us by his grace in this difficult undertaking. Well must he who knows any thing of himself at all, know how greatly divine assistance is needed here, and how little we can depend upon ourselves without it. For *deceitful*, as well as *desperately wicked*, are our hearts; and after all our pretences to ability and wisdom, how often, by the seductions of folly, and of passion, have the wise, the learned, and the admired, been shamefully carried away.—Most earnestly to be desired is that blessing promised in the Gospel, of a new heart and a new spirit, which shall ren-



der us superior to the attacks of vanity and vice. *Who can understand his errors ; Cleanse me, O God, from secret faults ; Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me. That which I see not, teach thou me ; and lead me in thy way everlasting.*

IN the last place, all that has been said on the subject tends to impress us with a sense of this awful truth, that the Great God hath already begun to punish bad men for their sins and vices. You see his hand clearly marked in all that they are made to suffer by the Wounded Spirit. You see that he has not delayed all retribution to another world ; but hath in this world begun to act as a Governor and a judge ; shewing, by an established order of things, that while he loves the righteous, *he hateth all the workers of iniquity.* With a wisdom, peculiar to himself, he hath made the punishments due to sinners to arise directly from their own behaviour, and to be inflicted by their own hands. He hath no occasion to send forth destroying angels against them ; the thunder which is ever in his hands, needs not to be pointed at the heads of the guilty. He need only leave them to themselves ; and presently their *wickedness begins to reprove them, and their backslidings to correct them,* till they fully see and feel what an *evil thing, and bitter it was, to depart from the Lord their God.* Conscious, while their hearts are bleeding within them, that they are only *reaping the fruit of their own doings,* the sense of deserving what they suffer, both aggravates the suffering, and forces them to acknowledge the justice of it.

When we behold such plain marks of wise and just government taking place among men, who shall take upon him to say, that all things come alike to all men, and that there is no more than a promiscuous distribution of good and evil by Providence on earth? However it may seem in appearance, it is far from being so in reality. We look to the outside of things. We are dazzled with that tinsel glare which prosperity sometimes throws around the worthless and the wicked. But what is that to true happiness and self-enjoyment? often, how little connected with it? Could you look into the hearts of men, another scene would open. You would see many a heart wounded and bleeding in secret, from a guilty conscience and remembered crimes, while gay looks were affectedly put on before the world. Comparing this galled and distressed state of mind, with the free and easy, the light and disencumbered spirit of a worthy and virtuous man, even under the pressures of life, you would forbear to charge Providence, and would readily acknowledge, that though the external distribution of the world's goods be promiscuous, the internal allotment of happiness is measured by the real cha-

racters of men.—On the whole, let us hold fast by this great truth, and by it govern our lives, that every man's real happiness or misery is made, by the appointment of the Creator, to depend more on himself, and on the proper government of his mind and heart, than upon any external thing, or than upon all external things put together; that for those who serve God, and study to keep their conscience clear from guilt, God hath provided peace and comfort on earth, as well as rewards hereafter; *but saith my God, there is no peace to the wicked.*

## SERMON LXXVI.

ON ALL THINGS WORKING TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THE  
RIGHTEOUS.

---

*We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*—ROMANS, viii. 38.

AMONG many ancient philosophers it was a favorite tenet, that all seeming disorders in the world are rendered subservient to the order and perfection of the universe ; or, that all things work together for the good of the whole : But to this good of the whole, they conceived the interest of individuals to be oft-times obliged to yield. The revelation of the Gospel has opened to us a higher and more comfortable prospect. For it assures us not only of the direct tendency of all things to general order, but to the consummate happiness of every individual who loves and serves God. While the Deity is ever carrying on the general system of things to its proper perfection, the interest of no one good man is sacrificed in any point to promote this end ; but his life is, at the same time, a system complete within itself, where all things are made to conspire for bringing about his felicity. *We know*, says the Apostle in my text, that is, we are assured, not by doubtful reasonings, with regard to which the wisest might be perplexed, but by a divine promise on which the simple can firmly rely, that *all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.*—This is that capital encouragement of religion, which virtually contains in itself all the other promises made in Scripture to the righteous, and like a full and exuberant fountain, divides itself into a thousand streams to refresh the life of man with consolation and joy. It will therefore deserve our very full and particular consideration, both as to the extent and encouragement given, and the evidence on which our assurance of it rests,

THE first thing which should here draw our attention is, the character of those to whom the encouragement of the text is appropriated. For it is evidently not given indiscriminately to all, but limited to such as *love God*, and *are the called according to his purpose*; that is, chosen by him to eternal life. But, lest the latter part of this description should appear too secret and mysterious to afford the encouragement intended, it is cleared up by the first and explanatory character, *them that love God*. Here is something plain and satisfactory, on which we can rest. We need not say, Who shall ascend into heaven, in order to bring us down from thence any information, whether our names be written in the book of life; it is sufficient to look into ourselves, and the state of our heart. *The word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.\** They that *love God* and they who are *the called according to his purpose*, are the same. Divine love is the sacred character which marks those who are *sealed unto the day of redemption*.—This love of God is not to be understood as signifying merely some occasional ardour of affection; it imports that steady principle of goodness which becomes the spring of a pure and virtuous life.—The same character is here meant, which is described in other passages of Scripture, by *fearing and serving God*. They who truly love God, are they who love and imitate the divine perfections; they who love and obey the divine laws; they who love and pursue the divine approbation, as the great aim of their life. Keeping this important article ever in view, as a necessary limitation of the gracious declaration in the text, let us proceed to examine the full extent of that encouragement which it affords.

WE begin by considering what the *good* is, for which it is here said that all things work in favor of the righteous. It is a term susceptible of very different acceptations. For many things appear good to some which do not appear so to others; nay, the same things which have appeared to ourselves good at one time, have been far from appearing good at another. Assuredly that *good* which God promises as the reward of his servants, must be somewhat worthy of God to bestow; somewhat that depends not on the fluctuation of fancy and opinion, and that is not liable to change with the change of times. It must be some good of a fixed and permanent nature, which will be felt as such in every situation and period of our existence. But it is evident that such characters are not applicable to the external advantages of the world, riches, fame, and honours. These may occasionally be desirable, and at some times confer satisfaction on the possessor. But besides their uncertain and transient duration, they are far from conferring satisfaction at all times.

\* Deut. xxx. 14

even when thy last. On the contrary, it is a certain fact, and manifest to general observation, that a man may possess all the external advantages of fortune, and lead withal a very miserable life. Suppose him to be disquieted in his own mind by envy, jealousy, revenge, or other violent passions, and harassed with a guilty conscience, such a man cannot be said to have attained what is *good*. Would it have been worthy of the Supreme Being to have flattered his servants with the hope only of a good so fallacious, that in certain circumstances it might be consistent with the greatest misery?—Nor: that good, for the sake of which he makes all things work to those that love him, must be founded in the improvement and perfection of their nature in wisdom, grace, and virtue; in their good considered as rational and immortal beings; productive of a felicity which is within them, and shall abide with them for ever. While we look only to a present momentary satisfaction, the Divine Being, in consulting our welfare, provides for the whole of our existence in time and eternity; connects the present with the future; and by his beneficent decree, ordains for each of his servants, that which, upon the whole, is *the best*.—While, *to the sinner he giveth sore travail, to gather and to heap up; he giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.\**

HAVING ascertained the sense in which we are to understand *the good* for which God maketh all things to work, we proceed to consider what is included in the extent of the expression, of *all things working for this good*. In general, it includes all that happens to good men in this world; every station and condition in which they are placed: every circumstance in their lot, from the beginning to the end of their lives. Nothing befalls them fortuitously, nothing happens in vain, or without a meaning; but every event possesses its proper and destined place, and forms a link in that great chain of causes which is appointed to carry on their improvement and felicity. As all the rivers upon the face of the globe, however circuitous they may be in their progress, and however opposite in their course, yet meet at last in the ocean, and there contribute to increase the mass of waters; so all the seemingly discordant events in the life of a good man are made to preserve, upon the whole, an unerring tendency to his good, and to concur and conspire for promoting it at the last—What a noble and sublime view does this present of the supreme dominion of Providence, and of its care exercised over every righteous man!

When we descend to a more particular examination of what is included in the expression here used, of *all things*, we may observe, first, that it includes a state of worldly prosperity. For

\* Eccles. ii. 26.

sometimes this is appointed to fall to the share of God's servants; nay, their worth and virtue have often been the means of bringing it about. But it is not one of those things which are good in their own nature, till God makes it work for that purpose.—What numbers of men has it poisoned and destroyed, cherishing the growth of wantonness and folly; and implanting in their breasts the seeds of those bad passions which spring up into many a crime! From such evils, the prosperity of good men is guarded by God. The poison is extracted from it, and the salutary part only left. It is rendered to them a comfortable and useful enjoyment of life, affording opportunity for the exercise of many virtues, which otherwise would not have come within their sphere.

But, *among all things that work for good*, it is probable that the evils of this life were particularly designed to be included, as what we might have least expected to be subservient to that purpose. It is nevertheless certain, that, from the discipline of adversity, the most salutary improvements of human nature have been often derived. In that severe school, the predominant errors of the mind have been corrected, the intemperance of the giddy spirit has been allayed and reformed, and that manly seriousness acquired, which is the foundation of true wisdom. By the *sadness of the countenance, the heart* of the sufferer *has been made better*; he has been trained up to fortitude of mind, improved in humanity to men, and formed to the habits of devotion and resignation to God.

At the same time, it is only *if need be* as the Apostle Peter speaks,\* that the righteous *are left for a season in heaviness*.—If it be certain that all things work for their good, it follows of course that there is no superfluous severity, no needless or unnecessary trouble to them, in the constitution of things. Their afflictions never befall without a cause, nor are sent but upon a proper errand. These storms are never allowed to rise, but in order to dispel some noxious vapors, and to restore salubrity to the moral atmosphere.—Herein appears, if we may be allowed so to speak, the wonderful art and skill of the Supreme Artificer, the profound depth of the Divine wisdom, in extracting, from distresses and sorrows, the materials of peace and felicity. Nor are only the external calamities of good men subservient to this purpose; but their internal infirmities, their very failings and errors, are made, by the powerful influence of God's grace, to contribute ultimately to their good. They are thereby instructed in the knowledge of themselves; they are properly humbled by the discovery of their own weakness: and trained to that becoming spirit of contrition and returning repentance,

\* 1 Pet. i. 6.

which is represented as giving joy to the angels in Heaven. He who *maketh the wrath of man to praise him*, is not deficient in wisdom and power, to make even the failings of his servants, in this imperfect state of human nature, redound at last to his own glory, and to their good.

It must not escape observation, that the text suggests, not merely that all things prove good in the issue, or eventually turn out to the benefit of the righteous, but that they *work for it*. This expression carries particular energy. It imports that *all things* are so formed by God, as to become active causes of happiness to those who love him. His infinite wisdom gives to things in themselves most unapt, an aptitude and fitness to fulfil his own great ends; disposes and prepares them for their proper effects; and makes dangers and evils his instruments for accomplishing the felicity of his servants. There is a certain operation and process always going on, by which, though we are insensible of it, all things are constantly advancing towards a happy issue. In the same manner as the operation of natural causes, though slow and unperceived, is sure; as the seed which is sown in the ground is every moment unfolding itself; and though no eye can trace the steps of its progress, yet with a silent growth, is ripening and shooting forth its stalks; so in the moral world, throughout all the dispensations of Providence, there is the same latent, but certain progress of the seeds of virtue and holiness, tending towards perfection in the end. *Light is sown for the righteous*, as the Psalmist beautifully employs this metaphor, *and gladness for the upright in heart*.\*

It is said in the text, not only that all things thus work, but that they *work together for good*; intimating that they are made to conspire and to concur with one another, for bringing about what is best on the whole. Taken singly and individually, it might be difficult to conceive how each event wrought for good. They must be viewed in their consequences and effects; considered in all their dependencies and connections, as links hanging together to form one extensive chain. It is by adjusting into one consistent whole, the various events that fill up human life; arranging in the happiest succession all the occurrences of that complicated scene; and bending to his own purpose things which appear most opposite and contrary, that the Almighty accomplishes his great plan in behalf of those who *love him, and are the called according to his purpose*.

SUCH is that great edifice of encouragement and hope, which the gospel of Christ hath reared for the consolation of those who sincerely love and serve God. It remains now that we examine what the pillars are on which so mighty an edifice rests.

\* Psalm xcvi. 11.

The Apostle speaks, you see, in a strain of full assurance. He does not say, we believe, or we hope, but *we know*, that all things work together for good.—Let us consider,

In the first place, the evidence in support of this doctrine, which arises from the perfections of the Divine nature. In general, that God is good to all, and that his goodness is especially exerted in behalf of the righteous, is a principle of religion which none will dispute. The only question is, how far that goodness extends, and whether we can conceive it as extending to all that is implied in the text? Something, it must be confessed, there is astonishing, and on first view almost incredible in the assertion, that amidst that infinite combination of events which carry on the general order of the universe, nothing shall ever happen but what advances the happiness of each good man; and which shall tend to his private interest, as much as if his existence had formed a system by itself. But how astonishing soever this may seem to us, let us first reflect, that this supposes no effort beyond the power of Him who is Almighty, or beyond the skill of Him who is infinite in wisdom. We must not measure divine operations by the feeble energies of man. God is the first cause of all that exists and acts. All events are, at every moment, in his hand. Nothing can make any resistance to his purpose, or fall out in any way beside, or beyond his plan. At one glance he perceives how all things are going on throughout his universe. Not the minutest object is overlooked by Him. No multiplicity of affairs distracts Him; for, to the supreme intelligence, all things are present at once; and to the concerns of every good man, his observation and attention reach as fully as if there were no other object under his government.

As there is nothing, therefore, in the promise of the text, which Divine power and wisdom cannot effect, so neither is there any thing in it but what Divine goodness gives us reason to believe shall be fulfilled. The goodness of the Supreme Being is very different from that of men. Among them, it is a principle occasionally operating, but always limited, and always subject to alteration and change. Their benefits, though literally bestowed at one time, will at another time be stopped by the intervention of contrary passions. Their benevolence decays; selfishness and indifference succeed. But, in the nature of the Deity, there is no principle which can produce alteration or change in his benevolent purpose once formed. *Without variableness, or shadow of turning, whom he hath once loved he loveth to the end. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.\** His goodness therefore consists, not in a mere temporary effusion of blessings, but is permanent and steady; leading him, not

\* John, xiii. 1. Rom, xi. 29.



simply to bestow some things that are good, and then to stop, but to carry his gracious purpose to the utmost; in every instance to do what is best for his servants on the whole, or in the words of the text, to make *all things work for their good*.

Let us now consider what it would import, if any single occurrence were to happen in the course of human affairs, which had not a good design: which did not, in one form or other, promote the benefit of the righteous. What would it import, but that in such an instance, either the Divine power and wisdom had fallen short of their effect, or the Divine goodness had neglected and forsaken the virtuous? It were blasphemous to suppose that the nature of the Deity was changed: or that there were, in his government of the world, some vacant spaces, or neglected intervals, in which he suffered the reins of administration to drop out of his hands, and some evil principle to counteract his general system. But as all such suppositions are manifestly inconsistent with the nature of that God in whom Christians believe, there appears to follow, from the consideration of his perfections, evidence next to demonstration, for the truth of that doctrine which the text contains.

BUT that it may not rest its evidence on our own reasonings only, let us next consider what discovery of his high designs God hath been pleased to make in the revelation of the Gospel. Here it is amply sufficient to have recourse to one signal dispensation of his government, the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. Hence arises an argument which carries the most convincing force; and which accordingly, in a few verses after the text, is employed by the Apostle in support of that doctrine I have been illustrating. *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also, freely give us all things?*—Can we in any instance distrust him who hath given us this highest proof of his love? If he scrupled not to bestow this best gift, is there any other blessing he will be inclined to withhold? Having already done so much, will he leave incomplete his own great work?—By the death of Christ, we are taught in Scripture, that atonement was made for sin. He underwent in his sufferings the punishment due to us. He is said to have been *wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; to have borne our sins in his own body on the tree*. From this view of the doctrine of redemption, it naturally follows, that Christ having purchased for his followers the pardon of their sins, the afflictions they now undergo are not properly to be considered as punishments, but as chastisements intended for their good—Add to this, that it is the peculiar province of our Lord in his present exalted state, to administer all things for the good of his church. For this end his regal power is employed. To this end his mediation and intercession are directed:

and either these must in some cases prove ineffectual, or it must follow that all things work for the good of them who love him. As much evidence then as we have for those capital truths on which the whole of Christianity rests, the same we have for that high encouragement afforded by the text.

It remains to take notice, in the last place, of the express and multiplied promises of the sacred Scripture to the same purpose with that in the text. Though the text alone might have appeared sufficient for our encouragement; yet, as repeated assurances of the same thing come home with greater weight to the mind, it hath pleased God to make this full provision for confirming the trust and hope of his servants: and there can be no doubt that the plain and explicit words of the Divine promises have had the most comfortable influence on many who could not as well have supported themselves under the trials of life, either by reasonings taken from the Divine perfections, or by inferences drawn from the doctrine of redemption. Accordingly, we are not left merely to reason or to infer, but are in express terms told by God himself, that *godliness shall be profitable unto all things; that God the Lord is a sun and a shield, giving grace and glory, and withholding no good thing from them; that walk uprightly; that no evil shall happen to the just; for the Lord is their keeper, who never slumbers nor sleeps; that his eyes are ever on the righteous; that when they pass through the waters, he will be with them, and through the rivers they shall not overflow them; and in fine, that all his paths are mercy and truth to such as fear him, and keep his covenant.\** These promises, and many more to the same effect, with which the Scripture abounds, plainly express a particular care of Heaven exercised about every single good man; they signify as real an interposition of Providence, as if the laws of nature had been suspended on his account.

The opinion entertained by some, that the Providence of God extends no farther than to a general superintendance of the laws of nature, without interposing in the particular concerns of individuals, is contrary both to reason and to Scripture. It renders the government of the Almighty altogether loose and contingent, and would leave no ground for reposing any trust under its protection. For the majority of human affairs would then be allowed to fluctuate in a fortuitous course, without moving in any regular direction, and without tending to any one scope. The uniform doctrine of the sacred writings is, that throughout the universe nothing happens without God; that his hand is ever active, and his decree or permission intervenes in all; that nothing is too great or unwieldy for his management, and nothing so minute and inconsiderable as to be below his inspection and

\* 1 Tim. iv. 8. Ps. lxxxiv. 11. Ps. cxxi. 3, 4, &c.

care. While he is guiding the sun and the moon in their course through the heavens; while in this inferior world he is ruling among empires, *stilling the ragings of the waters and the tumults of the people*, he is at the same time watching over the humble good man, who, in the obscurity of his cottage, is serving and worshipping Him. In order to express this vigilance of Providence in the strongest terms, our Saviour himself has said, that the very *hairs of our head are all numbered by God*: and that *while two sparrows are sold for a farthing, not one of them falls to the ground without his pleasure*. The consolation which this affords, he applies to his disciples in what follows: *Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows*.\* It is on this doctrine of a special and particular Providence he grounds that exhortation against worldly solicitude and anxiety, which accords so fully with the argument we have been pursuing: *your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of; take therefore no thought for the morrow; but seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*.†

Thus it has been shown on what grounds our assured belief rests of the declaration in the text, that all things are made to work for the good of the righteous. It is not a promise which admits of ambiguity, and which we might be afraid to interpret to its full extent. It is on every side confirmed by the most sober reasonings we can form from the divine perfections; by the whole tenor of the dispensation of redemption; by many repeated assurances given us in the sacred writings.

THE great objection, I am aware, that will be started by many against the whole of what has been advanced in this discourse, is founded on the seeming prevalence of evil and disorder in the world. This, it will be said, is so conspicuous as to be inconsistent with the representation that has been given of a Supreme Being, who attends, in every instance, to the welfare of every good man. The present state of the world may be suspected to carry more the appearance of a conflict between too opposite principles of good and evil, which divide the empire of the world, and of course create a mixture of some good things with more that are evil. How often, it will be said, are the best men insensible of any such gradual improvement, or any such tendency in the general course of things, as has been represented to promote their interest; but on the contrary, left comfortless and forlorn, in the midst of surrounding prosperous vice, to mourn over disappointed hopes and bitter sorrows, without receiving the least mark of favourable intentions from Heaven? Hence the exclamations they have often uttered; “Where is the Lord, and

\* Matth. x. 31.

† Matth. vi. 32, 33.

“ where the sceptre of righteousness and truth? Doth God indeed see, and is there knowledge in the Most High? Or hath He forgotten to be gracious, and in anger shut up his tender mercies?”

Now, in answer to such objections, let us consider how much reason there is for ascribing those dark and dreadful appearances, to the narrow and confined views which our state allows us to take. The designs of the Almighty are enlarged and vast. They comprehend not only the whole of our present existence, but they include worlds unknown, and stretch forwards into eternity. Hence much darkness and mystery must of course rest at present on the administration of God; and we, who see only so small a portion of a great and complicated system, must be very inadequate judges, both of the tendency of each part, and of the issue of the whole. We behold no more than the outside of things. Our views glide over the surface; and even along that surface, they extend but a short way. But under the surface there lie hidden springs, that are set in motion by a superior hand, and are bringing forwards revolutions unforeseen by us. There are *wheels moving within wheels*, as the prophet Ezekiel beheld in mysterious vision.\*—We, measuring all things by the shortness of our own duration, are constantly accelerating our designs to their period. We are eager in advancing rapidly towards the completion of our wishes. But it is not so with God. In his sight, *a thousand years are as one day*: and while his infinitely wise plans are continually advancing with sure progress, that progress to our impatience appears slow. Let us have patience for a while, and these plans shall in due time be developed, and will explain themselves. His language to us is, *What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.*†

Let us attend to the analogy of Nature. We shall find it to hold very generally, both in the moral and natural world, that nothing arises suddenly to the perfection of its state; that all improvement is carried on by leisurely gradations; and that most frequently it is through harsh and unpromising beginnings things are brought to a favourable conclusion. This might be illustrated by many examples: Take, for one instance, the progress of the seasons. Who that for the first time beheld the earth, in midst of winter, bound up with frost, or drenched by floods of rain, or covered with snow, would have imagined that Nature, in this dreary and torpid state, was working towards its own renovation in the spring? Yet we by experience know that those vicissitudes of winter are necessary for fertilizing the earth; and that under wintry rains and snow lie concealed the seeds of those roses that are to blossom in the spring; of those

\* Ezek. x. 10.

† John, xiii. 7.

fruits that are to ripen in summer ; and of the corn and wine, which are in harvest to make glad the heart of man. We perhaps relish not such disagreeable commencements of the pleasing season. It would be more agreeable to us, to be always entertained with a fair and clear atmosphere, with cloudless skies, and perpetual sunshine : while yet, in such climates as we have most knowledge of, the earth, were it always to remain in such a state, would refuse to yield its fruits ; and in the midst of our imagined scenes of beauty, the starved inhabitants would perish for want of food — Let us therefore quietly submit to nature and to Providence. Let us conceive this life, of whose evils we so often complain to be the winter of our existence. Then the rains must fall, and the winds must roar around us. But, sheltering ourselves, as we can, under a good conscience, and under faith and trust in God, let us wait till the spring arrive. For a spring, an eternal spring, awaits the the people of God. In the new heavens and the new earth, no storm shall any more arise, nor any unpleasing vicissitudes of season return. It shall then at last appear how former sufferings have produced their proper effect ; how the tempests of life have tended to bring on an everlasting calm ; in fine, how *all things have wrought together for good to them that love God, and who are the called according to his purpose.*

## SERMON LXXVII.

### ON THE LOVE OF OUR COUNTRY.

[Preached 18th April, 1793, on the day of a National Fast appointed by Government, on occasion of the War with the French Republic.]

---

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem ; they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sake, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy peace.*—PSALM, cxxii. 6, 7, 8, 9.

IT is one of the infirmities belonging to human nature, that continued enjoyment of the highest blessings is apt to depreciate them in our esteem. This unhappy weakness shows itself, not only with respect to the light of the sun, and the beauties of nature, which we have been long accustomed to behold, but also with respect to health, peace, religion, and liberty. Let any one of those blessings have been long familiar to us; let a tract of time have effaced the remembrance of the distress which we suffered from the want of it; and it is surprising how lightly men are ready to prize the degree of happiness which they continue to possess.—In the midst of that peaceful and secure state which the inhabitants of this land have long enjoyed; surrounded with the chief blessings that render life comfortable; how few have any just sense of the gratitude they owe to heaven for such singular felicity? Nay, is it not much to be lamented that there should have sprung up among us an accountable spirit of discontent and disaffection, feeding itself with ideal grievances and visionary projects of reformation, till it has gone nigh to light up the torch of sedition?—When government has now, for wise and proper reasons, called us together in a religious assembly, our thoughts cannot be more suitably employed than in reviewing

the grounds on which, as good Christians and faithful citizens, we have reason to entertain the warmest affection for our native country, and to put a just value on that constitution of government, civil and sacred, under which it is placed.—In the words of the text you see with what zeal the heart of the pious Psalmist glowed for the prosperity of his country. By the accumulation of expressions which he employs, and the variety of topics he suggests, you see the fervor with which this subject animated his heart.—It will be proper to consider, first, the grounds on which love for our country rests: and next, the duties to which this affection naturally give rise.

BUT, before entering on any of those topics, it may be proper to take notice of the speculations of some pretended philosophers, who represent the love of our country as hardly entitled to any place among the virtues. They affect to consider it as a mere prejudice of education; a narrow attachment, which tends to operate against more enlarged interests. We ought, say they, to view ourselves as citizens of the world, and extend our benevolence, equally, to all nations and all mankind.—Nothing can be more empty and futile than such reasonings. The wisdom of our Creator hath linked us by the ties of natural affection, first to our families and children; next to our brothers, relations, and friends; then to our acquaintance, and to the several societies and communities to which we belong. By instincts implanted in our nature, He has formed our hearts to enter readily into their interests; and has thus directed our benevolence to act primarily within that sphere, where its exertions can be most powerful and most useful. It is evident, that by acting on this plan, the general welfare is promoted in a much higher degree, than if our social affections had no particular direction given them, but were to float, as it were, in empty space, without any more determined object on which to act than the whole human race, where they never could act with any effect. He who contends that he is not bound to have any more concerns for the interests of Great Britain, than for those of France, or any other country, ought to hold, on the same grounds, that he is under no obligation to consult the welfare of his children and family, his brothers and friends, more than that of the most distant stranger; being equally connected, as he holds, with all, by the common brotherhood of the human race. It is much to be suspected, that this wonderful extensive philanthropy is only the language of those who have no affections at all; or perhaps, that it is the language assumed by some, who, bearing in their hearts a secret preference to the interests of another country above their own, but a preference which they choose not to avow, affect to cover it under this disguise, of a liberal, enlarged spirit.

Let us, my friends, disclaiming all such refinements of false philosophy, and following the dictates of plain good sense, and natural affection, resolve to love our native country, and in every proper way to show our attachment to it. This was the spirit which so honourably distinguished patriots, heroes, and legislators of old, and has transmitted their names with veneration to posterity; while they who felt no affection for the country to which they belonged, or who were treacherous to its interests, have been stigmatized with infamy among all civilized nations. I admit that there have been occasions, on which attachment to a particular country has been pursued to a very unjustifiable length. Wherever it has led the natives of one country to state themselves as enemies to the rest of mankind, and to endeavour at aggradizing themselves by ruining all around them, the pretended love of their country is then become no other than a conspiracy against all other nations, and, instead of being a virtue, is the offspring of ambition, pride, and vanity.

I proceed now to show the just grounds on which it becomes us to be zealous for the welfare of that happy island, to which we have the honour and the blessing to belong. Let us consider our native country in three lights; as the seat of private enjoyment and happiness; as the seat of true religion; as the seat of laws, liberty, and good government.

I. As the seat of all our best enjoyments in private life.—There, my brethren, after we first drew breath, was our tender infancy reared with care; there, our innocent childhood sorted; there, our careless youth grew up amidst companions and friends; there, our dearest connections were formed; there, after having passed the happiest years of our life, we look forward for our old age to rest in peace.—These are circumstances which endear, and ought to endear a home, a native land, to every human heart. If there be any names known among men that awaken tender sentiments in the breast, the names of father, mother, spouse, child, brother, sister, or friend, these all recall our thoughts to our native land, and cannot, even in idea, be separated from it. When we name our own country, we name the spot of the earth within which all that is most dear to us lies.—To be long absent from it, is a circumstance of distress; but to be excluded from the hope of ever returning to it, sinks the spirits of the worthy and the brave into extreme depression. Its very dust appears to them to be precious. Its well known fields, and mountains, and rivers, become, in their eyes, a sort of consecrated ground; the remembrance of which often touches the heart with sensations of more tender joy, than can be raised by scenes more rich, and objects more splendid, in any foreign land.



These are feelings, which nature, or rather the God of nature, has implanted in the mind of man; and base and vile is he who studies to erase them, intimately connected as they are with our very best affections.—Can we think, my friends, how long we have sat *under our vine and our fig-tree*, in peace and joy, encircled by our families and friends, in that happy land we possess; and, with this pleasing remembrance dwelling on our minds, can we think with indifference of any danger which threatens the welfare of that country which has been the mother, the nurse, the guardian of us all? Can we think, without horror, of foreign invasion laying waste our fruitful and smiling fields, or of lawless anarchy and tumultuary mobs attacking our peaceful habitations?—No! *Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces*, will ever be the earnest prayer of every virtuous man; *for my brethren and companion's sake, I will ever say, Peace be within thee!*

II. We love our country as the seat of true religion. Freed from the dominion of Popish superstition and darkness which so long overspread the earth, here the light of the blessed reformation continues to shine in its greatest splendour. Here the forms of religious worship are incumbered with no pageantry of vain rites! but, agreeably to God's word, are plain and simple, yet solemn and venerable. Religion has among us neither been the engine of ecclesiastical tyranny, nor the instrument of princely despotism. It has maintained a proper alliance with the regular government of the state, and the order of public tranquillity. The church that has been established by law, in the two separate divisions of the island, is suited to the genius and dispositions of the people in each. While to the established church is given that protection and support from government, which both the interest of religion and the welfare of the state render proper and due; yet no rigid conformity to it is exacted. All persecution for conscience-sake, is unknown.—They who, in their modes of thinking, or in their religious forms, differ from the established church, are at full liberty, without reproach, to worship God according to their own opinions and the rites of their fathers, as long as they infringe not the public tranquillity nor disturb the state.

I now ask, what establishment of religion more friendly to public happiness could be desired or framed? How zealous ought we to be for its preservation? How much on our guard against every danger which threatens to trouble or overthrow it?—Can there be any among us so infatuated as to wish to exchange it for that new form of things which has produced such fatal effects on a neighbouring land? Were it ever to be introduced among us, it is not the return of ancient superstition, it is not the bondage of the church of Rome, we would have to

dread: evils great in themselves, but small in comparison of what such a revolution would produce. As soon as under the guise of philosophy, and with the pretence of unlimited toleration the established forms of religion were demolished in France, the flood-gates were opened to pour a torrent of avowed infidelity, atheism, and all the grossest immoralities, over that devoted country. We have beheld the throne and the altar overthrown together: and nothing but a wretched ruin left, where once a stately fabric stood. We have seen the venerable ministers of religion, stripped of their subsistence, torn from their churches, driven from their homes, and forced to wander as exiles, and beg their bread in a foreign land—We have seen the last consolation of the wretched destroyed, and the grave sealed against their hope, by the public declaration that death is an eternal sleep.—Such have been the blessed fruits of that new order of things which boasted of being to restore happiness to all the nations. Such are the consequences we have to expect among ourselves, if ever the like dangerous opinions shall prevail in Britain.—With horror let us turn away from the thought. With earnestness let us *pray for the peace of our Jerusalem; and for the house of the Lord our God, let us zealously seek its good.*

III. WE love our country as the seat of liberty and laws; a mild, wise, and happy government. This opens a much wider field of discourse than the bounds of a sermon admit. But on this part of the subject being happily anticipated by so many excellent publications which have lately appeared, I shall content myself with making a few leading observations.—The ends for which men unite in society and submit to government are, to enjoy security to their property, and freedom to their persons from all injustice or violence. The more completely those ends are obtained, with the least diminution of personal liberty, the nearer such government approaches to perfection: I say approaches to it; for a perfect government is a mere chimera.—Before we can expect it to take place, we must wait till we see any one thing whatever arrive at perfection on earth. The two extremes to be guarded against are, despotism, where all are slaves; and anarchy, where all would rule, and none obey.

The British government may appear at different periods to have inclined sometimes to the one, and sometimes to the other of those extremes. In its present state, it may justly be accounted to be removed to an equal distance from either of those evils; and therefore to have approached nearer to the perfection of social order, than any other government, ancient or modern. To this point it has arrived in the progress of ages, not in consequence of theories formed by speculative men, such as our modern reformers, but in consequence of experiments made, and

trials undergone. Experience, that great parent of all, but especially of political wisdom, taught a brave, generous, and high-spirited people, how to correct, by degrees, preceding evils, and to form the wisest plan for liberty and security. In this state we now find the British constitution. It stands among the nations of the earth, like an ancient oak in the wood, which, after having overcome many a blast, overtops the other trees of the forest, and commands respect and veneration. All foreigners look to it with wonder, and with envy, as the happiest system that ever was devised for uniting dignity in the magistrate and liberty in the subject, with protection and security to all. Justly may we challenge those who attempt to criticise it, to produce, from the annals of history, any example of such a multitude of men as the British subjects, held together in the bonds of civil society, under so few restraints, and with such full enjoyment of freedom as we possess: blessed to for a whole century past with a succession of princes, who made the laws of the land the rule of their government; blessed now with a sovereign at the head of the empire, to whom faction itself cannot impute, throughout his long reign, any acts of tyranny, cruelty, or oppression; whose personal virtues and whose domestic conduct hold forth to the nation such a high example of piety, decency, and good order, as if generally followed, would render all his subjects happy.

In opposition to such sentiments as I have now delivered in favour of the constitution of our country, we are called upon, by a certain set of men to look to a republic, as the glory of all governments. There we are told, every man comes forth to act his part with vigour; and by the exertion of his talents, has opportunities of rising to the highest distinction and power.—In reply to this, let it be observed, first, that there are no advantages claimed by a republic, but what under the British constitution are enjoyed to the full. On the exertion of any laudable and honourable talent whatever, no restraint is laid; no odious distinctions take place between the nobility and the people; no severe exclusive privileges are possessed by the former to the prejudice of the latter; but merit in every rank has the freest scope, and examples abound of persons rising by their talents from ordinary rank and humble birth, to high distinction in the state.

But next, it may be boldly asserted, that of all the forms of government which have been established on the earth, the republican is attended with the greatest disadvantages to those who live under it. In a small state, where the people resemble the inhabitants of one family, the management of their concerns can more safely be carried on by their own joint councils, without any supreme magistrate. But if government be extended

over a large territory, and over numerous inhabitants of different orders and fortunes, it has ever been found impossible to preserve any well-regulated balance of power under a republican constitution. It has ever been, and never can be, any other, than a perpetual contest between oligarchy and democracy; between the rich and the poor; between a few popular leaders who aspire to the chief influence, and the unruly violence of a turbulent multitude. In such states an internal warfare of this kind has been almost always carried on, with such violent convulsions and party animosities, as have given rise to more miseries than have been suffered under any other form of government whatever.—To no purpose are quoted to us the heroes of Greece and Rome. Amidst the agitations of popular government, occasions will sometimes be afforded for eminent abilities to break forth with peculiar lustre. But while public agitations allow a few individuals to be uncommonly distinguished, the general condition of the people remains calamitous and wretched. Under despotic governments, miserable indeed is the condition of those who are near the throne. But while they are often the sport, and the victims of capricious cruelty, the ordinary mass of the people, at a distance from the thunder of power, are left, for the most part, in their inferior situations, unmolested. Whereas, under a multitude of popular governors, oppression is more extensively felt. It penetrates into the interior of families; and by republican tyranny the humble and obscure are liable to be as much harassed and vexed as the great and the wealthy.

If any one doubt of those facts, let him look at the present state of the republic established in that country to which we have so often been unfortunately obliged to allude. He will there behold a memorable example set forth to the world; but an example, not for imitation, but for instruction and caution; an example, not of exploits to be copied, or of advantages to be gained, but of all the evils against which men, joined in society, ought to stand on their guard. He will behold the republican halls hung round with monuments of proscriptions, massacres, imprisonments, requisitions, domiciliary searches, and such other trophies of the glorious victories of republicanism over monarchical power. *O my soul, come not thou into the secret; into their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united; for their anger was fierce, and their wrath was cruel.\**

ENOUGH has now been said to convince every reasonable subject of the British government, that he has good grounds for loving and respecting his country. It remains to point out the duties to which the love our country gives rise. Though these branch out into many particulars, they may be comprised

\* Genesis, xlix. 6, 7.

under two general heads; the duties which are required of us in our character as private men, and those which belong to us in a political capacity as subjects and citizens.

FIRST, as private men and Christians, let us cultivate those virtues which are essential to the prosperity of our country. The foundation of all public happiness must be laid in the good conduct of individuals; in their industry, sobriety, justice and regular attention to the duties of their several stations. Such virtues are the sinews and strength of the state; they are the supports of its prosperity at home, and of its reputation abroad; while luxury, corruption, venality, and idleness, unnerve the public vigor, disgrace the public character, and pave the way to general ruin. Every vice, however fashionable, that becomes prevalent, is the infusion of so much poison into the public cup; and in proportion to the degree of its prevalence, will the health and strength of the nation be impaired. Few of us by our arms, and fewer still by our counsels, can have influence in promoting that welfare of our country which all profess to desire. But there is one sphere in which all of us can act as benefactors to it; by setting a good example, each in his own line, and performing a worthy and honourable part. *Righteousness will ever exalt a nation*; and *wickedness* will be, first, the reproach, and then the *ruin of every people*.

Among those virtues to which the love of our country calls us, let us not forget piety to God. Without a proper sense of religion, and a due acknowledgment of that Supreme Power which rules among the kingdoms, no nation was ever found to prosper long. Let those sophistical reasoners, who would teach us that philosophy ought now to supersede the ancient prejudices of Religion, look to the history of those republics which they so highly admire, especially to the history of the Romans. They will there find, that, during the freest and most flourishing periods of the republic, the Romans were the most religious of all nations. The Senate at no time assembled, no consul entered on his office, no great public measure was ever undertaken, without previous religious services, without prayers and sacrifice. After every victory, solemn thanksgivings were offered to the gods; and upon any defeat that was sustained, public humiliations and processions were decreed, in order to deprecate the displeasure of Heaven. That much superstition and folly entered into what they called religion, will be readily admitted; but still it implied reverence to a Supreme Power in Heaven, which ruled all the affairs of men, and was entitled to their homage. Hence that sacred respect to an oath, as an inviolable obligation, which long distinguished the Romans; and historians have remarked, that when the reverence for an oath began to be diminished, and the loose epicurean system which discarded the belief of Provi-

dence to be introduced, the Roman honour and prosperity from that period began to decline.—These are things that belong to our admonition, on whom *the ends of the world are come*.

IN the second place, as we would show our love to our country, let us join to the virtues of private men, those which belong to us in a political capacity as subjects and citizens. These must appear in loyalty to our sovereign, in submission to the authority of rulers and magistrates, and in readiness to support the measures that are taken for public welfare and defence. Without regard to such duties as these, it is evident, not only that the state cannot flourish, but even that it cannot subsist. Accordingly they are strongly bound upon us by the authority of Scripture. *Let every soul be subject to the higher powers; whoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience'-sake.\** Such passages as these, there is little danger of our misunderstanding at present, as if they enjoined a slavish submission to authority in things unlawful. This is by no means the extreme to which the spirit of the times points, or to which the nature of our civil constitution leads. The full opportunity that is given for the voice of the people being at all times heard, the freedom of discussion on all political matters that is allowed both in discourse and writing, is a sufficient guard against all approaches to unwarrantable stretches of power in the ruler, and to unlimited submission in the subject.

But while we duly value this high advantage of the liberty of the press and the freedom of political discussion, and when we behold it perpetually acting as a censorial check on all who are in power, let us beware, lest, abusing our liberty, we suffer it to degenerate into licentiousness. The multitude, we well know, are always prone to find fault with those who are set over them, and to arraign their conduct; and too often this spirit appears when public dangers ought to silence the voice of discontent, and to unite every heart and hand in the common cause.—The management of a great empire, especially in difficult times, is the conduct of an unweildy and intricate machine, in directing the movements of which, where is the hand so steady as never to err? Instead of the violent censures which the giddy and presumptuous are so ready to pour forth, moderation in discussing matters of which they are very incompetent judges, would be much more wise and becoming. The art of government and legislation is undoubtedly the most nice and difficult of all the arts in which the human mind can be engaged; and where the greatest preparation of knowledge, experience and

\* Rom. xiii. 1—6.

ability are absolutely requisite to qualify men for the task. But in times when legislation is considered as a trade which every man is qualified to take up; when the manufacturer quits his loom, and the artizan lays down his tools, in order to contrive plans for reforming the state, and to constitute societies for carrying his plans into execution; what can be expected to follow from such a spirit, if it were to become prevalent, but the most direful confusion?—Were the rashness of some, whose intentions are innocent, the only evil to be dreaded, the danger would be less. But it is always to be apprehended, that the operations of such persons are directed by men who have deeper designs in view; who seek to embroil the state, in order to bring forward themselves; whose aim it is to rise into eminence, though it were on the ruins of public tranquillity and order. Let such men, if any such there be, consider well what the consequences may be, of fomenting the spirit of presumptuous innovation. It is a dangerous weapon which they attempt to wield. By the agitation which they raise among a blind multitude, they are giving impulse to the motions of a violent engine, which often discharges its explosions on the heads of those who first touched its springs.

UPON the whole, let us, my brethren, be thankful that our grounds of discontent, whether founded on real or imaginary grievances, are so few; and that, for so great a number of public blessings, we have reason to bless the God of Heaven. We live in a land of pure religion, of liberty and laws, and under a just and mild government. However the opinion of men may differ about this or that political measure adopted by government, it may with confidence be said, that we have much reason to respect those rulers, under whose administration the empire, though engaged in a hazardous and expensive war, has all along continued to hold a high rank among the nations of Europe, and has attained to that flourishing state of commerce, opulence, and safety, in which we behold it at this day; inso-much that perhaps the greatest dangers we have to apprehend, arise from the jealousy with which rival nations behold our superiority at sea, and our wealth and strength at home.—Let our prayers ascend frequently to Heaven for the continuance of those blessings; for *the peace of our Jerusalem; for peace within her walls, and prosperity within her palaces*; and let the admonition of Scripture never be forgotten; *My son, fear thou God; honour the king; and meddle not with them that are given to change.*\*

\* Prov. xxiv. 21.      1 Peter, ii. 17.

## SERMON LXXVIII.

### ON A CONTENTED MIND.

---

*Say now unto her, "Behold thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? Wouldst thou be spoken for to the King, or to the Captain of the Host?" And she answered, "I dwell among mine own people."—*  
2 KINGS, iv. 13.

A PIOUS and respectable woman of Shunem had exercised great hospitality to the prophet Elisha. In order to accommodate him in his various journeyings, she had caused a chamber to be built for him, adjacent to her house, where he might be furnished with all that, according to the simplicity of those times, was wanted for his entertainment. In the text, the Prophet, by his servant Gehazi, acknowledges the obligations he lay under to this good woman for her care and attention; and being at that time in favour with the king of Israel, desires to know, whether, in return for her kindness, he should apply to the king, or the captain of the host, in her behalf, and procure advancement to her in rank and fortune. Her answer bespeaks all the modesty of one who was satisfied and contented with her present lot. Without any affectation of uncommon virtue, or any haughty contempt of the Prophet's offers, she mildly replies, "*I dwell among mine own people.*" "I dwell in the condition to which I was born; in my native land; among my original connections, and persons of my own rank; and living there in peace, I have no desires of aspiring to a higher rank."

The temper of this worthy Shunamite, who could so properly set bounds to her desires, and enjoy her present condition with contentment, is what I now propose to your imitation. It stands in opposition to that restless and discontented spirit which so often sets men at variance with their condition in the world, makes them look with contempt on that state of life and sphere of



action which Providence has allotted them ; and encouraging every real or supposed discouragement to prey upon their minds, makes them pine for some change of fortune.

It is proper, however, to observe, that this moderation of spirit which I am now recommending, is not inconsistent with our having a sense of what is uneasy or distressing in our lot, and endeavouring, by fair means, to render our condition more agreeable. Entire apathy, or passive indifference to all the circumstances of our external state, is required by no precept of religion. What a virtuous degree of contentment requires and supposes, is, that with a mind free from repining anxiety, we make the best of our condition, whatever it is: enjoying such good things as God is pleased to bestow upon us, with a thankful and cheerful heart ; without envy at those who appear more prosperous than us ; without any attempt to alter our condition by unfair means ; and without any murmuring against the Providence of Heaven.—“ In that state in which it pleased God to place me at my birth, I am ready to remain, as long as it shall be his pleasure to continue me there. He has placed me among my equals. Such comforts as he saw meet for me to possess, he has bestowed. These I shall study to improve ; and by his kind Providence favouring my industry and application, I may hope they will be increased. In the mean time, I rest satisfied ; and complain not. *I dwell among mine own people.*”

But if this acquiescence in our condition is to be considered as belonging to that contentment which religion requires, what becomes, it will be said, of that laudable ambition, which has prompted many boldly to aspire with honour and success far beyond their original state of life? I readily admit, that on some among the sons of men, such high talents are bestowed, as mark them out by the hand of God for superior elevation ; by rising to which, many, both in ancient and modern times, have had the opportunity of distinguishing themselves as benefactors to their country and to mankind. But these are only a few scattered stars that shine in a wide hemisphere ; such rare examples afford no model for general conduct.—It is not to persons of this description that I now speak.—I address myself to the multitude ; to the great body of men in all the various walks of ordinary life. Them I warn of the danger of being misled by vanity and self-conceit, to think themselves deserving of a much higher station than they possess. I warn them, not to nourish aspiring desires for objects beyond their power of attaining, or capacity of enjoying ; and thereby to render themselves unhappy in their present condition, and dissatisfied with all that belongs to it.—By this restless discontented temper, I shall proceed to show that they incur much guilt, and involve themselves in great folly and misery.

FIRST, discontent carries in its nature much guilt and sin.—With this consideration I begin, because I am afraid that discontentment is commonly treated, in a religious view, more slightly than it deserves. A contented temper, we are apt to say, is a great happiness to those who have it; and a discontented one, we call an unlucky turn of mind; as if we were speaking of a good or bad constitution of body, of something that depended not at all on ourselves, but was merely the gift of Nature. —Ought this to be the sentiment, either of a reasonable man, or a Christian; of one who knows himself to be endowed with powers for governing his own spirit, or who believes in God, and in a world to come? What, I beseech you, do all the risings of discontent within you import, but so much concealed rebellion against the government of that Supreme Being, who hath appointed your place in the world? When you repine at your state, as below what you deserved, do you not inwardly tax Him with injustice and partiality, for conferring his favours on others more unworthy of them, and leaving you neglected and humbled? By treating with contempt the blessings he allows to your state, do you not, in effect, tell him, that his blessings are not worthy of being enjoyed, and merit no thanks, because he does not give you more?—The outward expressions of such sentiments, you may suppress. You may affect to appear religious, by shows of reverence and homage; but such appearances deceive not God. Every habitually discontented person is, and must be, ill-affected towards Him: nay, though he would wish to conceal it from himself, he is a secret blasphemer of the Almighty.

Besides impiety, discontent carries along with it, as its inseparable concomitants, several other sinful passions. It implies pride, or an unreasonable estimation of our own merit, in comparison with others. It implies covetousness, or an inordinate desire for the advantages of external fortune, as the only real goods. It implies and always engenders, envy, or ill-nature, and hatred, towards all whom we see rising above us in the world. Dare we treat that as a slight infirmity, or a constitutional weakness merely, which imports some of the worst dispositions and passions of the human heart.—The discontented man is never found without a great share of malignity. His spleen irritates and sours his temper, and leads him to discharge its venom on all with whom he stands connected. He can act his part well, in no relation of life. In public affairs, and in private business, he is always given to fretfulness and complaint. While the man of contented mind, easy and happy in himself, is disposed for living well with others, and spreads around him that cheerfulness which he possesses; the restless discontented

person is a troubler of the world; neither a good friend, nor a good neighbour, nor a good subject or citizen.

IN the second place, as this disposition infers much sin, so it argues great folly, and involves men in many miseries. If there be any first principle of wisdom, it is undoubtedly this: the distresses that are removable, endeavour to remove: those which cannot be removed, bear with as little disquiet as you can; in every situation of life there are comforts: find them out, and enjoy them. But this maxim, in all its parts, is disregarded by the man of discontent. He is employed in aggravating his own evils; while he neglects all his own comforts.—What is it to you, though others are supposed to be happier? Very possibly they are not so; for wide is the difference between being what the world calls prosperous, and being happy: You see no more than the imposing outside of glittering fortune; while, under that gaudy cover, there may be lurking many a bitter sorrow.—But supposing others to be in truth as happy as they seem to be, is there any reason, except mere viciousness of disposition, why their happiness should be a cause of your discontent and misery? Cannot you be at your ease in the shade, because others are basking in the sun? What is this but the unhappy art of extracting from objects that ought to be indifferent to you, materials for your own torment?

“Such reasonings as these,” says one, “may be specious and plausible; but what avail reasonings to set me at ease, who every day feel myself hurt and sore from the scorn of those above me; who am condemned to behold them shining in all the pomp and splendour of life; while I, through the injustice of the world, am left in obscurity to toil for a scanty subsistence?”—Accuse not the world, my brother. Imagine not, that it is entirely the injustice of the world which produces your unhappiness. The disease lies within yourself. It originates from your pride and self-conceit, joined with the false opinions you have allowed yourself to entertain of the distinctions of fortune. Those distinctions must take place in every established society. There must be inequality of ranks; and of course a diversity of outward appearance among men. But it is in the outward appearance that the diversity lies, far more than in what is intrinsic to happiness and well-being.—You *dwell among your own people*. In that rank where Providence had placed you, you are living among your friends and equals; and pursuing that train of life to which you have been bred. But you are eager and restless, till from this quiet obscurity you can rise to some higher elevation, to which you fancy yourself entitled.—Are you aware of the dangers and troubles that would await you there? Supposing you to be in some degree success-

ful, yet, with your new rank of life, would not new burdens begin to oppress you, and new and unknown cares to vex you?—How many rivals would you have to encounter? How many slanderers to decry you? How many enemies to combine in opposing you? What mortification would you endure on every disappointment you met with! And on every small step of advancement, what envy would still remain in looking up to those who continued above you? Till at last, tired with the vexations of competition, you should be forced to regret the day when discontent drove you away from *dwelling among your own people*.—Awake then, in time, from the dreams of ambition and vanity. Instead of aspiring beyond your proper level, bring down your mind to your state; lest, by aiming too high, you spend your life in a train of fruitless pursuits, and bring yourself at last to a state of entire insignificance and contempt.

Let it be farther considered, in order to show the folly of a discontented temper, that the more it is indulged, it disqualifies you the more from being freed from the ground of your discontent. First, you have reason to apprehend, that it will turn the displeasure of God, against you, and make him your enemy.—For, what have you to expect from that Providence towards which you are so sullen and unthankful; from that God, whose perfections you injure by your repining and accusing thoughts? How much is it in his power to render you ten times more unhappy than you are at present by taking away those remaining comforts, which, by your contempt of them, you show yourself unworthy to enjoy?—Next by your spleen and discontent, you are certain of bringing yourself into variance with the world as well with God. Such a temper is likely to create enemies; it can procure you no friends. Proud, jealous, and dissatisfied with those around you, you will, in return, be avoided, disliked, and looked upon by them with an evil eye; the discouragements from the world, of which you complain, will daily increase; while the humble, the cheerful, and contented, will on every occasion, get before you, and attract the good-will of all who can assist them.

SUCH being the mischiefs, such the guilt and the folly of indulging a discontented spirit, I shall now suggest some considerations which may assist us in checking it, and in reconciling our minds to the state in which it has pleased Providence to place us. Let us for this purpose, attend to three great objects; to God, to ourselves, and to the world around us.

FIRST, let us speak of God, of his perfections, and government of the world; from which, to every person of reflection who believes in God at all, there cannot but arise some cure to the discontents and griefs of the heart. For, had it been left

to ourselves what to devise or wish, in order to secure peace to us in every state, what could we have invented so effectual as the assurance of being under the government of an Almighty Ruler, whose conduct to his creatures can have no other object but their good and welfare?—Above all, and independent of all, He can have no temptation to injustice or partiality. Neither jealousy nor envy can dwell with the Supreme Being. He is a rival to none, he is an enemy to none, except to such as, by rebellion against his laws, seek enmity with him. He is equally above envying the greatest, or despising the meanest of his subjects.—His dispensations, it is true, are often dark and unaccountable to us; but we know the reason of this to be, that we see only a part of them, and are not yet able to comprehend the whole. This we well know, that we ourselves are often the very worst judges of what is good or ill for us in this life. We grasp at the present, without due regard to consequences: and whether these consequences are to carry the advantages we had promised ourselves, or be pregnant with future evils, is what we cannot foresee. Experience has taught us a thousand times, that God judges better for us than we judge for ourselves. Often have we seen that what we considered at the time as sore disappointment, has proved in the issue to be a merciful Providence; and that, if what we once eagerly wished for had been obtained, it would have been so far from making us happy, that it would have produced our ruin.—The reflection of Solomon, *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?*\* should often occur to every one who is given to discontent. Placed as we are, in the midst of so much ignorance with respect to the means of happiness, and at the same time under the government of a wise and gracious Being, who alone is able to effect our happiness, acquiescence in the disposal of our lot, is the only disposition that becomes us as rational creatures. To fret and repine at every disappointment of our wishes, is to discover the temper of froward children, not of men, far less of Christians. Christians, amidst all their grievances, have ever these promises to comfort them; that if they *cast their care upon God, he will care for them*; that out of evil he bringeth forth good; nay, that at last *he shall make all things work together for good to them who love him*.

In the second place, in order to correct discontent, let us attend to ourselves and our own state. Let us consider two things there; how little we deserve, and how much we enjoy. As to deserving in the sight of God, the great Disposer of our lot, we know that we have no claim. We are all sinners; who are so far from having a title to challenge favours as our due, that we

\* Eccles, vi. 12.

must acknowledge it to be of God's mercies that we are not consumed. As to deserving from the world, we are apt indeed sometimes to make high and unreasonable pretensions; yet, surely, very conceited we must be, if we be not disposed to admit, that there are many of at least equal merit with us, whose condition in the world is no better, perhaps much worse than ours, who yet make no complaints, whose discontents are not heard. How much splendid genius is buried in forgotten neglect and obscurity? How much real worth and merit is driven forth to suffer all the hardships of a stormy life, while we *dwell among our own people*?—Look into your state, my brethren, and before you give vent to peevishness, make a fair and just estimate of all the blessings you enjoy in comparison with others. You would willingly, I know, exchange your condition, in part, with many. You would gladly have the wealth of this man; you would have the high reputation and honour of another, the health, perhaps, and firm vigour of a third. But I ask, Who is there with whom you would wish to make a total exchange? to forego altogether your present self; and to be just what he is, in mind and in body, as well as in outward estate? If this be an exchange, which few, I apprehend, are willing to make, does not this argue, that each man, on the whole, is sufficiently pleased with himself; that there are, in every situation, certain comforts, and certain grounds of self complacency and satisfaction, which ought in reason, to be employed as remedies against discontent?

IN the last place, consider the state of the world around you.—You are not happy. You *dwell*, you admit, *among your own people*. But there, say you, “How many vexations do I occasionally experience? Sometimes distressed for want of health; sometimes disappointed in my plans, and straitened in my circumstances; at other times afflicted with domestic troubles; so that I am far from being as I would wish to be.”—Pray, my brother, who is there that lives in every respect just as he would wish to live? First, find out such a person; look through all conditions and ranks, and try if you can discover one who will tell you that he has no complaint or uneasiness whatever, before you allow yourself to repine at your present situation. Do you presume to indulge discontent, merely because you are included in the common lot; because you are not exempted from bearing your share of the common burden? What is human life to all, but a mixture of some scattered joys and pleasures, with various cares and troubles?

You have, perhaps, set your heart on some one thing, which if you could attain it, you insist, would put an end to all your complaints, and give you full contentment.—Vain man! will no experience teach you wisdom? Have you not had the same opinion before this, of some other object of your desire; and did

you not find that you was deceived in the enjoyment? Will you not then at last be persuaded that *all which cometh*, like all that is past, *is vanity*?—Vanity, believe it, is the indelible character imprinted on all human things. As far as happiness is to be found on earth, you must look for it, not in the world or the things of the world, but within yourselves, in your temper and your heart. Let the world change into one form or another as it will, it will be a vain world to the end; and you, to the end will be discontented. It cannot give you what you seek. *The sea saith, it is not in me; and the earth saith, it is not in me. Silver and gold are to no purpose weighed for the price of it.* The decree of the Almighty hath past, and cannot be reversed, that man should find his true contentment, under every condition, only in a good conscience and a well regulated mind, in a holy life, and the hope of heaven.—You call yourself a christian. Does not that name import that you consider yourself as a pilgrim and a passenger on earth; related in your expectations and hopes to a better world? Are you not ashamed to betray, by your discontent, a spirit so inconsistent with such hopes and expectations, and at the time when you profess to be looking towards the end of your journey, to shew so much uneasiness about all the little circumstances of accommodation by the way?—Live by faith, my brethren, and you will live above this world and its discouragements. Dwell with God, and with things divine and immortal, and you shall dwell with true wisdom. You will find nothing so great in worldly events, as either to elate or deject you. Resting upon a principle superior to the world, you will possess your spirits in peace, and will learn that great lesson of heavenly philosophy, *in whatever state you are, therewith to be content.*

## SERMON LXXIX.

### ON DRAWING NEAR TO GOD.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

---

*It is good for me to draw near to God.*—PSALM. lxxiii. 28.

IN this psalm the pious author describes himself as suffering a great conflict within his mind. His observation of the course of Providence, did not present to him such an order of things as was to have been expected from the justice and goodness of Heaven. The wicked appeared flourishing and triumphant, while the worthy are destitute and oppressed, and much disorder and darkness seemed to prevail in the course of human affairs. Hence his mind fluctuated for a while amidst doubts and fears. His trust in the divine administration was even so far shaken as to create a suspicion that in *vain he had cleansed his heart, and washed his hands in innocency*: till at last he *went into the sanctuary of God*, and was there taught to view the state of human things in a juster and truer light. He then saw the vanity of that earthly prosperity which bad men appear to enjoy; and the happy issue of all things at the last to the pious and good. He saw the divine presence ever surrounding them, and though with invisible guidance, yet with unerring hand, brings them in the end to glory. His mind returned to tranquillity; and, struck with compunction for his past errors, he rose into those high and memorable expressions of devotion, which we find in the verses preceding the Text. *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.* His fixed principle and



resolution, upon the whole, he declares in the words of the Text, *It is good for me to draw near to God*; words which will immediately occur to you as particularly suited to the solemn service in which we are to be engaged this day. In discoursing from them, I shall endeavour to show what is implied in *drawing near to God*; and what reason we have to agree with the Psalmist in judging this to be *good for us*.

To *draw near to God*, is an expression of awful and mysterious import; in explaining which, we have much reason to be sober and modest, and to guard with care against every enthusiastic excess; remembering always that, rise as high as we can, an immeasurable and infinite distance must ever remain between us and the Supreme Being. There are two senses in which we may be said to *draw near*, in such a degree as mortality admits, *to God*: either by the general course of a pious and virtuous life; or in solemn acts of immediate devotion.

I. By the practice of holiness and virtue throughout the general tenour of life, we may be said to *draw near to God*; for it is such an approach as we can make to the resemblance of his moral perfections. After the image of God, man was created. That image was defaced by our sin and apostacy. By a return to God and our duty, that image, through the intervention of our Saviour, is renewed upon the soul; man is said to be regenerated or born again, and is in some degree restored to that connection with God which blessed his primeval state. He who lives in the exercise of good affections, and in the regular discharge of the offices of virtue and piety, maintains, as far as his infirmity allows, conformity with the nature of that perfect Being, whose benevolence, whose purity and rectitude are conspicuous, both in his works and his ways.—Worldly and corrupt men, on the contrary, estrange themselves from all that is divine. They degrade their nature by unworthy pursuits, and are perpetually sinking in the scale of being. By sensuality they descend to the rank of the brute creation; by malignity, envy, and other bad passions, they connect themselves with devils and infernal spirits. Hence they are said in Scripture to be *alienated from the life of God*; to be *without God in the world*. Though in one sense God is ever near them, as he surrounds and encompasses them on all hands; yet, in a spiritual sense, they are farther removed from him than any distance of space can separate bodies from one another.—Whereas a virtuous man, whose pleasure it is to do good, and his study to preserve himself upright and pure, is in the course of constant approach towards celestial nature. He is the lover of order, the follower of that righteousness of which God is the author and inspirer. He accords with the great laws of the universe, and seconds the designs of its Almighty Go-

vernor. He is, if we may so speak, in unison with God. Hence piety and virtue are described in Scripture as friendship with God, as introducing us into his family, and rendering us *members of his household*. Strong expressions are used on this subject by the sacred writers. A good man is said *to dwell in God, and God in him*.\* *If a man love me*, says our Lord, *he will keep my words; and my Father will love him; and we will come, and make our abode with him*.†

THESE high and magnificent views of religion, as an approach to God, may easily satisfy us how much it must be *good for us to draw near to God*, in this sense of the expression. It is visibly the honour and dignity of man to resemble his Creator; and surely his chief happiness will be ever found to lie where his highest dignity and honour are found. *With God is the fountain of life*. With him reside complete beatitude and perfection; and from him are derived all the portions of happiness and comfort, which are any where to be found among the creatures he has made. In exact proportion, therefore, as they approach to, or deviate from him, must the happiness or misery of all rational creatures be. As light and heat flow from the sun as their centre, so bliss and joy flow from the Deity; and as with our distance from that glorious luminary darkness and cold increase; so, according as by alienation of nature we are removed from God, ruin and misery advance in the same degree upon the soul.

Now consider, my brethren, that there is one or other course which you must pursue. If it be not your study to *draw near to God*, by a religious and virtuous life, be assured that you are departing from him; for there is no middle course between sin and righteousness; and let every thinking being seriously reflect what is included in this state of being far from God, and cut off from every kindly influence that descends from Heaven. With shadows of pleasure, persons in this unhappy situation may be surrounded and amused; but shadows only, and not realities, they must be, as long as men have no connection with Him who is the origin of all good. Can the stream continue to flow when it is cut off from the fountain? Can the branch flourish when torn away from the stock which gave it nourishment? No more can dependent spirits be happy, when parted from all union with the Father of Spirits and the Fountain of Happiness.

A good man, who is always endeavouring to draw near to God, lives under the smiles of the Almighty. He knows that he is under the protection of that God towards whom he aspires. He can look up to him with pleasing hope; and trust that he shall receive illumination and aid in his progress to perfection.

\* 1 John, iii. 24.—iv. 13.

† John, xiv. 23.

His virtues may as yet be imperfect, and attended with many failings ; but his approach towards God is begun. The steps by which he draws near to him may be slow ; but that progress is commenced, which in a future state shall be more successfully carried on, and which shall continue to advance through all eternity. *They go on*, says the Psalmist, *from strength to strength ; every one of them approacheth before God in Zion.*\* Hence, by a very beautiful and instructive metaphor, the *path of the just*, is described in Scripture to be *as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*† It is the dawn of a glorious morning, which increases by degrees to meridian splendour ; and as the morning dawn, though dim and feeble, is nevertheless a ray of the same light which forms the brightness of noon-day, we are hereby taught to conceive, that the piety and virtue of good men now, is a degree of celestial nature already imparted to their souls, and differs from its perfection in a higher world, only as the twilight is inferior to noon. The path of the wicked man is directly the reverse of all this. Degraded by his vices, he is constantly declining more and more in a downward course. His path, instead of being as the shining light, is the dusk of evening begun : that darkness of the infernal regions to which his nature is tending, increases upon him gradually, till the shadows of night close upon his head at last, with endless and impenetrable gloom.—Thus fully is verified what the Psalmist had asserted in the verse preceding the text, *Lo ! they that are far from thee shall perish ;* while his own fixed sentiment he immediately declares—*but it is good for me to draw near to God.*—I proceed.

II. To consider the other sense in which we may be said to draw near to God ; that is, in acts of immediate devotion.

There are two ways by which these contribute to bring us near to God. The first is, by their strengthening in the soul that power of vital godliness and virtue, in which consists our chief resemblance to God ; for it is never to be forgotten that all our devotional exercises are subservient to this great end.—Herein consists their whole virtue and efficacy, that they purify and improve the soul, raise it above low passions, and thereby promote the elevation of the human nature towards the divine. When they are considered merely as external services, which we are obliged to perform, but to which we address ourselves with cold and backward hearts ; or when the glow of affection which they excite is merely momentary and soon forgotten, they cannot be held to have any influence in bringing us near to God. It is only when they are the service of the heart, when they are

\* Psalm, lxxiv. 7.

† Prov. iv. 18.

the genuine voice of the soul to God, when they serve to kindle those sacred aspirations which continue to breathe throughout the rest of life, that they assist us in rising towards heaven, and alliance with God.

When our acts of devotion are of this nature, they form the other sense in which the words of the text are to be understood. We therein *draw near to God*, as we enter into the most immediate intercourse with him, which the nature of our state admits. In one sense, we cannot be said to be nearer to God at any one time than another; as at all times his presence equally surrounds us: in the fields, as in the temple: in the midst of the world, as much as in the retirement of the closet. But when with serious and devout affections we address ourselves to God, in prayer, and praise, and solemn worship, we then bring home that divine presence to our feelings, and formally place ourselves in it. We may then be truly said to *draw near to God*; approaching to him through a great Mediator and Intercessor; sending up those prayers to which we are encouraged to believe that the Almighty is lending a gracious ear; resigning ourselves to his conduct, and offering up our souls to him; exercising, in short, all those acts of faith, love, and trust, which become dependent creatures, towards their Sovereign and Father.

This intellectual correspondence of the heart with our Maker and Redeemer, is termed, in the language of divines, communion with God. And, if there be truth in religion at all; if a Supreme Being exist, who is in any degree accessible to his creatures, and who is gracious to the good, it must be admitted to have a foundation in reason and truth. There must be just ground to think, that the worship of pure and holy hearts is acceptable to him; and the gospel gives us full reason to believe that the energy of his spirit is concerned in stirring up within them the sentiments of devotion.

At the same time it is incumbent on me to warn you, that the satisfaction which on such occasions we feel, must not be grounded merely on a belief which we allow ourselves to entertain, of some communication which we had received directly from God. In the warm and transporting moments of devotion there is always a hazard of our mistaking the exalted efforts of our own imagination, for supernatural impressions from Heaven. It is much safer to judge of the acceptance of our services, by an inference which we can warrantably draw from the state of our hearts and life, compared to God's written word. *To the law and the testimony* we must always have recourse in judging of our state; and then only the *testimony of God's spirit witnesseth with our spirits* that we are the children of God, when we can discern in ourselves those declared *fruits of the spirit*, which are

*love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance.\**

Carrying along with us this caution, it will be found that, on many accounts, it will be *good for us to draw near to God* in exercises of solemn devotion.

First, It is evidently *good for us*, to discharge those duties of worship, and to give proof of those pious affections, which are unquestionably due from us to our Heavenly Father. If we be wanting in these, we are clearly deficient in one essential part of religion. Morality without piety, constitutes a very imperfect character. It is neither stable in its foundation, nor universal in its influence; and gives us no ground to look for the rewards of those whose *prayers, together with their alms come up in memorial before God.*

But, besides the obligations from duty which we are laid under to such religious exercises, it can clearly be shown that they are in themselves good for us, on account of the improvement, the satisfaction, and comfort, they enable us to enjoy, in a devout elevation of the heart towards God and celestial objects.

When we reflect on the languor that attends the ordinary circulation of the little occupations of life; on the insipidity of many of its amusements; and the depression of spirits that follows after them; we cannot but be sensible that occasional intercourse with God and divine things, must furnish a comfortable relief to the mind. It is not, indeed, an intercourse for which we are at all times equal; but neither was the human mind formed to grovel at all times among low cares and objects. It has a demand for something higher and greater than what the common round of the world affords. Hence the extravagant and eccentric pursuits into which we sometimes deviate. We attempt some higher bliss than what we find here. But the attempt which is made by folly, can only be successfully executed by a wise and good man, in the elevation of his soul towards God. Some, indeed, are sunk so low in worldly gratifications, that nothing has any relish with them, but what either breathes the air of giddy dissipation, or tastes of the impure stream of sensual pleasure. But this vitiated taste, contracted by long corrupt habits, is unnatural in itself, and by proper discipline can be corrected and reformed. Let the mind be restored to its sound and natural state, and its relish for what is more great and noble, will return.

Besides the imperfection and emptiness of the ordinary pleasures of the world, many pains and distresses are always mingled with them. No more effectual relief from them can be found than that which may be enjoyed in drawing near to God.

\* Galat. v. 22.

Passions corrode the mind. Cares and anxieties fester in it. We are fretted by the ingratitude of friends ; soured by the calumnies of enemies ; harassed with the competition of rivals. The very bustle and agitation of the world, wear out and oppress the mind that longs for tranquillity. In religious retirement, and in those exercises of devotion that bring us near to God, we attain a pleasing region of calm and repose. There, worldly passions are silent ; worldly cares are hushed and forgotten. The mind retires as within itself : and remains alone with God. It is only afar off that the noise and disturbance of the world is heard, like the sound of a distant tumult.

By the perplexity of our worldly concerns, we may have been involved in trouble. By the death of our dearest friends, we may have been overwhelmed with sorrow. By the situation of public affairs, we may be alarmed with dangers that threaten our country. In all such situations is there any consolation equal to that which the devout man enjoys in drawing near to God ? He looks up to a Father and a Friend, in whom he can place his trust in every time of need. He hears a voice issuing from the divine sanctuary, which says, *Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee. Fear not, for I am with thee : be not dismayed, for I am thy God.* Comforted by such words, his mind regains tranquillity. Resting on the hope that the God whom he serves will never forsake him, he can dismiss from his thoughts the fears, the troubles, and wickedness of men, and compose his spirit to dwell among celestial things. Looking up to that blessed world where he expects to find his repose, he beholds no objects but what he can contemplate with delight, as great, peaceful, and serene. There, he beholds none of the agitations and turmoils of men ; no tumults, nor factions, nor wars ; no friends, who die and leave us : no ambitious men, who aspire to oppress : nor violent men, who attempt to destroy : nor fraudulent brethren, who, with a smiling countenance, cheat and deceive. In perfect contrast to the confusion of the earth, he beholds all things above, proceeding in the same perfect order with the heavenly bodies, which move in their orbs with smooth and steady course. He sees the river of life flowing continually from before the throne of God : and diffusing among the blessed inhabitants, *fulness of joy and pleasure for evermore.*

From such devout contemplations and hopes, arose that great delight which holy men of ancient times describe themselves to have felt in drawing near to God, and which they have expressed in language so vivid and glowing. *Blessed Oh Lord, is the man whom thou chooseth, and causeth to approach unto thee ; that he may dwell in thy courts, and be satisfied with the goodness of thy house and of thy holy place.—Oh God thou art my God, early will I seek thee. Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips*

*shall praise thee. I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.—Whom have I in Heaven, but thee?—And there is none upon earth that I desire, besides thee.\** When such language as this expresses the native sentiments of our hearts, we join ourselves in some measure to the angelical choir above, and anticipate the enjoyments of the blessed.

SOME may perhaps imagine that what has been said of the importance and the advantages of *drawing near to God*, approaches in some degree to mysticism and enthusiasm. I admit, that if religion were represented as consisting wholly of internal devout emotions, the representations of it would be imperfect and false. It is designed to be an active principle, regulating the conduct of life, and exerting itself in good works. But very ignorant he must be of human nature, who perceives not, that in order to produce such effects, it is of high importance to engage the affections and the heart on the side of virtue. It is not by reasonings addressed solely to the understanding, that men's characters are formed, or their general conduct actuated. If you wish to work any considerable effect on their life, you must bring over the affections and inclination to your side. You must not only shew them what is right and true, but make them feel what is desirable and good. If you attempt to make religion so very calm and rational, as to exclude from it all warmth of sentiment, all affectionate and devotional feelings, you will leave it in possession of small influence on conduct.—*My son, give me thy heart*, is the voice of God; and the voice of reason is, that according as the heart is affected and disposed, such will be the general character and conduct.

The application of the whole subject to the Holy Sacrament, which we are now to celebrate, is natural and obvious. No more solemn opportunity can be afforded us of drawing near to God, than what we there enjoy. All that is encouraging and comforting in christian faith is set before us, in this most effectual proof of God's mercy to mankind, giving up his Son to the death as a sacrifice for our sins. In celebrating the memorial of this great event, we are placed as under the immediate brightness of heavenly light, and under the warmest ray of divine love. If there be *any consolation in Christ, any fellowship of the Spirit*, any pleasing hope of eternal life and joy, it ought on such an occasion to be drawn forth, and deeply felt. Let us endeavour to kindle at the altar of the Lord, that sacred fire, which shall continue to diffuse its vivifying influence over our

\* Ps, lxxiii. 3—6. lxx. 4. lxxiii. 25.

hearts, when we go abroad into the world, and mingle again in the ordinary concerns of life. We are now to *draw near to God*. Let us draw near to him as our Father ; but with that reverence and humility, which becomes us on approaching to a Father *who is in Heaven*. Let us draw near through that great Mediator, by whose merits and intercession alone our services find acceptance at the Divine throne. *No man cometh unto the Father but through him, and none who cometh unto God by him, will be cast out.*



## SERMON LXXX.

### ON WISDOM IN RELIGIOUS CONDUCT.

---

*I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way.*—PSALM, ci. 2.

*WISDOM*, says Solomon, *excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.*\* In our present state, there is no situation in which we can, consistently with safety to ourselves, act thoughtlessly and at random. In whatever enterprise we engage, consideration and prudent thought are requisite to bring it to a good issue. On every occasion, there is a right and a wrong in conduct: there is one line of action which is likely to terminate according as we wish; and another, which, for certain, will land us in disappointment. If, in the ordinary transactions of life, we cannot prosper without a due exercise of wisdom and prudence, a higher degree of it is certainly necessary in those momentous parts of conduct which regard our everlasting welfare.

It is indeed confessed that in religious conduct, the fundamental and most important article is sincerity of heart, and goodness of intention. At the same time, let the intentions be ever so pure and sincere, they will be in hazard of falling into some wrong direction, unless they be properly guided by wisdom. Too many instances have appeared, of persons who, setting out in life with fair and virtuous purposes, have been so far bewildered by mistaken forms of goodness, as to be betrayed, first into errors, and then into vices and crimes. In order to act our parts with propriety and steadiness, there must be a due proportion of light in the understanding, as well as of warmth and goodness in the heart. The Psalmist was sensible of this when he declares in the text, his resolution, of not only *walking in a perfect*, or upright, *way*, but of *behaving himself wisely* in

\* Eccles. ii. 13.

that perfect way. Of the wisdom or prudence which is necessary to guide and support virtue, I propose to treat in this Discourse. I shall adventure with great plainness and simplicity of language, to propose some practical rules and directions for that purpose; which may be of service to persons, who with good dispositions and intentions, are beginning the career of life: and which may, perhaps, deserve attention from persons in every period of age.—I begin by observing,

I. THAT it is most necessary to lay down principles on which we are to form our general conduct. If we set out without principles of any kind, there can be no regular plan of life, nor any firmness in conduct. No person can know where they are to find us; nor on what behaviour of ours they are to depend. If the principles which we pitch upon for determining our course be of a variable nature; such, for instance, as popular opinion, reputation, or worldly interest; as these are often shifting and changing, they can impart no steadiness or consistency to conduct. Other principles there are, which some affect to adopt, founded on a sense of honour, on the beauty and excellency of virtue, and the dignity of human nature. But however fair these may be in appearance, they will be found ineffectual in many trying situations; unable to repress the violence of contending passions, or to support the heart under many discouragements and sorrows.

The only sure principles we can lay down for regulating our conduct, must be founded on the Christian religion, taken in its whole compass; not confined to the exercises of devotion, nor to the mere morality of social behaviour; but extending to the whole direction of our conduct towards God and towards man. The foundation is to be laid in faith in Christ as the Saviour of the world, through whose merits only we can look for final acceptance with God. We must evince the sincerity of our faith by good works; that is, by a faithful discharge of all the duties incumbent upon us in our several stations of life, continually looking up to Divine grace for assistance in the part assigned us to act; and trusting to that recompense of our present labours, which is promised to the virtuous in a future and better world.—Supposing, that having laid the foundation in such principles, we set forth to act a worthy and virtuous part; resolved that whatever may befall us, *till we die we will not remove our integrity from us; that our hearts shall not reproach us so long as we live.\** I proceed to advise,

II. THAT we begin with reforming whatever has been wrong in our former behaviour. This counsel is the more important, because too many, in their endeavours towards reformation, be-

\* Job, xxvii 5, 6.

gin with attempting some of the highest virtues, or aspiring to the most sublime performances of devotion, while they suffer their former accustomed evil habits to remain just as they were. This, I apprehend, is beginning at the wrong end. We must first, as the Prophet has exhorted *put away the evil of our doings from before God's eyes*; we must *cease to do evil, before we learn to do well*.<sup>\*</sup> All attempts at reformation of manners are vain, where this is not studied. Let us remember, that as long as the weeds and tares are allowed to remain in the ground, the soil is vitiated by their roots spreading deep and wide; and no good grain will have room to spring up.—Every man who inspects his own character, may learn that there are certain failings, to which, from constitution, circumstances, or long habit, he is prone; termed in Scripture the *sins that most easily beset us*. To discover these, must be his first care; and his first purpose, if he in truth wishes to become a good man, must be gradually to check, and finally to extirpate them, of whatever nature they are: whether, perhaps, habits of intemperance, unlawful indulgences of pleasure, indirect methods of acquiring gain, or propensities to malice, resentment, or envy. To overcome those evils when they have become inveterate, to pluck up those thorns by the roots, is perhaps the most difficult part of reformation, and therefore what we are generally the most backward to undertake. At the same time it is certain, that as long as, by this tender indulgence to favourite vices, men remain in a divided state between good resolutions and evil habits, they are so far from behaving *wisely in a perfect way*, that they can scarcely be accounted to have entered on that *perfect way*; irresolution will be spread over their conduct, and incoherence will mark their character.—In order to facilitate so necessary a step in the progress towards virtue, let me advise you,

III. To shut up, as much as possible, the avenues which lead to the return of former evil habits. Here is required that exercise of vigilance, self-distrust, and self-denial, which is so often recommended to us in Scripture. There is always some one side on which each of us is more vulnerable than on another. There are places, there are times, there are circumstances, which every man who knows any thing of himself at all, must know will prove the occasions of calling forth his latent frailties, and bringing him into some fatal snare. Then ought that caution of the Apostle to sound in his ears; *Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*.<sup>†</sup> Let him not only *walk circumspectly*, but rather altogether fly the dangerous ground: aware of the viper which lurks under the grass, ready to sting. But presumption to flatter ourselves, and to think that we are able

\* Isaiah, i. 16.

† 1 Corinth. x. 12.

to withstand every danger, is a weakness inherent in man. It is our accurate and humble estimation of our abilities that wisdom directs us to form our conduct. As in civil and political life he who believes himself equal to every task, and on all occasions comes forward with rash audacity, is likely to meet with many a humiliation and repulse; so, in moral behaviour, he who, trusting to the strength of his virtuous resolutions, exposes himself inconsiderately to every occasion of temptation, is sure of being often betrayed into evil.

All the various and dangerous avenues to vice, with which in great cities especially, modern life abounds, it cannot be expected that I am here to point out. Wealth, luxury, and idleness, are the great nourishers of every frailty; the great fomenters of every bad inclination and passion. To the children of Idleness, the haunts of Dissipation open many a wide and inviting gate by night and by day. When within those gates they carelessly enter, surrounded with loose companions, how often does it happen, that from the halls of pleasure and houses of gaming, they come forth, as from caverns of destruction, overwhelmed with losses and misery, and pining with bitter remorse?—Much does it concern every one who seeks to *walk wisely in a perfect way*, to be particularly guarded in the choice of his associates and companions. How often among the gay and the giddy will he meet with those who smile and betray! *He only who walketh with wise men, shall be wise; while the companions of fools shall be destroyed.*\* Observe the attention which, in the verses immediately following the text, King David declares himself to have given to this rule of conduct; *I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes; I will not know a wicked person. Mine eyes shall be on the faithful of the land. He that worketh deceit, shall not dwell within my house. He that telleth lies shall not tarry in my presence.* Such was the wisdom that assisted him to continue in a perfect way.—This wisdom requires farther,

IV. THAT consistency and uniformity be preserved in character; that not by pieces and corners only we study goodness, but that we carry one line of regular virtue through our whole conduct. Without this extensive regulation of behaviour, we can never hold on successfully in a perfect way. Almost all men, even the loose and profligate, lay claim to some one virtue or other, and value themselves on some good moral disposition, which they boast of possessing. It is in vain, therefore, that we rest our character on one or a few estimable qualities, which we imagine ourselves to possess in a high degree, while in other points of virtue we are relaxed and deficient. True virtue must form one complete and entire system. All its parts are connee-

\* Prov. xiii. 20.

ted ; piety with morality, charity with justice, benevolence with temperance and fortitude. If any of these parts be wanting, the fabric becomes disjointed ; the adverse parts of character correspond not to each other, nor form into one whole. It is only when we *have respect unto all God's commandments*, as the Psalmist speaks, that we have reason *not to be ashamed*.

The apology for many of those breaches of consistency is always at hand, that the transgression is small, and can easily be repaired on a future occasion ; and small sins, we imagine, may be compensated by great and distinguished virtues. But no seduction is more dangerous, than this distinction which men are so ready to make between great and small sins. Nothing is more difficult, than to draw the line of this distinction with any warrantable precision. Wherever inclination gives a strong bias to any indulgence, we may be assured that we shall be always misled in measuring the quantity of guilt. No sin is to be accounted small, by which the dictate of conscience is counteracted, and its authority is weakened and impaired. It may soon draw consequences after it, which will affect our whole conduct. Supposing the matter of these transgressions to be ever so small in its own nature, yet the moral characters of men become stained and bloated by their frequent accumulations ; just as many small ulcers, when allowed to form and spread, will grow by degrees into a great disease.—At the same time, when I thus advise you to study entire and consistent virtue, and to guard strictly against small transgressions, let me warn you,

V. AGAINST unnecessary austerity, as forming any part of religious wisdom. This is the meaning of the precept of Solomon, *Be not righteous overmuch : neither make thyself over-wise ; why shouldst thou destroy thyself ?\** Too strict and scrupulous indeed, we cannot be in our adherence to what is matter of clear duty. Every dictate of conscience is to be held sacred, and to be obeyed without reserve. But wisdom requires that we study to have conscience properly enlightened with respect to what really belongs to duty, or infers sin. We must distinguish with care the everlasting commandments of God, from the superstitious fancies and dictates of men. We must never overload conscience with what is frivolous and unnecessary, nor exhaust on trifles, that zeal which ought to be reserved for the weightier matters of the law. In all ages it has been the great characteristic of false pretenders to piety and religion, to arrogate to themselves uncommon sanctity, by affected strictness and severity of manners ; paying tithes, like the Pharisees of old, of mint, anise and cummin, while they overlook righteousness, judgment, and mercy. That religion which is connected with true wisdom, leads

\* Eccles. vii. 16.

to a very different spirit. It will teach us to be neither rigid in trifles, nor relaxed in essentials; not to aim at impracticable heights, nor to fall below the standard of attainable duty; never to make ostentation of our righteousness, nor to set ourselves up as patterns and standards to others, but to be gentle and unassuming; without harshness in our manners, or severity in our censures, when others depart in some particulars from our mode of thinking on religious subjects.

At the same time, we are to remember that, in order to avoid austerity, it by no means follows that we should run into an unlimited compliance with the manners of others around us.— This is a danger to which they are often exposed, whose tempers are mild, and whose manners are condescending. In that mixed and various intercourse, which the present state of society forces upon us, few things, indeed, are more difficult, than to ascertain the precise degree of compliance with the world which virtue allows. To preserve a just medium between a formal austerity on the one hand, and that weak and tame facility on the other, which betrays men into many vices, is one of the most important and arduous exercises of religious wisdom. A manly steadiness of conduct, is the object which we are always to keep in view; studying to unite gentleness of manners with firmness of principle, affable behaviour with untainted integrity.

VI. IN order to walk wisely in a perfect way, it is of importance that we study propriety in our actions and general behaviour. There are few precise rules of conduct that can be applied alike to all men. In some of the fundamental virtues indeed, no circumstance can admit of the least variation. There are no situations, for instance, in which truth, justice, and humanity, are not required equally from all. But, in a great number of the duties of life, the manner of discharging them must vary, according to the different ages, characters, and fortunes of men. To suit our behaviour to each of these, to judge of the conduct which is most decent, and becoming in our situation is a material part of wisdom. Without this attention to propriety, virtue will lose much of its grace and efficacy; nay, good dispositions may degenerate into mere weaknesses and follies. The behaviour, for instance, which would be engaging in youth, is unsuitable to advanced years. What is innocent gaiety in the one, becomes culpable levity in the other: and to assume in youth, that authority and dignity to which years only give any title, is impertinent affectation. In like manner, to the different ranks of men in society, there belongs a different strain of manners. Whatever is either above or below that line of life in which Providence has placed us, hurts every impartial observer, and suits not the propriety of virtue. What is proper

dignity in one station, may, in another, be presumptuous arrogance; and while suitable dependence belongs to those of inferior rank, it ought not to sink into a degrading servility. With a change in the situation of our fortunes, our duties obviously change. What was commendable frugality is one condition, may become sordid parsimony as our estate rises; and the generosity required of the affluent, turns into extravagance and injustice when our circumstances are impaired.—In all those attentions to propriety, some regard will, of course, be had to the opinions which the world forms of us. No man has a title to dispise altogether what the world thinks, and what it expects from him. But this regard to the sentiments of others, must never go so far as to encroach on what a man's own conscience tells him, it is his duty either to do, or to forbear doing. In the scale by which we measure the propriety of our conduct, the opinion of the world must never be the preponderating weight.—Let me recommend,

VII. THE observance of order and regularity in the whole of conduct.\* This may, at first appearance, seem an article of inferior importance, and hardly deserving to be ranked among moral duties. But I am persuaded that it is more nearly connected with virtue, than many persons imagine; and that it maintains an important place in that wisdom which directs a perfect way. If ever you mean to carry a consistent line of virtue throughout your conduct, you must allot to every transaction its place and its season. Hurry and tumult, disorder and confusion, are both the characteristics of vice and the parents of it. Let your time be regularly distributed, and all your affairs be arranged with propriety, in method and train. Thus, and thus only, can you be masters of yourselves; your time and your life will be your own; and what is serious and important, will not be justled out of its place, by that crowd of inferior cares, which are for ever pressing on the disorderly, and frustrating the plans which they had formed for the wise and proper regulation of life.—Consider too, that, if order be not studied, there can be no prudent economy in the management of your fortune and worldly affairs; and economy, be assured, is a great guardian of all the private and domestic virtues. When order and economy are neglected, you are in hazard of being first involved in distresses, and then inveigled into crimes; whereas, under the direction of regular conduct, both your worldly and your religious concerns will be more in the course of prospering.—I have now only to add,

VIII THAT we should give attention to all the auxiliary means which religion offers for assisting and guiding us to walk

\* Vide on this subject, Sermon XVI.

wisely in a perfect way. These open a large field to the care of every good man. We must always remember that virtue is not a plant which will spontaneously grow up and flourish in the human heart. The soil is far from being so favourable to it; many shoots of an adverse nature are ever springing up, and much preparation and culture are required for cherishing the good seed, and raising it to full maturity.—Among the means for this purpose, let me first mention the serious reading of the holy Scripture. That sacred book, as the standard of our belief and practice, claims on every account, our frequent perusal. In the New Testament, the brightest display of our Lord's energetic example, joined with his simple, affecting, and instructive discourses, illustrated by the writings of his inspired followers: in the Old Testament, the variety of matter, the ardent glow of devotion in some parts, and the mysterious sublimity of others; all conspire to affect the mind with serious and solemn emotions. Passages impressed on the memory from those sacred volumes, have often, from their recurrence, had a happy effect. In our early years, most of us were accustomed to look with respect upon those venerable records; and woe be to them, who, looking back upon the days of their father's house, can trample with scorn on the memory of those whose pious cares were employed in forming them to good principles, and teaching them to reverence the word of God!—Let me next recommend a serious regard to all the established means of religious instruction; such as, attending regularly the preaching of the word, partaking frequently of the Holy Sacrament, and preserving a sacred reverence for the Lord's day. Whenever all regard to the Lord's day becomes abolished; when on it we are allowed to mingle without any distinction in our common affairs, and even in our ordinary diversions and amusements, we may account this a certain symptom of declining virtue, and of approaching general immorality. We have beheld in a neighbouring kingdom, how fatally it proved the forerunner of an entire dissolution both of moral and civil order in society. Whatever disregard certain modern refiners of morality may attempt to throw on all the instituted means of public religion, assuredly they must, in their lowest view, be considered as the outguards and fences of virtuous conduct; and even in this view must deserve the esteem and respect of all good men. We know and are often enough told, that the *form of godliness* may subsist without the *power* of it. But depend upon it, wherever the *form of godliness* is entirely gone, the ruin of its *power* is not far off. Whoever has studied the human mind, may soon be satisfied of this truth.

Besides attention to the public means of religious improvement, much will depend on our own private exercises of devo-



tion and serious thought. Prayer, in particular, operates to our high advantage, both by the immediate assistance which we may hope it will procure from Him who is the author and inspirer of virtue, and by its native influence in softening, purifying, and exalting the heart. In vain would he attempt to behave himself wisely in a perfect way, who looks not frequently up to God for grace and aid; and who would presumptuously attempt to separate moral virtue from devotion, its natural and original ally. Besides the exercises of religious worship, both public and private, seasonable returns of retirement from the world, of calm recollection and serious thought, are most important auxiliaries to virtue. He who is without intermission engaged in the bustle of society and worldly occupation, becomes incapable of exercising that discipline over himself, and giving that attention to his temper and character which virtue requires. *Commune with your own hearts on your bed, and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord.\**

By the observance of such rules and maxims as have been now pointed out, it may be hoped that, through divine grace, we may be enabled to *behave ourselves wisely in a perfect way*, until, in the end, we receive the reward of such behaviour. The wisdom here spoken of, as conjoined with virtue, is that *wisdom from above*, which is appointed by God to enlighten and guide the course of integrity. It opens to us that *path of the just*, which is now as *the shining light*, and which will *shine more and more until the perfect day*.

\* Psalm. iv. 4, 5,

## SERMON LXXXI.

ON THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL, AND A FUTURE STATE.

---

*For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.—2 CORINTHIANS, v. 1.*

THIS passage presents to us in one view the nature of our present earthly state, and the future object of the Christian's hope. The style is figurative; but the figures employed are both obvious and expressive. The body is represented as a house inhabited by the soul, or the thinking part of man. But it is an *earthly house, a tabernacle* erected only for passing accommodation, and *to be dissolved*; to which is to succeed the future dwelling of the just in *a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*. Here then are three great objects presented to our consideration. First, the nature of our present condition. Secondly, that succeeding state which is the object of good men's hope. Thirdly, the certain foundation of their hope; *we know, that if our earthly house be dissolved, we have a building of God*.

I. THE text gives a full description of our present embodied state; as an *earthly house, an earthly house of this tabernacle*, and a tabernacle, which is to be *dissolved*.

We dwell in an *earthly house*. Within this cottage of earth is lodged that spiritual, immortal substance, into which God breathed the breath of life. So we are elsewhere said in Scripture, to have *our foundation in the dust*, and to *dwell in houses of clay*.—During its continuance in this humble abode, the soul may be justly considered as confined and imprisoned. It is restrained from the full exertion of its powers by many obstructions. It can perceive and act only by very imperfect organs. It looks

abroad as through the windows of the senses; and beholds truth as *through a glass darkly*. It is beset with a numerous train of temptations to evil, which arise from bodily appetites. It is obliged to sympathize with the body in its wants; and is depressed with infirmities not its own. For it suffers from the frailty of those materials of which its earthly house is compacted. It languishes and droops, along with the body; is wounded by its pains; and the slightest discomposure of bodily organs is sufficient to derange some of the highest operations of the soul.

All these circumstances bear the marks of a fallen and degraded state of human nature. The mansion in which the soul is lodged, corresponds so little with the powers and capacities of a rational immortal spirit, as gives us reason to think that the souls of good men were not designed to remain always thus confined. Such a state was calculated for answering the ends proposed by our condition of trial and probation in this life; but was not intended to be lasting and final. Accordingly, the Apostle in his description, calls it the *earthly house of this tabernacle*; alluding to a wayfaring or sojourning state, where tabernacles or tents are occasionally erected for the accommodation of passengers. The same metaphor is here made use of which is employed in several other passages of Scripture, where we are said to be *strangers and sojourners on earth before God, as were all our fathers*. This earth may be compared to a wide field spread with tents, where troops of pilgrims appear in succession and pass away. They enter for a little into the tents prepared for them; and remain there to undergo their appointed probation. When that is finished, their tents are taken down, and they retire to make way for others who come forward in their allotted order. Thus *one generation passeth away, and another generation cometh*; and the *earthly house* is to all no other than the *house of their pilgrimage*.\*

The *earthly house of this tabernacle*, the Apostle, proceeding in his description, tells us, is *to be dissolved*. Close as the union between the soul and body now appears to be, it is no more than a temporary union. It subsists only during the continuance of a tabernacle of dust, which, by its nature is tending towards ruin. The *dust must soon return to the dust, and the spirit to God who gave it*.—The dissolution of the *earthly house of this tabernacle*, is an event full of dismay to wicked men. Beyond that period they see nothing but a dark unknown, which as far as they can discern, is peopled with objects full of terror; even to the just, this dissolution is a serious and awful event. Providence has wisely appointed that, burdened as our present state is with

\* Psalm cxix. 54.

various ills and frailties, we should, however, be naturally attached to it. Its final close is always attended with several melancholy ideas.—Thou who now flourishes most in health and strength, must then have thy head laid low. From thy closing eyes the light of the sun shall disappear for ever. That light shall continue to shine, the seasons to return, and the earth to flourish; but to thee no more, separated from the dwellings of men, and cut off from all thou wert accustomed to love, as though thou hadst never been.—Such is the fate of man considered merely as mortal; as dwelling in an earthly house which is about to be dissolved. The consolatory corrective of those humbling ideas, the ray that is to dissipate this gloom, we behold in the subsequent part of the text; that when this earthly house is dissolved, there is prepared for the righteous *a building of God, an house not made with hands*. But before proceeding to this part of the subject, let us pause for a little, and make some reflections on what has been already said.

- LET the distinction between the soul and the body, which is so clearly marked in the text, be deeply imprinted on our minds. Few things in religion or morals are entitled to make a stronger impression than this distinction; and yet, with the bulk of men the impression it makes appears to be slight. They seem to think and act as if they consisted of no more than mere flesh and blood, and had no other concerns than what respect their embodied state. If their health be firm, if their senses be gratified, and their appetites, indulged all is well with them. Is not this to forget that the body is no more than an *earthly house* or *tabernacle* of the soul? The soul, that thinking part which they feel within them, and which it is impossible for them to confound with their flesh or their bones, is certainly far nobler than the tenement of clay which it inhabits. The soul is the principle of all life, and knowledge, and action. The body is no more than its instrument, or organ; and as much nobler as is the part which belongs to him who employs an instrument, than to the instrument which is employed, so much is the soul of greater dignity than the body. The one is only a frail and perishable machine; the other survives its ruin, and lives for ever.—During the time that the union continues between those two very different parts of our frame, I by no means say that it is incumbent upon us to disregard all that relates to the body. It is not possible, nor though it were possible, would it be requisite or fit, for a man to act as if he were pure immaterial spirit. This is what the condition and laws of our nature permit not.—But must not the greatest sensualist admit, that if the soul be the chief part of man, it must have interests of its own, which require to be carefully attended to? Can he imagine that he truly consults either his interest or his pleasure, if he employs the thinking

part of his nature only to serve, and to minister to the bodily part? Must not this infer, not merely a degradation of the superior part, but an entire perversion of that whole constitution of nature which our Maker hath given us? Be assured, my brethren, that the soul hath a health and a sickness, hath pleasures and pains of its own, quite distinct from those of the body, and which have a powerful influence on the happiness or misery of man. He who pays no attention to these, and neglects all care of preserving the health and soundness of his soul, is not only preparing final misery for himself when he shall enter into a disembodied state, but is laying, even for his present state, the foundation of many a bitter distress. By folly and guilt he is *wounding his spirit*. Its wounds will often bleed, when his body appears sound, and will give rise to inward pangs, which no animal comforts shall be able to assuage or heal.

When we impress our minds with a sense of this important distinction between the body and the soul, let us not forget, that closely united as they now are in our frame, their union is soon to terminate. *The earthly house of this tabernacle is to be dissolved*; but the soul which inhabits it remains. Let us therefore dwell in our earthly house with the sentiments of those who know they are about to dislodge. The endowments and improvements of the soul are the only possessions on which we can reckon as continuing to be our own. On every possession which belongs to our bodily estate, we ought to view this inscription as written by God; “This is an earthly house which is tottering to its fall; This is a tabernacle which is about to be taken down.”—Let us with pleasure turn our thoughts towards those higher prospects that are set before us, when this change shall have taken place in the human condition; which naturally brings us to the

II<sup>d</sup> Head of discourse,—the great object of the hope of good men in a succeeding state. *The earthly house* is contrasted by the Apostle with a *building of God: an house not made with hands*; and *the tabernacle which is to be dissolved*, with a *house eternal in the heavens*.

The expressions here employed to signify what is promised to the righteous, *a building of God, an house not made with hands*, are expressions of mysterious import. They suggest to us things which we cannot now conceive, far less describe. Into that house which is above, those habitations of eternity, no living man has entered, to explore them, and to report to us tidings of what he there beheld. A sacred veil conceals the mansions of glory. But, in general, these expressions of the text plainly import that the spirits of good men shall, upon death, be translated from an imperfect to a glorious state. Whether we explain *the building of God, the house not made with hands* to signify

the incorruptible bodies which the just shall animate at the resurrection, or the habitations of celestial glory into which they enter, they are terms which convey ideas of high magnificence and felicity. This earth on which we dwell, is no more than an exterior region of the great kingdom of God. It is but an entrance, through which, after suitable preparation, we pass into the palace of an Almighty sovereign. Admitted there, we may hope to behold far greater objects than we can now behold; and to enjoy in perfection those pleasures which we here view from afar, and pursue in vain. Such degrees of pleasure are allowed us at present as our state admits. But a state of trial required that pains should be intermixed with our pleasures, and that infirmity and distress should often be felt. The remains of our fall appear every where in our condition. The ruins of human nature present themselves on all hands. But *when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.* With the fall of the earthly house, all its rotten and corruptible materials shall disappear. *It is sown in corruption,* says the Apostle, speaking of the happy change made upon good men at the resurrection, *it is raised in corruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural, it is raised a spiritual body;—for this corruptible shall put an incurruption, and this mortal put on immortality.\**—In that house not made with hands, that building of God, we have every reason to believe that there will be no room for such guests to intrude as care or sorrow. Nothing can be admitted to enter there, but what contributes to the felicity of those whom the Almighty hath allowed to dwell in his presence, and to *behold his face in righteousness.*

Besides the glory and perfection of his future state, the text suggests its permanency. This house *not made with hands, is a house eternal in the heavens.* The tabernacle which we now inhabit, is every moment liable to fall: above is the fixed mansion, the seat of perpetual rest. Beyond doubt, the certain prospect of death renders every thing inconsiderable which we here possess. Every enjoyment is saddened, when we think of its end approaching. We become sensible that we are always building on sand, never on a rock. Fluctuation and change characterise all that is around us; and at the moment when our attachment to any persons or objects is become the strongest, they are beginning to slide away from our hold. But in the mansions above, alteration and decay are unknown. Every thing there continues in a steady course. No schemes are there begun, and left unfinished; no pleasing connexions just formed, and then broken off. The treasures possessed there shall never

\* 1 Corinth. xv. 42—53.

be diminished; the friends we enjoy there shall never die, and leave us to mourn. In those celestial regions, shines the sun that never sets; the calm reigns, which is never disturbed; the river of life flows with a stream, which is always unruffled in its course.

Such are the prospects, imperfectly as we can now conceive them, which are set forth to good men in a future world. But how, it may be asked, shall we be satisfied that such prospects are not mere illusions with which our fancy flatters us. Upon what foundations rests this mighty edifice of hope, which the Apostle here rears up for the consolation of Christians, and of which he speaks so confidently as to say, *We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God?*—To enquire into this was the

III<sup>d</sup> Proposed Head of Discourse, to which we now proceed. And as the subject is in itself so important, and so pleasing to all good men, I shall take a view of the different kinds of evidence upon which our faith of a happy immortality is grounded.

We must observe in the first place, that the dissolution of the earthly tabernacle at death, affords no ground for thinking that the soul at the same time perishes, or is extinguished. I begin with this observation, because the strongest prejudices against the soul's immortality, arise from what is sometimes found to happen at that period. The soul and the body are at present united by the closest sympathy. When one suffers, the other is affected. Both seem to grow up together to the maturity of their powers; and together both seem often to decay. Such a shock is apparently suffered by the soul at death, as at first view might lead us to suspect that it was sharing the same fate with the body. Notwithstanding this, there are clear proofs that the body and the soul, though at present closely connected by divine appointment with one another, are however, substances of different and dissimilar natures. Matter, of which the body is composed, is as substance altogether dead and passive, and cannot be put in motion without some external impulse. Whereas, the soul hath within itself a principle of motion, activity, and life. Between the laws of matter, and the action of thought, there is so little resemblance, or rather so much opposition, that mankind in general have agreed in holding the soul to be an immaterial substance; that is, a substance the nature of which we cannot explain or define farther than that it is a substance quite distinct from matter. This being once admitted, it clearly follows, that since thought depends not on matter, from the dissolution of the material part we have no ground to infer the destruction of the thinking part of man. As long as by the ordination of the Creator these different substances remain uni-

ted, there is no wonder that the one should suffer from the disorder or indisposition of the other.

It is so far from following that the soul must cease to act on the dissolution of the body, that it seems rather to follow, that it will then act in a more perfect manner. In its present habitation, it is plainly limited and confined in its operations. When it is let loose from that earthly house, it is brought forth into greater liberty. To illustrate this by an instance which may be conceived as analogous; let us suppose a person shut up in an apartment, where he saw light only through some small windows. If these windows were foul or dimmed, he would see less; if they were altogether darkened, he could see none at all. But where he let out from this confinement into the open air, he would be so far from being deprived of sight, that though at first overpowered by a sudden glare, he would soon see around him much more completely than before. The senses are as so many windows or apertures, through which the soul at present exercises its powers of perception. If the senses are disordered the powers of the soul will be obstructed. But once separated from its earthly tenement, the soul will then exercise its powers without obstruction; will act with greater liberty, and in a wider sphere.—I admit this argument only goes as far as to show, that although the body perish, there remains with the soul a capacity for separate existence. Whether that existence shall be actually continued to it after death, must depend on the will of Him who gave it life, and who certainly at his pleasure can take that life away. It is necessary, therefore, to enquire into what we have any reason to believe, may be the intention of our Creator concerning a future life.

I ARGUE then, in the next place, that if the soul were to perish when the body dies, the state of man would be altogether unsuitable to the wisdom and perfection of the Author of his being. Man would be the only creature that would seem to have been made in vain. All the other works of God are contrived to answer exactly the purposes for which they were made. They are either incapable of knowledge at all; or, they know nothing higher than the state in which they are placed. Their powers are perfectly suited and adjusted to their condition.—But it is not so with man. He has every appearance of being framed for something higher and greater than what he here attains. He sees the narrow bounds within which he is here confined; knows and laments all the imperfections of his present state. His thirst for knowledge, his desires of happiness, all stretch beyond his earthly station. He searches in vain for adequate objects to gratify him. His nature is perpetually tending and aspiring towards the enjoyment of some more complete felicity than this world can afford. In the midst of all his re-



searches and aspirations, he is suddenly cut off. He is but of yesterday, and to-morrow is gone. Often in the entrance, often in the bloom of life, when he had just begun to act his part, and to expand his powers, darkness is made to cover him.—Can we believe, that when this period is come, all is finally over with the best and worthiest of mankind? Endowed with so noble an apparatus of rational powers, taught to form high views and enlarged desires, were they brought forth for no other purpose, than to breathe this gross and impure air for a short space, and then to be cut off from all existence? All his other works, God hath made in *weight, number, and measure*; the hand of the Almighty artificer every where appears. But on man, his chief work here below, he would, upon this supposition, appear to have bestowed no attention; and after having erected a stately palace in this universe, framed with so much magnificence, and decorated with so much beauty, to have introduced man, in the guise of a neglected wanderer to become its inhabitant.

Let us farther consider the confusion and promiscuous distribution of good and evil in this life. The enjoyments of the world, such as they are, are far from being always bestowed on the virtuous and the worthy. On the contrary, the bitterest portion is often their lot. In the midst of infirmities, diseases, and sorrows, they are left to drag their life, while ease and affluence are allowed the ungodly.—I must ask, if such an arrangement of things, owing to the ordination, or, at least, to the permission of Providence, be consonant to any ideas we can form of the wisdom and goodness of a Supreme Ruler, on the supposition of there being no future state?—But as soon as the immortality of the soul, and a state of future retribution are established, all difficulties vanish; the mystery is unravelled; supreme wisdom, justice, and goodness are discovered to be only concealed for a little while behind the curtain. If that curtain were never to be withdrawn and immortality never to appear, the ways of God would be utterly inexplicable to man. We would be obliged to conclude that either a God did not exist; or, though he existed, that he was not possessed of such perfections as we now ascribe to him, if when a worthy and pious man had spent his whole life in virtuous deeds, and perhaps had died a martyr to the cause of religion and truth; he should, after long, and severe sufferings, perish finally, unrewarded and forgotten; no attention shown to him by the Almighty; no *building of God* erected for him; no *house eternal* prepared in the Heavens!

THESE reasonings are much strengthened by the belief that has ever prevailed among all mankind, of the soul's immortality. It is not an opinion that took its rise from the thin-spun speculations of some abstract philosophers. Never has any nation been discovered on the face of the earth so rude and barbarous, that

in midst of their wildest superstitions there was not cherished among them some expectation of a state after death, in which the virtuous were to enjoy happiness. So universal a consent in this belief, affords just ground to ascribe it to some innate principle implanted by God in the human breast. Had it no foundation in truth, we must suppose that the Creator found it necessary for the purposes of his government, to carry on a principle of universal deception among his rational subjects. Many of the strongest passions of our nature are made to have a clear reference to a future existence of the soul. The love of fame, the ardent concern which so often prevails about futurity, all allude to somewhat in which men suppose themselves to be personally concerned after death. The consciences both of the good and the bad, bear witness to a world that is to come. Seldom do men leave this world without some fears or hopes respecting it; some secret anticipations and presages of what is hereafter to befall them.

But though the reasonings which have been adduced to prove the immortality of the soul and a future state, are certainly of great weight, yet reasonings still they are, and no more, and in every human reasoning, suspicions may arise of some fallacy or error. In a point so momentous to us, as our existence after death, we never could, with absolute certainty and full satisfaction, have rested on any evidence except what was confirmed by the declaration of God himself.—For many and high blessings we are indebted to the Christian revelation; for none more than for its having *brought life and immortality to light*. The revelations made by God to the world in early ages, gave the first openings to this great article of faith and hope. In future periods the light dawned more and more; but it was not until the sun of righteousness arose by the appearance of Christ on earth, that the great discovery was completed. Then, indeed, were made known the *city of the living God, the new Jerusalem above, the mansions prepared for the spirits of just men made perfect*. Nor was a state of future felicity only proclaimed by Christ and his apostles to good men, but was represented as purchased for them by the death of their Redeemer. *I give, he was authorised to say, unto my sheep eternal life. In my father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you.*\* Accordingly, he lay down in the grave; rose as the *first fruits of them that slept*; and ascending into Heaven, entered there within the veil, as the *forerunner* of his followers, to assure them of all being friendly and well disposed towards them in those upper regions. All therefore who live and die in the faith and obedience of Jesus, are entitled to say with the Apostle, *we know*; not only we hope and

\* John, x. 28.—xiv. 3.

we reason, but *we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens.*

THE first and most natural improvement of all that has been said, is to produce in our hearts the most lasting gratitude, love and reverence, towards that great Benefactor of mankind, who not only hath made known and published the blessings of a future state to the righteous, but by his great undertaking for their redemption hath erected in their behalf the *house eternal in the heavens.*—The next improvement we should make, is to conduct our own life and behaviour as becomes those who have an interest in this happiness and this hope. From such persons assuredly is to be expected a pure, correct, and dignified behaviour in every situation; not a contempt of the employments, nor a renunciation of all the comforts of their present life. Opinions that produce such effects are connected only with the spirit of superstition and false religion. But to them it belongs, in midst of the affairs, enticements and temptations of the world, to regulate their conduct as becomes the heirs of a divine inheritance; never debasing themselves among what is mean, nor defiling themselves with what is corrupt in the present state; but serving God with that fidelity, and behaving to men with that steady magnanimity of virtue, that generous beneficence and humanity which suits immortal beings, who are aspiring to rise in a future state to the perfection of their nature, in the presence of God.

## SERMON LXXXII.

ON OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD.

---

*Be not overcome of evil ; but overcome evil with good.*

ROMANS, xii. 21.

IN this world, we all know that we must reckon upon a mixture of goods and evils. Some of the evils are owing to the appointment of Providence in this state of trial ; many of them are the fruits of our own guilt and misconduct. The goods and the evils of our state are so blended, as often to render the whole of human life a struggle between them. We have to contend both with the evils of fortune, and with the evils of our own depravity ; and it is only he who can in some measure overcome both, that is to be esteemed the wise, the virtuous, and the happy man. At the same time amidst the evils of different kinds which assault us, there is a principle of good, derived from heaven, by which we may hope to acquire strength, and through Divine assistance be enabled to overcome the evils of our state. This is the subject of the exhortation in the text, *Be not overcome of evil ; but overcome evil with good.* Taken in its most extensive sense, as respecting the different kinds of evil which we have to overcome, the exhortation may be understood to comprise the three following particulars. In the first place, Be not overcome by the injuries you meet with in the world, so as to pursue revenge. Secondly, Be not overcome by the disasters of the world, so as to sink into despair. Thirdly, Be not overcome by the evil examples of the world, so as to follow them into sin. But in all these cases, *overcome evil with good.* Overcome injuries by forgiveness. Overcome disasters by fortitude. Overcome evil examples, by firmness of principle.

I. BE not overcome by the injuries you meet with in the world, so as to pursue revenge. It appears from the context

that this was the primary object which the Apostle had in his view in this exhortation. He refers to the injuries which the primitive Christians were constantly suffering from their persecutors. Instead of being so much overcome by these as to be intent on revenge, his exhortation in the verses preceding the text is, *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good.* But it is not in times only of persecution and general distress, that this exhortation is needful. We must in every state of society reckon upon meeting with unreasonable men, and encountering their bad usage. This is one of the evils inseparable from our present state. No station is so high, no worth so distinguished, no innocence so inoffensive, as to secure us entirely against it. Sometimes the violence of enemies, sometimes the ingratitude of friends will ruffle our spirits. Where we think that we have merited praise, we will be in hazard of meeting reproach. Envy will rise unprovoked; and calumny, from its secret place, will dart its envenomed shafts against the most deserving. Such is the consequence of the present depravity of our nature, and of the disordered state in which human affairs lie.—The fondness of self-love is always apt to amuse us with too flattering prospects of what life is to produce for us, beyond what it produces for others. Hence our impatience and irritation upon every injury we suffer; as if some new and unheard-of thing had befallen us; and as if we alone were privileged to pass through the world, untouched by any wrong. Whereas, if we were disciplined to think of the world, and of the tempers of those around us, as a wise man ought to think, the edge of this impatience would be taken off. When we engage in any undertaking, we ought to say to ourselves, that in the course of it we will have to do, more or less, with selfish, crafty, unprincipled men. These men will naturally act as their evil nature prompts them. They are the thorns and brambles that we must expect to encumber and to gall us in many of the paths of life. We must not hope to *reap grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles*. Wild dogs will naturally bark; and beasts of prey naturally seek to devour.

Now, when thus situated, how are we to act for overcoming the evils we have already endured, or are in hazard of still farther enduring from others? To provide for safety and defence, is unquestionably allowable and wise. But are we also to lay plans for future revenge?—Were this the course to be followed, what would the consequence be, but to render the life of man a state of constant hostility, where provocations and resentments,

injuries and retaliations, would succeed one another without end; till the world became like a den of wild beasts, perpetually attacking and devouring one another? No, says the Apostle, *overcome evil with good.* Disarm and overcome your enemies, by forgiveness and generosity. This is the principle of *good*, which you are to oppose to their *evil*. Teach them thereby, if not to love, at least to honour and respect you. While you take proper precautions for present safety, provide for the future, not by studied plans of revenge, but by fortitude of mind, by prudent behaviour, and superior virtue. Herein you show no unmanly tameness, or cowardice. Religion means not to suppress the proper feelings of honour, nor the sense which every man ought to have of dignity of character, and the rights which belong to him. These may be supported to the full, without a mean thirst for revenge, and a fierce desire of returning evil for evil.

By the magnanimity of forgiveness, you gain an important victory in overcoming, not perhaps your enemy, but your own wrathful and violent passions. Whereas he, who in such conjunctures knows no other method of proceeding, but that of gratifying resentment, is, in truth, the person who is overcome. For he has put it in the power of his enemy to overthrow his repose, and to gall and embitter his mind. By forgiving and despising injuries, you assume a superiority over your adversary, which he will be obliged to feel. Whereas, if you allow his provocations to blow you up into fierce revenge, you have given him the advantage. You confess yourself hurt and sore. His evil has overcome your good. He has fixed a dart within you, which in vain you endeavour to pull out; and by the attempts you make, you only exasperate and inflame the sore. Seldom is there any punishment which revenge can inflict, more severe than is suffered by him who inflicts it. The bitterness of spirit, the boilings of fierce passions, joined with all the black ideas which the cruel plans of revenge excite, produce more acute sensations of torment, than any that are occasioned by bodily pain.—When bad men have behaved injuriously toward us, let us leave them to themselves, and they will be sufficiently punished by their own vices. Their wickedness is no reason why we should render ourselves unhappy, or afford them the gratification of having it in their power to deprive us of peace.—I shall only add farther on this head, that a passion for revenge has been always held to be the characteristic of a little and mean mind. Never was any man distinguished as a hero, or recorded in the annals of history as a great man, to whom this quality of generous forgiveness of evil did not conspicuously belong. We know how eminently it shone in the character of Him whom we justly venerate as the model of all perfection;

whose dying breath was employed in apologising and praying for those who were shedding his blood.

II. BE not overcome by the misfortunes of life, so as to sink into despair. This is another view of that *evil* which we are called upon to *overcome by good*; and is the sense in which *evil* is most generally understood, and is most dreaded by men.—Although by inoffensive and blameless behaviour we should escape, in a great degree, from the injuries of bad men; yet, to escape altogether from the stroke of misfortune and distress, is what none of us can expect. In one way or other, in our person, or fortune, or families and friends, it is the doom of all, more or less, to suffer. From what causes this appointment of Providence arises, and to what purposes it is rendered subservient, it belongs not to our subject at present to enquire; the fact is too certain and obvious.—The principle of good which we must oppose to those evils of our lot, and by means of which we may hope to overcome them, is inward fortitude grounded on religion and trust in God; forming that state of mind, which, resting on itself, and the witness of a good conscience, rises superior to the trials of the world.

When the sky begins to lour around thee; when thy gay prospects begin to disappear, thy friends to fail, or thy fortune to decline; or when, as years advance, the chief comforts on which thy heart was set, and on which thou hadst conceived thy happiness to depend, are unexpectedly cut off; say not then within thyself, “The evil time has now overtaken me; the gates of hope are all shut; the days are come wherein I shall have no pleasure; enjoyment is fled; nothing remains for me now, but to close my days in melancholy, to despair, and to die.” This is to be *overcome of evil* indeed. He who thus allows himself to sink under the misfortunes of life, dishonours the character of a man, still more that of a Christian. He shows that whatever plausible appearances he may at former times have made before the world, at bottom he not only wanted strength and firmness of mind, but was deficient also in religious faith and principle. For it is impossible that he who allows himself to be so entirely overcome by the evils of the world, can entertain just notions of God, and of his government of the world.—He hath cast aside all reliance on Providence, and set at nought the promises of the gospel. He may suppress all outward expressions of impious discontent; he may even affect the language of resignation; but his heart in secret will murmur and repine against the Lord.

These, therefore, are the occasions when it particularly behoves us to call to mind all those principles which should assist us so to possess our minds in patience, as to overcome evil with good.—Recal, my brethren, all the former experience you

have had of the goodness of the Almighty, and the ground which this affords for trust and hope in him now. Recal to remembrance all the promises he has made to good men; as the words of Him *who changes not*; who *is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent*. Recollect the general tenor of that Providence, whose course it has ever been, since the creation of the world, so to chequer the life of men with unforeseen vicissitudes, as often to make unexpected goods succeed evils; nay, to make them spring from evils. Recollect, that whatever fortune may rob you of, it cannot take away what is most valuable, the peace of a good conscience, the pleasing sense of having acted honourably and done your duty, and the cheering prospect of a happy conclusion to all the trials of life in a better world. Consider that, as long as virtue remains, there are always, even in the most unfavourable situations, some comforts still left open, did we not overlook them. For it is seldom or never that all good things forsake a man at once, and all evils overtake him together. If he is bereaved of some friends whom he tenderly loved, there are others yet remaining to whom he may look for comfort. If, by infirmity, or old age, he be excluded from the enjoyments of active life, the gratifications which leisure and repose afford, are still left to him. If his fortune be shattered, and poverty threaten to beset him, yet, even in very straitened circumstances, many of the simple and best pleasures of nature, and many of the satisfactions of social life, can still be enjoyed. Nay, the mind of a good man can still be a kingdom to itself; and though confined in a prison, or stretched on a sick-bed, peaceful and pleasing thoughts will occasionally arise to him, and fair prospects of futurity will present themselves to his view.

Assisted by such considerations as these, let us enliven faith, strengthen patience, and animate hope, till we be enabled to *overcome evil with good*: always looking forward to better days; nourishing trust in the gracious government of the universe; and listening to Him who hath said of old, and who still says to all his servants, *Fear not, for I am with thee; be not afraid for I am thy God. Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer thee; wait on the Lord, be of good courage; and he shall strengthen your hearts, all ye that wait upon the Lord.*

III. BE not overcome by the evil examples of the world, so as to follow them into sin. This undoubtedly is one of the most dangerous evils which good men are called to overcome; and where it is most difficult to gain the victory. He who, in the former instances that have been mentioned, can *overcome evil with good*; who can generously forgive injuries, and magnanimously bear up under misfortunes, will be often in hazard of being overcome by evil, under this form. After having main-



tained his ground against many a rough blast, he may be in danger of being betrayed by a flattering gale, in the days of his ease and prosperity ; of being insensibly carried down the stream by that multitude of evil-doers who surround and deceive him. For the character of *the world* too certainly is, that it *lieth in wickedness*. Fashions of vice may change with the times. In one age, one set of corrupt habits may prevail : and in another, the passions of men may take a different turn. But, in every age, the multitude of men will be prone to indulge vicious desires. On the surface of behaviour, vice may be disguised under a plausible and polished appearance, while at bottom there lies the poisoned root of evil. Pleasure will ever captivate the young and unthinking. Riches and advancement ensnare the more sober and stayed. Attached to their different pursuits, and connecting with them the ideas of wisdom and importance, the multitude will ridicule those who go not along with them, as formal and precise, as raw, uneducated, and ignorant of the world. Assailed by such reproaches, the timid become afraid ; the modest are abashed : the complaisant and good-natured submit to their supposed friends. They begin to imagine, that the general opinion of the world cannot but have some reason on its side ; and, half seduced by persuasion, half compelled by ridicule, they surrender their former convictions, and consent to live as they see others around them living.

Such are the evils which we must study to overcome by good, if we wish to be esteemed either honourable men, or faithful Christians. And how are we to overcome them ? *This is the victory* says the Apostle John, *that overcometh the world, even our faith*.\* It is the steadiness of firm and rooted principle, of belief in God and Christ, of belief in the everlasting importance of religion and virtue, which you are to oppose to the host of evil-doers.— Consider, I beseech you, that no fashions nor opinions of men can affect that unalterable law of God, which rests on the eternal basis of rectitude and truth. Men, if they please, may call evil, good, and good, evil ; but as they cannot change the nature of things, their voice gives no sanction to any plan of conduct as right and wise.† So far are you from having any chance of holding either a wise or a safe course by going along with the multitude, that he who implicitly follows them may be justly presumed to be in the path of error and of danger. For in every age the multitude have inquired superficially, have judged rashly, and acted inconsiderately. Concurrence with general practice, neither affords justification of conduct, nor promises impunity in what is evil. The righteous Lord of all will never suffer his laws to be subjected to the capricious fancies of his creatures.

\* 1 John, v. 4.      † See this subject fully discussed in Sermon LXIX.

Transgressors will neither be screened by their numbers, nor escape by being hidden in a crowd.

In times, therefore, when corruption is prevalent, when vice under any of its modes is fashionable, we are particularly called upon to shew that we have within us a *good*, which we can oppose to this *evil*; to shew that we have fixed principles of our own, which we will surrender to no man, but upon which we will act, and will stand by them to the last. It ought to be no part of our character, that we seek to distinguish ourselves by affected austerity, and a marked singularity in frivolous and insignificant matters. Our distinction must rest upon a steady adherence to rational religion and the uncontrovertible rules of virtue, when the multitude around us, whether the high or the low, are deviating into licentious and criminal conduct. Depend upon it you may, that even that multitude, though they may attempt to turn you into ridicule, honour you at the bottom of their hearts.—They will be compelled to acknowledge, or at least to feel, whether they acknowledge it or not, that your unshaken firmness in what you esteem to be honourable and worthy, must proceed from some principle within, of a higher nature than that from which they act. At any rate, by thus maintaining in every situation the cause of religion and truth, and thereby overcoming evil with your good, you shall obtain honour from the great Judge of the earth, and your reward shall be great in Heaven.

Thus, in several important instances, I have shown how the exhortation in the text is to be complied with, and in what manner our good should overcome evil; overcoming injuries by generous forgiveness: overcoming misfortunes by patience and resignation; overcoming the temptations of evil examples by steady adherence to conscience and duty. In many of these cases, the conflict we are called to maintain may be arduous and difficult; inclined, as we too often are, by the bent of our nature, to the evil side. But, if we wish and desire to do well, let us not be discouraged, nor despair of victory. Weak in ourselves, we have ground to be *strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*. For the principle of good, feeble though it may be at present in human nature, is never left unbefriended by God. It is a principle derived from Heaven, and partakes of heavenly efficacy. If it once take root in the soul, it will be made to arise and grow from small beginnings into gradual maturity, under his protection and influence from whom its origin came.—To them who have no might, it is written, *he increaseth strength*.\* The contest between sin and righteousness, which at present takes place in the world, is a struggle between God and Belial, between the powers of light and the kingdom of darkness; and

\* Isaiah, xl 29.

in this state of things we must easily discern to which side the final victory will belong. Let us endeavour to do our duty, and God will be with us. Let us sincerely study to overcome evil with good, and we shall overcome it. Our feeble powers shall be aided by divine might, and our imperfect services crowned with divine rewards. *They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength ; they shall mount up with wings as eagles ; they shall run, and not be weary ; they shall walk and not faint.\**

\* Isaiah, xl. 31.

## SERMON LXXXIII.

ON A LIFE OF DISSIPATION AND PLEASURE.

---

*Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.*—PROVERBS, xiv. 13.

PAINS and sorrows occur so frequently in human life, that it is not surprising that the multitude of men should eagerly court scenes of pleasure and joy. It is natural to seek relief from our cares, by whatever promises to substitute hours of gladness in the place of anxiety and trouble. But we have much reason to beware, lest a rash or unwary pursuit of pleasure defeat its end, lest the attempt to carry pleasure too far, tend, in the issue, to sink us into misery. *There is a way*, says the wise man in the verse preceding the Text, *which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death.* There is a certain course of life which a man may have chosen to adopt, as leading to gladness and enjoyment; but which he shall find at last to be destructive of his happiness; for all is not real gladness, which has the appearance of being such. *There is a laughter, in the midst of which the heart is sorrowful; and a mirth the end whereof is heaviness.*

From serious admonitions of this kind given in Scripture, it would be very unjust to infer, that religion is an enemy to all mirth and gaiety. It circumscribes our enjoyments, indeed, within the bounds of temperance; but as far as this sacred limit permits, it gives free scope to all the gratifications of life. It even heightens their relish to a virtuous man. It enlivens his cheerfulness, and allows him to enjoy with satisfaction all that prosperity affords him. The text is applicable only to that set of men to whom temperance is no restraint; who propose to themselves the unlimited enjoyment of amusement and pleasure in all their forms, as the sole object and business of life.

Such persons, too frequently to be met with in the age wherein we live, have utterly mistaken the nature and condition of man. From the participation of pleasure, as I just now observed, he is far from being excluded. But let him remember, that a mediocrity only of enjoyment is allowed him, for his portion on earth. He is placed in a world, where, whatever his rank or station be, a certain part is allotted him to act; there are duties which are required of him; there are serious cares which must employ his mind, how to perform properly the various offices of life, and to fill up the place which belongs to him in society.—He who, laying aside all thoughts and cares of this kind, finding himself in the possession of easy or affluent fortune, and in the bloom of life, says within himself, “What have I to do, but to seek out every pleasure and amusement which the world can afford me? Let others toil in the common walks of life, who have to make their fortunes by sober and dull application. But to me labour is superfluous, the world is open. Wherever amusements invites, or pleasure calls, there I go. By passing my days and nights in whatever can entertain my fancy or gratify my senses, life shall, to me, be rendered delightful.”—He, I say, who thinks thus, vainly endeavours to counteract the intention of nature, and the decree of Providence. He attempts to render his state on earth, what it was never designed to be. He might as well expect that the physical laws of nature should be altered on his account; and that, instead of being confined to walk like ordinary men on the ground, he should obtain the privilege of treading on the air, as expect to enjoy a state of perpetual pleasure, by devoting himself to pleasure wholly, and setting aside all the serious cares and duties of life. Troubles, he may be well assured, are prepared for him, and await him. Where he expected satisfaction, he shall meet with disappointment; and in him shall be verified the saying in the Text, that *even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.*—But lest, to persons of this description, such general reasoning, from the established constitution of Providence, may not be satisfactory, I proceed to show them how clearly it is confirmed by facts. For this purpose let us observe,

IN the first place the obvious consequences of a life of pleasure and dissipation, to health, fortune, and character. To each of these, it is an enemy, precisely according to the degree to which it is carried.—Character is soon affected by it. As the man of dissipation often makes his appearance in public, his course is marked, and his character is quickly decided, by general opinion, according to the line which he is observed to pursue. By frivolity and levity, he dwindles into insignificance. By vicious excesses, or criminal pleasures, he incurs disappro-

bation or contempt. The fair prospects which his friends had once entertained of him die away, in proportion as his idleness or extravagance grows: and the only hope which remains is, that some fortunate incident may occur to check his career, and reclaim him to a better mind. In the mean time, the respectable and the grave smile at his follies, and avoid his company.—In the midst of some fashionable assemblies he may shine; by some of his fellows he may be admired; but in the world he is of no significance or consequence, any more than the little animals that sport around him.—Health, the most valuable of all temporal blessings, is known to be preserved by temperance and a regular life. But, by the men of dissipation, it is readily sacrificed at the shrine of pleasure. To years of health and soundness, they are often so foolish as to prefer a few hours of sensual gratification. Supposing that no extravagant excesses, or vicious pleasures, cut short their health and life, yet what constitution can stand the irregular hours, the disorderly living, the careless indulgence, into which the love of pleasure draws those who devote themselves to it? Hence the shattered and debilitated body, and the premature old age. The native vigour and sprightliness of youth, is melted down by effeminacy and sensuality. The spirits are weakened and enervated, if not sunk and lost for ever.—The state of their fortune may, for a while, enable them to indulge their pleasures, and to maintain the figure they wish to keep up in the world; but let fortune be ever so affluent, in the possession of such persons, it is in the high road to decay. For to them, attention to business or to the management of their affairs, becomes a burden, which they studiously shun. Prudent economy is disdained, as a mean attention, belonging only to vulgar and narrow minds. Their habits of licentiousness require unlimited indulgence. The demands of passion must be immediately supplied, whatever the consequences be. Hence, delivering themselves up to those who can furnish supply for their expense, or who pretend to take charge of their affairs, they become the prey of the crafty, who fatten on their spoil; till at last, in the midst of thoughtless extravagance, and of general waste and profusion, they see nothing remaining to them, but the ruins of a broken fortune.

Such are some of the miseries attending habits of dissipation, and the intemperate love of pleasure. We see them daily exemplified in the world, throughout all the stages of this character, from the frivolous and the giddy, up to the rake and the profligate; in some stages, only impairing health and fortune; in others, entirely overthrowing them; in their beginnings, casting a shade on the characters of men; in their completion, exposing them to disgrace and misery.—Even abstracting from those ultimate consequences in which irregular pleasures termi-

nate the gratification which, in the mean time, they bestow, is dearly paid for. A temporary satisfaction, it is admitted, they afford. They raise the spirits to a degree of elevation above their usual tone, but in that forced elevation they can never long remain; and in proportion to the elevation to which they were raised, is the degree of depression to which they subside. Experience has shown, that no sensual pleasure, except what is regulated by temperance, can be lasting. Every pleasure that is carried beyond it, is no more than a momentary explosion; a transient gush; a torrent that comes down impetuously, sparkling and foaming in its course, but that soon runs out, and leaves a muddy and polluted channel. Who knows not the languor and dejection that follow every excessive indulgence of pleasure, or a long continuation of amusement of any kind? From whom do you hear such frequent complaints of low spirits, as from those who spend most of their time in the circles of dissipation and gaiety, or in the revelry of the world? To what wretched and pernicious resources are they obliged to fly, in order to recruit their spirits, and restore some life to their deadened sensations? What melancholy spectacles do they at length exhibit of a worn out frame, and an exhausted mind? So well-founded is the assertion in the Text, that there is *a mirth, the end of which is heaviness.*

LET us consider, in the second place, the ruin which a life of pleasure and dissipation brings upon the moral state and character of men, as well as on their external condition. This deserves the more attention, as the pursuit of pleasure sometimes sets out at the beginning with a fair and innocent appearance. It promises to bestow satisfactions unknown to a duller race of mortals; and, at the same time, to allow virtue and honour to remain. With a great part of mankind, especially with those who are most likely to run the race of pleasure, such as are well born, and have been regularly educated, some attachment to good principles at first is found. They cannot as yet bear the reproach of any thing that is dishonourable or base. Regard to their word, generosity of sentiment, attachment to their friends, and compassion for the unhappy, prevail for a while in their hearts.—But, alas! as the love of pleasure gains ground, with what insidious steps does it advance towards the abolition of all virtuous principles? It has been ever found, that without the assistance of reflection, and of serious thought, virtue cannot long subsist in the human mind. But to reflection and serious thoughts the men of dissipation are strangers. Absorbed, as they are, in the whirlpool of fashionable life, and hurried along by a rapid succession of amusements, reflection is lost, and good impressions gradually decay. Nothing is regarded but present enjoyment, and plans of improving on that enjoyment, in future. **As**

their taste, and their acquired habits, carry them into the society of licentious company, they must follow the more trained votaries of pleasure who naturally take the lead. They become assimilated to the manners of their loose associates; and, without perceiving it themselves, their whole character, by degrees is changed. Former restraints are now laid aside, and, in order to preserve the rank of equality with their companions in every expense, prodigality is the necessary consequence. Prodigality presently opens a way to the worst vices. They become both covetous and profuse; profuse in spending, but covetous to acquire. In order to carry on the splendour of life, and to indulge their inclinations to the full, they now submit to what, at their first outset in life, they would have rejected as mean and base. Now is the creditor defrauded; the tenant racked and oppressed; the tradesman frustrated of the reward of his honest industry; and friends and relations, on whom any impression can be made, are plundered without mercy.—In this manner all the bland and smiling appearances which mirth and gaiety once carried, are transformed into the blackest shapes of vice; and, from a character originally stamped only with giddiness and levity, shoots forth a character compounded of dishonesty, injustice, oppression and cruelty.

Is there any one who will deny, that the intemperate pursuit of pleasure leads frequently into all the vices now mentioned, and that some of them it carries always in its train? I shall not dwell on certain crimes, which none but the most atrocious devotees of pleasure will pretend to justify, though all who partake of that character make too light of them; such as, the violation of the marriage-bed, the seduction of the innocent, and the introduction of misery into families once happy and flourishing. These are crimes that require the interposition of the lawgiver and the judge, more than the admonition of the preacher.—Let us only think for a little of that reproach of modern times, that gulf of time and fortune, the passion of gaming, which is so often the refuge of the idle sons of pleasure, and often also the last resource of the ruined. To how many bad passions, to how many base arts, does it give rise? What violent agitations of the mind, sometimes bursting into rage and frenzy, does it occasion? What a shameful traffic of gain does it form among persons, whom their rank in life, and their connections in society, ought to have raised above the thoughts of enriching themselves by such dishonourable means? How many friendships has it broken? How many families has it ruined? In what deadly catastrophies has it often terminated? The gamester sits down at the fatal table with eager spirits and mighty hopes. Behold him when he rises,—a wretch, haggard and forlorn, cursing his fate, and, from despair of retrieving his ruined fortune, driven per-



haps to entertain the horrid thought of ending his own existence!  
—Dismissing so melancholy a theme, let us,

IN the third place, attend to the disquieting sensations which are apt to intrude upon the men of pleasure, even in the midst of their enjoyments. Not only is the *end of their mirth, heaviness, but in laughter*, as it is expressed in the text, *the heart is sorrowful*. Often is laughter affected, when the heart is galled within. A show of mirth is put on to cover some secret disquiet. When you enter into a gay and festive assembly, you behold every appearance of sparkling felicity. Alas! could you look into the breasts of this seemingly happy company, how inconsiderable would the proportion be found of those who were truly happy! how great the proportion of those who, either in their minds, were entirely vacant and languid; or who fled to scenes of gaiety in order to fly from themselves, from domestic uneasiness, or corroding cares, and, in the tumult of company and forced mirth, to drown their sorrows!—At the best, the flashes of joy, which burst from the dissipated and careless, are of a transient and broken kind, interrupted by reflections which they cannot altogether avoid. For, at the bottom of the hearts of most men, even amidst an irregular life, there lies a secret feeling of propriety, a sense of right and wrong in conduct. This inward sense is frequently so much borne down by appetites and passions, as to lose its power of guiding men to what is right, while yet it retains as much influence as to make them sensible that they have been doing wrong; that they have not acted that part in life which they ought to have acted, and which their friends, and the world, had a title to expect from them. Though conscience be not strong enough to guide, it still has strength to dart a sting.—Together with this consciousness of ill desert, there will be at some times joined a humbling sense of their own insignificancy, when they behold others meeting with esteem and honour for having acted a manly and worthy part in life. Their superiority they are obliged to acknowledge, and to look up to them with respect; while the retrospect of their own life affords nothing but shame, and the bitter remembrance of time they have mispent, and opportunities they have thrown away.—In the midst too of mortifying reflections of this kind, it will not be in their power to escape altogether from a dread of certain consequences which are in hazard of befalling from their careless conduct. Scarcely is any fortune so stable as to be beyond the reach of accidents that will diminish it. To none so readily as to the men of pleasure, are such accidents likely to happen; and fond as they are of their present superb train of living, the dread that it may not be in their power always to continue it, will, in spite of all their endeavours to avoid such

thoughts, occasionally force itself upon them, and cast a cloud over many a scene of projected merriment.

Can you reckon that to be sincere joy, which is liable to be interrupted and mingled with so many sensations of the most disagreeable nature? In the cup of intemperance, or in the tumult of loose society, the man of pleasure studies to drown them. But often his efforts are vain. When he pushes to the utmost his scenes of criminal revelry, they will carry the resemblance of Belshazzar's feast; at which, while the impious monarch was drinking amongst his lords and concubines, he beheld the finger's of a man's hand writing in unknown characters on the wall over against him; *and his countenance changed, and his heart sunk within him.*\* Thus, in the midst of riot, imagined spectres have been known to haunt the man of guilty pleasure. He sees hands coming forth to write on the wall against him. The very portraits of his ancestors, which hang in his hall, appear to him to look with frowning aspect, and to upbraid him with wasting in licentious pleasures the fortune which their honourable labours or virtuous industry had acquired.—Of all the classes of sinners, it has been found, that none are so liable, in some period of their lives, or at least when life is drawing to its close, to be smitten with severe remorse, as those who have sacrificed to pleasure all the calls of conscience and of duty,

LET us consider, in the last place, how unsuitable a life of dissipation and pleasure is to the condition of man in this world, and how injurious to the interests of society. In the world, we are surrounded with scenes of distress. We behold the greatest part of the human race doomed to hard labour and penurious subsistence. We hear the cries of indigence. We know that every day thousands are yielding up their breath, and thousands are attending their dying friends. Our own lives are fleeting fast away. Flourishing as our state may at present seem, we know that there is but a step between us and death. The youngest and the healthiest cannot tell whether they may not, within the space of a few days, be called to undergo the judgment of God.—Is this a time, is this a place, where no other thing is to be pursued but giddy amusement and perpetual pleasure? Have you, my friends, who are spending your days in this wanton abuse of prosperity, no sense of the unsuitableness of such conduct to the condition of mortal man? Do you see nothing in the state of human life to chasten and temper your mirth; to bring serious reflections home to your bosom; to admonish you that it is better to go sometimes *to the house of mourning*, than to dwell always *in the house of feasting*?—Do you feel no com-

\* Daniel, v. 5.

punction at the thought that, by your luxury and extravagance, you are adding to the scenes of sorrow which already abound in this afflicted world? For you, and your follies, the aged parent, or the respectable relation, mourn. To supply the oppressive demands of your pleasures, families are driven from their habitations, and left to poverty and want. Your mirth forces the widow and the fatherless to weep.—At the same time you are scattering poison in society around you. You are corrupting the public manners by the life which you lead. You are propagating follies and vices; and by the example which you set are ensnaring many to follow you into ruin.—Consider with how much discontent and indignation the poorer classes of men, all the while, behold you. Especially, if in times of scarcity and of war, such as those in which I now write, they see you indulging in wastefulness and thoughtless profusion, when they and their families are not able to earn their bread. As long as wealth is properly employed, persons in low situation naturally look up to their superiors with respect. They rest contented in their station. They are even disposed to bless the hand which furnishes them with employment on reasonable terms, and occasionally dispenses seasonable relief. But if they feel themselves oppressed, merely that a few may be enabled to squander at pleasure, and to revel in wasteful excess, their discontents are not easily suppressed. With sullen murmurs they issue from their impoverished habitations, prepared for every evil work.

SUCH are some of the consequences which flow from dissipation and the intemperate love of pleasure. Let not the effect of what has been said be frustrated by this evasion, that although the descriptions which have been given be just and true, yet they are applicable only to such as have carried their pursuit of pleasure to the most criminal excess; a class, in which few, if any, will admit that they deserve to be ranked.—They who are only beginning the course of vicious pleasure, and who sin within prescribed bounds, may reckon with certainty on their bearing a share of the evils and miseries which I have described. Not only so, but having once entered on an irregular course, they cannot tell where they are to stop. They have drunk from the cup of the enchantress; and being fairly brought within the magic circle, their powers of reflection are laid asleep, and to make an escape may not be in their power.

To some, it may perhaps appear, that the whole strain of this discourse refers only to the rich and the great; and that persons of moderate fortune, and of the middle ranks of life, who form the great body of society, have little or no concern in it. But this is entirely a mistake. Splendid fortune, and high birth or rank, afford, beyond doubt, the strongest and most frequent temptations to the loose indulgence of every enjoyment. But

throughout all ranks the danger extends, of being misled by pleasure in some of its forms. In this country, where wealth and abundance are so much diffused over all stations; where it is well known that the inferior orders of men are perpetually pressing upon those who are above them, and following them in their manners, a life of dissipation is perhaps not less frequent among the middle, than among the higher classes of society.—The modes of amusement may not be so refined. The entertainments and pleasures may be of a grosser kind. But in many an inferior circle, there prevails as much love of pomp and show, as much proportional extravagance in expense, as much rivalry in the competition of passions and pleasures, as in the most fashionable and courtly assemblies. Sober reflections are as much laid aside; the gratification of vanity, and the indulgence of pleasure, are pursued with equal eagerness.—Let us therefore, my brethren, in whatever rank of life we are placed, proceed upon this as our great principle, that to serve God, to attend to the serious cares of life, and to discharge faithfully the duties of our station, ought to be the first concern of every man who wishes to be wise and happy; that amusement and pleasure are to be considered as the relaxation, not the business, of life; and that if from those sentiments we depart, and give ourselves up to pleasure as our only object, *even in laughter the heart shall be sorrowful, and the end of our mirth shall be heaviness.*

## SERMON LXXXIV.

ON THE CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENCE.

---

*Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.*—ACTS, xxiv. 16.

THESE words were spoken by the Apostle Paul, in the course of that manly and spirited defence which he made for himself, when accused of sedition and impiety before Felix, the Roman governor. He vindicates himself from the charges brought against him; but boldly avows his principles, conceals no part he had acted, gives up no doctrine he had taught, and with the firm consciousness of innocence, appeals to his enemies themselves for the unblemished integrity of his life and character.

To maintain *always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men*, is a degree of virtue to which, in its full extent, none can lay claim. For who is there among the sons of men that can pretend, on every occasion, throughout his whole life, to have preserved a faultless conduct? How few days, indeed, go over our heads wherein something does not pass, in which our behaviour has not been altogether correct, or free from every offence? In the present imbecility and fallen state of human nature, he is the worthiest person who is guilty of the fewest offences towards God or towards man. But though the character referred to in the text be not attainable by us in a complete degree, it is the character to which we must all study to approach; to come as near to it as the weakness of our nature admits; so that neither in piety towards God, nor in social duties towards men, we may be found remarkably deficient.— You will observe, that this great Apostle does not boast of having fully attained to a conscience void of every offence. His words are, that *herein he exercised himself*; that is, this was his

object and his study, to this he formed and trained himself, to have *always a conscience void of offence towards God and men*.—Assuredly, there is nothing in human life, more amiable and respectable than such a character. Wherever it appears, it commands universal reverence in every station, whether high or low. It is indeed what all men would wish to gain; at least, they wish that others should believe them to possess it. Even the most corrupt look to it, from afar, with a sigh; and however obliged to condemn themselves for having fallen short of it, cannot help esteeming and respecting others who are dignified by the attainment of it.—Let us then consider, first, what is implied in *exercising* or forming ourselves to maintain the conscience void of offence: and next, what the effects will be of having, in some degree, attained it.

I. In *exercising* ourselves for this purpose our first care must be to have our conscience well informed, or properly instructed, as to what is, or is not, real ground of offence towards God, or towards men. Conscience is the guide, or the enlightening and directing principle of conduct; and as our Saviour has warned us. *If the light which is in thee be darkness, how great will that darkness be?\** If that which should guide us be itself misled, how widely must we wander astray?—There are two extremes here, to each of which, different sets of men are apt erroneously to incline. One set of men are apt to be minutely scrupulous about matters of smaller importance; *tithing*, as the Scripture describes them, *mint, anise, and cummin, while they neglect the weightier matters of the law*. Punctual in their observance of all the forms and ceremonies of religion, they hope by this means to compensate for allowing themselves in unlawful pleasures or unrighteous gains. Another, and perhaps a more numerous set of men, err from loose casuistry in matters of moral duty. They admit the obligation they are under to virtuous practice; but they lay the whole stress of virtue on some particular good dispositions to which their temper inclines them. On these they highly value themselves; but breaches of other parts of duty, they are apt to consider as small and venial transgressions. They have balances of their own, in which they weigh every transgression: and if any of the offences they have committed, either against God or their neighbour, weigh light in the scale of fashion or general practice, they appear to them as scarcely any offences at all.—Both these extremes we must carefully guard against: and study to regulate our conduct by the pure unsophisticated laws of God; resting our character neither on a strict observance merely of the external forms of religion, nor on a partial regard to its moral duties; but attending to all that God

\* Matth. vi. 23.

has required from us as men and Christians.—The truth is, such errors as I have pointed out, always have their source in some corruption of the heart. It is not from inability to discover what they ought to do, that men err in practice. It is from some oblique regard to their interests or their pleasures, to their reputation or their gain, that they deviate into by-paths, while they affect to assume some appearance of principle. Fairness and uprightness of mind are the chief requisites for directing our conscience how to avoid offences towards God or man. He who, with an honest intention, seeks in every case to know what it is his duty to do, will seldom or never be at a loss to discover it.

In the next place, it belongs to every one who studies to attain to a conscience void of offence, to make reparation for whatever wrong he is conscious of having formerly done. This is the most difficult, but at the same time the most satisfactory test, of our sincerity in desiring to have a clear conscience before God and man. How can he be sincere in this desire, who allows himself to remain quiet while loaded with the sense that all he now enjoys has been obtained by injustice and fraud? If he continues, without remorse, to fatten upon the gains of unrighteousness; to feast on the spoils of the industrious: to revel in luxuries purchased by oppression or treachery; dare he hold up his face, and utter the name of Conscience? *Woe to him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong.\** In the midst of his stately habitation, *the stone, in the expressive language of Scripture, shall cry out of the wall against him; and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.†*—It may not be always in a man's power to make exact restitution of every unlawful gain he has acquired; but to make reparation to the utmost of his power, for every wrong he has done to others, is the duty of every one who lays any claim to principle or honesty. If this be entirely neglected, it is the mark of a conscience that is become dead to all sense of right and wrong. In vain we pretend to clear our conscience, by affecting to compensate for fraud or cruelty, either by acts of strict religious homage towards God, or by some partial virtues and shows of generosity towards men. With respect to men, we ought to learn that we must begin with being just, before we can attempt to be generous. With respect to God, we know that he delights in *mercy more than sacrifice*; and rejects with contempt the hypocritical worshipper. *I will come near to you in judgment, saith the Lord; and I will be a swift witness against those that oppress the hireling, the widow, and the fatherless; and that turn aside the stranger from his right.—The Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.‡*

AFTER making reparation for the wrongs he has committed,

\* Jerem. xxii. 13.

† Habak. ii. 11.

‡ Malachi, iii. 5.

the next study of every one who is *exercising himself to have the conscience void of offence*, should be to guard against those particular snares which have formerly led him into evil.—If, for instance, covetousness has on many occasions tempted him to defraud or oppress, that he might encrease his worldly store, it ought to be his first care to correct in future this inordinate passion for wealth, by bringing down in his estimation the acquisitions of fortune to their proper value; so that he may remain satisfied with a moderate share of the world's goods, and become sensible of what small importance great riches are to real happiness. If ambition has impelled him to rise into consideration by crooked policy and intrigues, let him impress his mind with all the considerations that will shew him the emptiness and vanity of worldly honours. If a loose and careless life has brought him into habits of dissipation, and led him to neglect those religious duties which he owed to his Maker, let him return to the regular worship of God; and nourish an awful fear and reverence of that Almighty Being, on whom his all depends in time and eternity.—In this manner it must be his care to begin, by eradicating those corruptions which, on different occasions, have tempted him to violate conscience. This study to reform all known errors in former life, will be one of the most satisfying marks of a sincere design to preserve in future a conscience void of offence. For if any of the old vitiated parts of the disposition be allowed to remain in their former state, in vain will any man apply himself to a thorough reformation of character. The favourite ruling passion, if it be suffered to keep its ascendant, will not fail to drag the life after it.

IN the last place, in order to carry on this discipline which I have been recommending for obtaining a good conscience, it will be highly necessary, that we frequently examine ourselves, and bring our conduct under review. No day ought to pass over our head, without some exercise of this kind. Every evening before we go to rest, we should subject to scrutiny the transactions in which we have been engaged. “What have I done this day, by which I may either have justly offended any man, or have shewn neglect of God? What duty have I transgressed? Wherein have I omitted to act the part which my Maker, or my fellow-creatures had a title to expect from me?”—Be assured, my friends, that only by thus preserving conscience in the frequent exercise of its natural jurisdiction, you can support its rights. If you do not lead it in this manner often to assume its due station, its authority will gradually decline. There will be no accuracy in your moral conduct. Corruptions will grow upon you unawares. You will forget that you are creatures accountable for your actions, to a higher tribunal than that of the world.—It is a careless train of living, that is the general ruin



of mankind. It is not so much from having adopted evil principles that men become wicked, as from having adopted no principles at all. They follow their inclinations, without examining whether there be any principles which they ought to form for regulating their conduct. The chief corrective of this mischief is that which has been suggested; by bringing conscience into a frequent exercise of its power, and thereby awakening its authority over our life.—Bitterly it may at times reprove us for our sins and follies. Sharply it may sting. But those reproofs and those stings are salutary in their effect; and tend to prevent us from proceeding headlong in a downward course. If ever conscience become altogether dead and still, the symptom is ominous of our having contracted from hardened vice that mortal lethargy, from which we are only to be awakened at the day of judgment.

II. HAVING thus suggested some of the particulars which appear most essential in *exercising* or forming *ourselves to attain to a conscience void of offence towards God and men*, I come next to recommend this discipline by showing the happy effects it will produce. These happy effects are manifold; to avoid prolixity, I shall comprise them under two general heads. Such a clear conscience sets us free from the terrors of another world; it exempts us from a multitude of disquietudes in this.

FIRST, the conscience void of offence tends to procure freedom from the terrors of another world. Many, I know, in the gaiety of their hearts, pretend to make light of terrors of this kind; yet nothing is more certain, than that they are capable of assailing and dismaying the stoutest heart. Conscience is too great a power in the nature of man to be altogether subdued. It may for a time be repressed and kept dormant. But conjunctures there are in human life which awaken it; and, when once awakened, it flashes on the sinner's mind with all the horrors of an invisible Ruler and a future judgment. It has been so ordered by Providence, that it is always in the evil day, at the season when men stand most in need of consolation and support, that conscience exerts its vengeance on the guilty. I might mention what is suffered in the lonely hours of solitude and silence, when the sinner's mind is humbled and depressed by some recent disgrace, or some disappointment in his criminal pursuits. But let me only lead your thoughts to what must await us all, when we shall have arrived at the decline of life; when we feel the hand of death upon us, and cannot any more flatter ourselves that it will long delay giving the fatal stroke. *Sufficient* and more than sufficient, *for that day will be the evil thereof*, even supposing that nothing within shall alarm us with dark forebodings of what is to follow. But if at the time when we are oppressed with sickness or pain upon our bed, distressed perhaps with the

situation of our family and worldly affairs, and just about to take the last farewell of our friends, and of all we have ever loved on earth; if in the midst of this scene of distress, we shall be also tormented with the thought of what is to become of us in that next world which is just opening to our view; if we depart from life, conscious that we deserve punishment for the manner in which we have lived; and dreading that the hour of our being to receive that punishment is at hand; such a state of complicated misery who can endure? *The spirit thus wounded and bleeding, when it is going forth from the body, who can bear?*

I by no means say, that he, who during his life has taken the greatest care to preserve his conscience void of offence, can upon that plea rest with confidence; or upon this ground alone leave this life without uneasiness or fear. No man's conscience was ever entirely clear from all reproach. We daily offend; and the best have much reason to implore mercy and forgiveness from their Judge. The whole strain of the gospel tends to humble and depress those who vainly trust to their own imperfect righteousness. It teaches us that the ultimate ground on which we are to rest for acceptance with God, is the righteousness and merit of our great Redeemer.—But this I say and testify to you, that the most satisfactory evidence you can possess of having an interest in the Redeemer's merits, and being finally accepted through him, must arise from the testimony of a conscience, which you have studied to keep *void of offence towards God and towards men*. This will be the best proof of your belonging to the number of the sons of God. It will be the witness of the divine spirit within you; the day-star arising in your hearts, and preparing the approach of a more perfect day.—Without the study of attaining a good conscience be assured that all other grounds of hope will prove fallacious: not the most fervent zeal, nor the highest pretences to intercourse with God, will be of any avail. They will have no more stability than the house built on the sand, which, in the day of trial, falls to the ground. He only whose conscience bears witness to his faithfulness, his integrity, and sincerity, in discharging all the duties of life, can, with a steady mind, and a firm but humble trust in his Saviour, look forward to all that awaits him in a future unknown world.

IN the next place, while the conscience void of offence thus delivers us, in a great degree, from the terrors of a future life, it keeps us free, at the same time, from innumerable disquietudes in this life. All the offences for which conscience condemns us, become, in one way or other, sources of vexation. Never did any man long forsake the straight and upright path, without having cause to repent of it. Whether it be pleasure, or inte-

rest, or ambition, that leads him astray, he is always made to pay dear for any supposed advantage he gains. Warily and cautiously he may at first set out, and lay many restraints on himself against proceeding too far. But having once forsaken conscience as his guide, his passions and inclinations soon take the lead of his conduct, and push him forward rashly. One bad step betrays him into another; till in the end, he is overtaken, if not by poverty and disease, at least by dishonour and shame, by the loss of friends, and the forfeiture of general esteem. *He who walketh uprightly*, has been always found to *walk surely*: while in the dark and crooked paths of fraud, dishonesty, or ignoble pleasure, a thousand forms of trouble and disaster arise to meet us. In the mean time to a bad man, conscience will be always an uneasy companion. In the midst of his amusements, it will frequently break in upon him with reproach. At night, when he would go to rest, holding up to him the deeds of the former day, putting him in mind of what he has lost and what he has incurred, it will make him often ashamed, often afraid. —Cowardice and baseness of mind are never-failing concomitants of a guilty conscience. He who is haunted by it, dares never stand forth to the world, and appear in his own character. He is reduced to be constantly studying concealment, and living in disguise. He must put on the smiling and open look, when dark designs are brooding in his mind. Conscious of his own bad purposes, he looks with distrust on all who are around him, and shrinks from the scrutiny of every piercing eye. He sees, or fancies that he sees, suspicion in many a countenance; and reads upbraidings in looks where no upbraiding was meant. Often he *is in great fear, where no fear is*.

Very different from this, is the state of the man whose conscience is void of offence. He is manly and intrepid in every situation. He has never seduced the innocent by guilty arts. He has deluded no one with false promises. He has ensnared no man to trust him by a deceitful account of his affairs; nor taken any advantages of the distresses of others to enrich himself.—Without uneasiness he can look every man boldly in the face; and say with the good prophet Samuel, *Behold, here I am; witness against me. Whose ox have I taken? or, whose ass have I taken? or, whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Of whose hand have I received any bribe? Declare, and I will restore it to you.\** He who can thus take God and the world to witness for his integrity, may despise popular accusation or reproach. Those censures and rumours which are constantly disquieting the man of guilty conscience, pass by him unheeded. *His witness is in heaven; and his record is on high.* Innocence and upright-

\* 1 Samuel, xii. 3.

ness form a tenfold shield, against which the darts of the world are aimed in vain. Of neither God as his Judge, nor of men as his companions, is such a man afraid. With no unquiet nor terrifying slumbers will his couch be haunted. *I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for the Lord maketh me dwell in safety.*

LET those considerations which have been now briefly suggested, contribute to render the character in the text, *of a conscience void of offence towards God and men*, amiable and estimable in our eyes. If in its fullest extent we cannot attain to it, let us at least endeavour to approach to it, and herein with the great Apostle *exercise ourselves*. We may rest assured, that the more we partake of this character, the happier and more honourable shall our life be on earth, and the nearer shall it bring us to Heaven. Conscious of our innumerable frailties, let it be our daily prayer to God, that by his powerful spirit he would rectify what is corrupted in our nature; would guard us by his grace against the temptations that surround us; *keep us from the path of the destroyer, and lead us in his way everlasting.*

## SERMON LXXXV.

### ON THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

[Preached in the evening after the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

---

*And he led them out as far as to Bethany; and he lift up his hands and blessed them: And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them and carried up into Heaven.*—LUKE, xxiv. 50. 51.

THE sacred Scriptures not only set before us a complete rule of life, but give weight and authority to the precepts they deliver, by the information they communicate of certain great and important facts, in which all the human race have a deep concern. Of those facts one of the most illustrious is the ascension of our Saviour to Heaven, after having completed the work of our redemption. This is a subject on which it is at all times pleasing to a Christian to meditate; but especially after the celebration of that solemn ordinance in which we were this day engaged. We there renewed the memorial of our Saviour suffering and dying in the cause of mankind. Let us now take part in his succeeding triumphs. Let us with pleasure behold him rising from the grave as the conqueror of death and hell, and ascending into heaven, there to reign in glory, and to act as the protector and guardian of his people, to the end of time. —It will be proper to begin with taking a particular view of all the circumstances that attend this memorable event in the history of our Saviour's life; as they are related in the text, compared with the accounts of other evangelists. The circum-

stances will all be found to be both beautiful and sublime in themselves, and instructive to us.

We are informed,\* that it was not until forty days after his resurrection from the grave, that this event took place. During this space he had *shown himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being often seen by his disciples, and conversing with them of things pertaining to the kingdom of God.* All being now concluded which he had to do on earth; the guilt of mankind having been expiated by his death, and his Apostles fully instructed in the part they were henceforth to act, and the character they were to assume; one day, we are told, he *led them out of the city as far as to Bethany.*—With the utmost propriety was this place selected for the scene of his ascension. Near Bethany was the Mount of Olives, to which our Lord was wont so often to retire for the exercise of private devotion; and there also was the garden of Gethsemane, where his sufferings commenced with that agony in which his *soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death.* At the spot where his generous sufferings on our account began, there also was his glory to commence; and those fields which so long had been his favourite retreat, and so often had been consecrated by him to meditation and prayer, were now to be dignified with his last and parting steps towards heaven; a sort of symbol, of devotion and virtuous sufferings being steps that prepare for ascent to heaven.—There, we are told, *He lift up his hands, and blessed his disciples; and while he blessed them, he was parted from them.* How beautiful is this attitude of our departing Lord! How well did such a conclusion suit the rest of his life; *Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the end.* While he lived, *he went about doing good:* He died, praying for his enemies; and when he ascended into heaven, it was in the act of lifting up his hands and blessing his friends; like a dying parent giving his last benedictions to his children and family. A worthy pattern is here set before us, of the manner in which every good man should wish to spend his last moments, in acts of devotion to God, and expressions of kindness and affection to his friends.—While our Saviour was thus employed, he was *parted from his disciples; a cloud, it is said, received him out of their sight,† and he was carried up into heaven.* Here were no whirlwinds, no thunder, no chariots of fire. Supernatural appearances of old, had been accompanied with majesty of a terrible kind. The law was given in the midst of lightnings and thunders. Elijah was caught up into heaven in a fiery chariot. But the Saviour of the world was gently *received up in a cloud;* with that sort of meak and calm

\* Acts, i. 5.

\* Acts, i. 9.

magnificence which bespeaks the peaceful genius of the Gospel and its Author.—Angels likewise assisted at this solemnity, as in every dispensation friendly to mankind these benevolent spirits are represented as taking part. At the creation of the world, *the morning stars*, it is said, *sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.*\* At the birth of our Lord, we hear of their songs of praise and joy; we find them present at his resurrection from the dead; and now again at his ascension into heaven. *While his disciples looked stedfastly towards heaven, as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*†

SUCH were the circumstances which accompanied that great and signal event of Christ's ascension into heaven; all of them very solemn and striking, and calculated to leave a deep impression on the minds of his disciples.—Let us now proceed to consider the ends and purposes of our Saviour's ascension, as far as they are revealed and made known to us; and, together with them, the effects which ought thereby to be produced in our minds.

IN the first place, by our Saviour's ascension into heaven, it was made to appear that the great design for which he descended to the earth was completely fulfilled. A solemn attestation was thus given by God, to the virtue and efficacy of that great sacrifice which he offered by his death for the sins of the world: It was declared that, in consideration of the high merits and generous sufferings of the Son of God, pardon and grace were to be extended to the fallen race of men. Therefore, *God raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might stand in God.*

Hence the ascension of our Lord is to be considered as a display from heaven of the olive branch to mankind. It is a most august ratification of that covenant of grace on which are founded all our hopes of acceptance with God. We lay under the sentence of condemnation as an offending guilty race till Christ undertook our cause, and by his resurrection and ascension proved that he succeeded in what he had undertaken. As soon as he was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God, the terrors of the law were withdrawn. Ancient prophecies were fulfilled, which represented the coming of the Messiah as the renovation of the world, as the era of declared grace and peace to mankind. The ascension of Christ was the signal of his triumph over all the powers of darkness. Long

\* Job, xxxviii. 7.

† Acts. i. 10, 11.

they had meditated our ruin, and maintained the reign of idolatry among the nations. But the period was now come when their power was to be overthrown. When Christ, as it was predicted of old by the inspired Psalmist, *ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.* He then spoiled *principalities and powers.\** He *destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil;†* and the *gifts* which, as tokens of victory, he bestowed among his followers, were no less than peace, pardon, and eternal life.—While our Lord's ascension thus serves to establish our faith in the Gospel.

It is, in the next place, to be viewed by us, with respect to Christ himself, as a merited restoration to his original felicity. As the son of God, all glory belonged to him for ever. The Divine nature could neither suffer any real depression, nor receive any additional advancement. But it was as a man, that he appeared and acted on earth; that he suffered and died.—What he had done in that character, entitled him as a man to the highest rewards. Accordingly it is in this view of merited recompense, that his ascension and exaltation at the right hand of God, is always set forth in Scripture. Because *he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.‡*—In this constitution of Providence, an illustrious testimony was designed to be given of God's regard and love to eminent righteousness. *We see Jesus,* as the Apostle speaks, *for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour.§* We see signal pre-eminence made the reward of signal condescension for the sake of mankind; and self-abasement and humiliation made the road to glory. We are taught, in this great instance, that God never deserts the cause that is his own, nor leaves worth and piety to be finally oppressed; though for a while he may allow trials and hardships to be undergone by the best men.—No person could appear more neglected and forsaken by God, than our Saviour was, for a season, when in the hands of his foes. Important purposes of Providence were, during that season, carried on; but as soon as those purposes were accomplished, God came forth in support of righteousness and truth, and by the high honours bestowed on Christ, established his eternal triumph over all his foes.

While we thus view our Saviour's ascension as a glorification justly merited on his own account, we cannot but on our

\* Coloss. ii. 15.

† Heb. ii. 14.

‡ Philip. ii. 7, &amp;c.

§ Heb. ii. 9



part highly rejoice in it from a sense of the obligations we lie under to him. Devoid of every just and honourable sentiment must he be, who partakes not with cordial satisfaction in the success and triumph of a generous benefactor, who for his sake had exposed himself to so much distress and danger.—In that holy sacrament which we this day celebrated, we beheld our blessed Saviour despised and rejected of men; we saw him treated as the vilest of malefactors, led to the hill of Golgotha with scorn and contempt, and their undergoing all that the cruelty of his enemies could contrive to inflict. All this we beheld him patiently and cheerfully enduring for our sake, in order to accomplish our redemption.—Now, when at his next appearance we behold such a glorious revolution; when we behold him rising from the dead, ascending into the highest heavens, sitting down there at the right hand of God, and all things in heaven and earth made to bow before him, shall not we, my brethren, with thankful and devout hearts partake joyfully in his exaltation and felicity?—Thou, O Divine Benefactor! O Illustrious Restorer of the lost hopes and happiness of mankind! Thou art most worthy to be thus raised above all beings. Our sorrows were thine. *For our transgressions thou wert bruised; and for our iniquities wounded.* Now, in thy joy we rejoice; and in thine honours we triumph. We with lifted hands will ever bless thee. Prostrate at thy feet, we will join with all the heavenly host in celebrating thy praises; in ascribing to *Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood*, all power, and glory, and dominion forever!

IN the third place, Christ ascended into heaven that he might act there, in the presence of God, and our High Priest and Intercessor. This office which he performs, was pre-signified under the Jewish dispensation, by the High Priest entering once every year on the great day of atonement, into the holiest place in the temple, and there sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice before the mercy seat. *But Christ being come, an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered at once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us; he is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.—There, we are told, he ever liveth to make intercession for his people.\**—By his appearing in the human nature, while he is acting as intercessor for mankind, an everlasting memorial is presented to the Almighty of the Redeemer's love to men. That

\* Heb. ix. 11, 12, 24. Heb. vii. 25.

sacrifice which was offered on Mount Calvary, still continues to ascend before the throne; and that blood which was shed on the cross, flows for ever in the sight of God.

CONCERNING the nature of this intercession, which our Saviour is represented as making in heaven, and his continuing to appear in the human nature for that purpose, I am aware that difficulties and objections may be raised by some. I readily admit, that the whole doctrine revealed to us in Scripture relating to the incarnation of Christ, the atonement made by his death, and the nature of his intercession for us in heaven, is of a mysterious kind. It is what we can comprehend in a very imperfect manner; and when we attempt too particularly to explain or discuss any of these doctrines, we are apt to *darken counsel by words without knowledge*.\*—Let us not however imagine that the mysterious nature of those doctrines furnishes any just objection against the truth of the Christian revelation. It must be considered, that this revelation professes to give us such a discovery of the spiritual invisible world, and of the administrations of the Divine government, as was proper to be at present communicated to us. In such a revelation of things invisible and divine, and which stretch far beyond the reach of human knowledge or capacity, it was naturally to be expected that matters would occur which should be mysterious, and incomprehensible by us. Indeed, it would have been strange and incredible if it had been otherwise; if nothing had appeared on such subjects, but what was level to our apprehension. In the present material system, in midst of which we live, and where the objects that surround us are continually exposed to the examination of our senses, how many things occur that are mysterious and unaccountable? The philosopher, age after age, has continued his researches into matter. After all his researches will he, at this day, refuse to acknowledge, that, in material substances, qualities have been discovered, powers and properties have been found, which it is beyond his power to reconcile to the commonly received laws and operations of matter, and which he cannot bring within the compass of any established system and theory? Shall this philosopher then, who finds himself so often baffled in his inquiries, by meeting with wonders in matter which he cannot explain, presume to reject a religious system, merely because in treating of an invisible world, and the administration of government there carried on by the Father of Spirits, particulars occur which appear incomprehensible to him?—My brethren, let us be a little more humbled and sober in our attempts to philosophise. Let us be thankful, that having received a reve-

\* Job, xxxviii. 2.

lation, which, upon rational grounds, stands well attested and confirmed, the mysterious doctrines which occur in it are all of them such as to be perfectly reconcileable with godliness and virtue; nay, such as have a direct tendency to promote the moral influence of virtue on the lives of men; and to bring powerful consolation to them under many troubles.

THIS is remarkably exemplified in that doctrine of which we are now treating, of the office performed by our Lord upon his ascension into Heaven. A mediator and intercessor with God, is what most nations and religions have anxiously sought to obtain. It has been at all times the favourite wish and hope of men; and from their earnestness to have this wish gratified, they contrived some form or other of mediation and intercession, on which they rested; some favourite hero, or saint, or tutelary subordinate God, through whose intervention they sought to obtain favour from the Supreme Governor of the universe. This is an idea which we find prevailing under most of the modes of Pagan worship. Men were generally sensible that they were guilty of offences against the Deity; that their own services were insufficient to appease him; and that therefore they had no title to expect his favour, unless some mediator of high merit was to espouse their interest and plead their cause.—This relief which the bewildered nations sought after in vain, is fully afforded us by the gospel of Christ. A real mediator is there revealed, invested with such characters as give encouragement and satisfaction to every pious worshipper. The Divine nature of which he is possessed, gives infinite merit and efficacy to every cause which he undertakes; and his possessing at the same time, the human nature, give us the justest ground to trust, that with compassion and tenderness he undertakes the cause of mankind.

The discovery therefore of Christ's acting as our Intercessor in heaven, is in the highest degree favourable to religion and virtue. It is so far from being a doctrine repugnant to the reason, or to the natural ideas and notions of mankind, that it accords, as has been observed, in the general view of it, with what has ever been their wish and their hope; and the evangelical discovery of the true Mediator, while it banishes all the superstition and idolatry which heathen ignorance had attached to a mediatory worship, fulfils to Christians every purpose both of encouragement and consolation. It encourages the humble virtuous man, who might be apt to look up with distrust to the awful Majesty of Heaven. It brings consolation to the penitent returning sinner, from the belief that unworthy as he is in himself, Christ the Saviour is worthy, by his powerful intercession, to procure his salvation.—What plan of religion could have been given more suited than this to the circumstances of man, in his present state of weakness and infirmity? What more animating to every sin-

cere worshipper?—Let us study to do our best; and if our endeavours be faithful, and our hearts be upright, we have an advocate with the Father in Heaven, on whose intercession we can rely; *One who is able to save to the uttermost, all who come unto God through him. We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.\**

In the last place, our Saviour ascended into heaven in order to exercise there the office of our King, as well as of our High Priest and Intercessor. His ascension was a solemn investiture in that royal authority with which he was to act as *Head of the Church*, till the end of time. All power in heaven and earth was committed to him. In token of his being the Sovereign of both worlds, in triumph he rose from his earthly grave, and in triumph ascended into Heaven. *Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ.† I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will give him the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.‡*

This view of our Lord's ascension and exaltation obviously commands from all Christians, the most profound reverence and submission. No longer let the humble appearance he made on earth vilify him to our apprehension. Never let the consideration of his grace and goodness as our Intercessor in heaven, be separated from the thoughts of that awful Majesty with which his ascension clothes him. With impunity none can offend him. If all the heavenly hosts adore him, if the whole universe obey him, what must be the fate of those, who being of all creatures the most highly indebted to his goodness, revolt against his government, and refuse obedience to his laws?

But while with awe and reverence the ascension and regal character of our Saviour is fitted to inspire us, it communicates also the highest satisfaction and comfort to our hearts. *Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.§* They have a Sovereign to whose protection they can, with firm trust, commit all their interests in life and death. There is no temptation under which his grace cannot be sufficient for them; no distress, from which it is not in his power to deliver them; no darkness but he can enlighten by a ray sent down from his eternal throne. *Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world.¶* From that eminence of celestial glory in which he resides, he beholds and remarks whatever is carried on throughout all his dominions,

\* Heb. viii. 25.—iv. 15. 16.

† Acts, ii. 36.

‡ Psalm ii. 6. 8.

§ Psalm cxlix. 2.

¶ Matth. xxviii. 20.

No secret conspiracy can escape his view; no fraud of wicked men or evil spirits can baffle his designs. *The heathen may rage, and the people imagine a vain thing. Kings of the earth may set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and his anointed. But he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision..* As his watchful eye is ever open to observe, so his almighty arm is ever extended to guard his church and people.—The same characters of wisdom and power, of justice and mercy, which we ascribe to the Providence and dominion of God the Father, belong, in their fullest extent, to the kingdom and government of Christ the Son of God.—This peculiar satisfaction his government affords us, that in the midst of sovereign authority, we know that he still retains the same mild and compassionate spirit, which he showed as our High Priest. The meanest of his subjects is not overlooked by him. The inhabitant of the most obscure cottage, equally as the possessor of the most splendid palace, dwells under his protection. He listens to the prayer of the poor, and despises not the services they yield him. *The widow's mite* is in his sight an acceptable offering; and even, *a cup of cold water given to a disciple in his name*, passes not without its reward.—Hence the characters of his regal administration cannot be better described than in the beautiful language of the prophetic Psalmist: *He shall judge the people with righteousness, and the poor with judgment. The righteous shall flourish in his days. He shall save the children of the needy, and break in pieces the oppressor.—He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. His name shall endure forever. It shall be continued as long as the sun. Men shall be blessed in him; and all nations shall call him blessed.\**

We have now under several views considered the ascension of Christ, and the important purposes which were answered by it. In going along, I have pointed out some of the chief effects which ought to be produced on us by this object of our faith.—Much more might be said on this subject, did the bounds of a discourse permit it. One improvement of the subject which the sacred writers often point out, must not be forgotten. *If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.†* A certain conformity with Christ, their great leader, in all the circumstances of his history, is in Scripture exacted from Christians. As they must *die with him to sin*, they must *rise with him unto newness of life*; and with him ascend in heart to heaven, and dwell in their

\* Psalm lxxii.

† Coloss. iii. 1, 2.

affections where he is. The elevated hopes which Christ, by his resurrection and ascension, has set before us, ought to inspire Christians with suitable elevation of sentiment above this present world.—As *Christ is in you the hope of glory, let every one who hath this hope in him, purify himself as Christ is pure.\** Let not the corrupt pleasures of this world debase you. Let not its terrors deject you. But in your whole conduct, let that dignity and equanimity appear, which belongs to those who have such high connections. Christ, as your *forerunner*, hath entered into the highest heavens; Him, it is your part to follow, in the paths of piety and virtue. In those paths proceed with perseverance and constancy, animated by those words of your departing Redeemer, which ought ever to dwell in your remembrance: *Go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.†*

\* John, iii. 3.

† John, xx. 17. † xiv. 2, 3.

## SERMON LXXXVI.

ON A PEACEABLE DISPOSITION.

---

*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*—ROMANS, xii. 18.

IT cannot but occur to every one who has read the New Testament, even in a cursory manner, that there is nothing more warmly and more frequently inculcated in it, than peace and love, union and good understanding among men. Were a person to form to himself an idea of the state of the Christian world, merely from reading our sacred books, and thence inferring how they would live who believed those books to be Divine, he would draw, in his fancy, the fairest picture of a happy society; he would expect to meet with nothing but concord, harmony, and order; and to find the voice of clamour and contention for ever silent. But were such a person, fond to be himself a witness and a partaker, of such a blissful state, to come amongst us from afar, how miserably, alas! would he be disappointed, when in actual conduct of Christians he discovered so little correspondence with the mild and peaceful genius of their professed religion; when he saw the fierce spirit of contention often raging unrestrained in public; and in private, the intercourse of men embittered, and society disordered and convulsed with quarrels about trifles! Too justly might he carry away with him this opprobrious report, that surely those Christians have no belief in that religion they profess to hold sacred, seeing their practice so openly contradicts it.

In order to prevent as much as we can, this reproach from attaching to us, let us now set ourselves to consider seriously the importance and the advantages of *living peaceably with all*

*men.*—This duty may be thought by some to possess a low rank among the Christian virtues, and the phrase a *peaceable man*, to express no more than a very inferior character. I admit that gentleness, candour, sensibility, and friendship,\* express a higher degree of refinement and improvement in the disposition; and that a good Christian ought to be distinguished by active benevolence, and zeal for remedying the miseries and promoting the felicity of others. But let it be remembered, that the love of peace is the foundation of all those virtues. It is the first article in the great Christian doctrine of charity; and its obligation is strict, in proportion as its importance is obvious. *Blessed are the peace-makers; for they shall be called the children of God.*†—I shall first show what is included in the precept of *living peaceably with all men*; and next, what arguments recommend our obedience to this precept.

I. THIS precept implies, in the first place, a sacred regard to the rules of justice, in rendering to every man what is his due. Without this first principle, there can be no friendly commerce among mankind. Justice is the basis on which all society rests. Throw down its obligation, and at that instant you banish peace from the earth; you let rapine loose, and involve all the tribes of men in perpetual hostility and war. To live peaceably, therefore, requires, as its first condition, that we content ourselves with what is our own, and never seek to encroach on the just rights of our neighbour; that in our dealings, we take no unfair advantage; but conscientiously adhere to the great rule of doing to others, according as we wish they should do to us. It supposes that we never knowingly abet a wrong cause, nor espouse an unjust side, but always give our countenance to what is fair and equal. We are never to disturb any man in the enjoyment of his lawful pleasure; nor to hinder him from advancing his lawful profit. But under a sense of our natural equality, and of that mutual relation which connects us together as men, we are to carry on our private interests in consistency with what is requisite for general order and good. *Render tribute to whom tribute is due; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.*—*Covet not what is thy brother's. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another.*

IN the second place, the duty of living peaceably, not only prohibits all acts of open injustice, but requires us carefully to avoid giving unnecessary provocation or offence to others.—When we consider from what small beginnings discord often arises, and to what astonishing heights from such beginnings it will grow, we will see much cause to watch with care over our

\* Vide preceding Discourses on these virtues.

† Matth. v. 9.



words and actions, in our intercourse with the world. It ought to be an object of attention so to behave, as never needlessly to exasperate the passions of others. In particular, we are to guard against all improper liberties of speech, and contumelious reflections on persons and characters.—The man of peace is mild in his demeanour, and inoffensive in his discourse. He appears to despise no man. He is not fond of contradicting and opposing, and is always averse to censure and to blame. He never erects himself into the character of a dictator in society. He never officiously seeks to intermeddle in the affairs of others, nor to pry into their secrets; and avoids every occasion of disturbing the good-will which men appear to bear to one another. —Opposite to this, stands the character of the man of unpeaceable and quarrelsome spirit; who, himself easily provoked by every trifle, is continually offending and provoking others by the harshness of his behaviour. He is loud in his censures, positive in his opinions, and impatient of all contradiction. He is a *busy body in other men's matters*; descants on their characters, enquires into their conduct, and on the authority of his own suspicions, assigns what motives he pleases to their actions. —Into the violence of party-spirit, he never fails to enter deeply; and confidently ascribes the worst principles to all who differ from him in opinion.—Such persons are the pests of society, and the troublers of all good order in human life. *Let every man study to be quiet*, says the Apostle, *and to do his own business.* —*Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.\**

IN the third place, the study of peace requires, that on some occasions we scruple not to give up our own opinion, or even to depart from our strict right, for the sake of peace.—At the same time, for preventing mistakes on this subject, it is proper to observe, that a tame submission to violence and wrongs, is not required by religion. We are not to imagine, that the love of peace is only another name for cowardice; or that it suppresses every proper exertion of a manly spirit. The expressions employed in the text, *if it be possible as much as lieth in you*, plainly insinuate, that there are cases in which it may not be in our power to *live peaceably with all men*. Every man is allowed to feel what is due to himself and his own character, and is entitled to support properly his own rights. In many cases the welfare of society requires that the attacks of the violent be checked and resisted.—What belongs to a good and a wise man is, to look forward coolly to the effects that are likely to follow the rigorous prosecution of any private rights of his own. If these appear to be pregnant with mischiefs to the society with which he

\* 1 Thes. iv. 11 Rom. xiv. 4.

is connected. in a much greater proportion than any advantage they can bring to himself, it then becomes his duty rather quietly to suffer wrong, than to kindle the flames of lasting discord. But how many are there, who, having once begun a claim, espoused a side, or engaged in a controversy, are determined to pursue it to the last, let the consequences be what they will? False notions of honour are brought in to justify their passions. Pride will not allow them to yield, or to make the least concession, when the true point of honour would have led to generous acknowledgements and condescension. They never make the first advances to returning reconciliation and peace. They are haughty in their claims, and require great submission before they can be appeased.—The lover of peace, on the other hand, looks upon men and manners in a milder and softer light. He views them with a philosophic, or rather a christian eye. Conscious that he himself has been often in the wrong; sensible that offence is frequently thought to be given, where no injury was intended; knowing that all men are liable to be misled by false reports into unjust suspicions of their neighbours; he can pass over many things without disturbance or emotion, which, in more combustible tempers, would kindle a flame. In all public matters in which he is engaged, he will not be pertinaciously adhesive to every measure which he has once proposed, as if his honour were necessarily engaged to carry it through. If he see the passions of men beginning to rise and swell, he will endeavour to allay the growing storm. He will give up his favourite schemes, he will yield to an opponent, rather than become the cause of violent embroilments; and, next to religion and a good conscience, the cause of peace and union will be to him most sacred and dear.

In the fourth place, our study of peace, in order to be effectual, must be of an extensive nature. It must not be limited to those with whom by interest, by good opinion, or by equality of station, we are connected. *Live peaceably with all men*, says the Apostle. No man is to be contemned because he is mean, or to be treated with incivility because he is one in whom we have no concern. Even to those whom we account bad men, the obligation of living at peace extends. This is not inconsistent with that just indignation which we ought to bear against their crimes. Without entering into any close connection with them, without admitting them to be our friends and companions, it is certainly possible to live amongst them in a peaceable manner. Human society is at present composed of a confused mixture of good and evil men; and from our imperfect knowledge of characters, it is often not easy to distinguish the one class of men from the other. We are commonly prejudiced in favour of those who concur with us in our modes of thinking; and are prone to look with an evil

eye on those who differ from us in subjects of importance. But if all the supposed blemishes of those with whom we differ in opinion; if the heretical doctrines which we ascribe to them, or the bad principles with which we charge them, were sufficient to justify the breach of peace, very little harmonious correspondence would remain among men. Appearances of religious zeal have been too often employed to cover the pride and ill-nature of turbulent persons.—The man of peace will bear with many whose opinions or practices he dislikes, without an open and violent rupture. He will consider it as his duty to gain upon them by mildness, and to reclaim them as far as he can from what is evil, by calm persuasion, rather than to attempt reforming them by acrimony and censure.—Neither indeed is it every man's office to set up for a reformer of the world. Every man, it is true, is bound to promote reformation by his personal example. But if he assume a superiority to which he has no title; and, with rude and indiscreet zeal, administer reproofs, and thrust himself forward into the concerns of others, he is likely to do much more hurt than good; to break the peace of the world, without doing service to the cause of true religion.

If it thus appears to be our duty to extend our study of peace throughout the wide sphere of all who are around us, it will naturally occur that there is a certain narrow sphere within which this study ought to be particularly cultivated; towards all those, I mean, with whom Nature or Providence has joined us in close union, whether by bonds of friendship, kindred, and relation, or by the nearer ties of domestic and family connection. There, it most highly concerns every one to put in practice all the parts of that peaceable and amicable behaviour which I before have described; to guard against every occasion of provocation and offence; to overlook accidental starts of ill-humour; to put the most favourable interpretation on words and actions. The closer that men are brought together, they must unavoidably rub, at times, the more on one another. The most delicate attentions are requisite, of course, for preventing tempers being ruffled, and peace being broken, by those slight failings, from which none are exempt. It is within the circle of domestic life, that the character of the man of peace will be particularly distinguished as amiable; and where he will most comfortably enjoy the fruits of his happy disposition.

HAVING now explained the precept in the text, and shown what is included in living peaceably with all men, I come next to suggest some considerations for recommending this peaceable disposition.

LET us recollect, in the first place, as a bond of union and peace, the natural relation which subsists among us all as men,

sprung from one Father, connected by one common nature, and by fellowship in the same common necessities and wants; connected as Christians closer still, by acknowledgment of the same Lord, and participation of the same Divine hopes. Ought lesser differences altogether to divide and estrange those from one another, whom such ancient and sacred bonds unite? In all other cases the remembrance of kindred, or brotherhood, of a common parent and common family, tends to soften the harsher feelings, and often has influence, when feuds arise, to melt and overcome the heart. Why should not a remembrance of the same kind have some effect with respect to the great brotherhood of mankind?—How unnatural and shocking is it, if, on occasion of some angry expression or trifling affront, to which sudden passion or mistaken report has given rise, a man shall deliberately go forth with the barbarous purpose of plunging his sword into his brother's breast? What a reproach to reason and humanity, that a ridiculous idea of honour, derived from times of Gothic grossness and ignorance, should stain the annals of modern life with so many tragical scenes of horror?

Let the sentiment of our natural connection with each other as men, dispose us the more to peace, from a reflection on our common failings, and the mutual allowances which those failings oblige us to make. A sense of equity should here arise, to prompt forbearance and forgiveness. Were there any man who could say that he had never, in the course of his life, suffered himself to be transported by passion, or given just ground of offence to any one, such a man might have some plea for impatience, when he received from others unreasonable treatment. But if no such perfectly unexceptionable characters are to be found, how unjust is it not to give to others those allowances which we, in our turn must claim from them?—To our own failings, we are always blind. Our pride and self-conceit render us quarrelsome and contentious, by nourishing a weak and childish sensibility to every fancied point of our own honour or interest, while they shut up all regard to the honour or interest of our brethren. From the high region of imaginary self-estimation, let us descend to our own just and proper level. Let us calmly reflect on the place we hold in society, and on the justice that is due to others. From such reflections we will learn to be more humble in our claims, and more moderate in our pretensions; and many of the causes of animosity and contention will die away.

LET us consider, in the next place, how trifling and inconsiderable, for the most part, the causes are of contention and discord among mankind, and how much they deserve to be overlooked by the wise and the good. When we view the eagerness with which contests are agitated in society, and look to the bit-

terness and wrath they so oft occasion, one would think that all were at stake, and that there could be no life, no happiness on earth, unless to him who was victorious in the contest. And yet, in how few instances has there been any just ground for this mighty ferment of spirits?—You have been slighted, perhaps, by a superior; you have been ungratefully treated by a friend; a rival has over-reached you by fraud, or overcome you by more powerful interest. Amidst the bustle of life, amidst the interfering and crossing of various pursuits and interests, are not such incidents to be expected by every one? Ought you not to have been prepared for encountering them without passion or violence, as evils belonging to the common lot of humanity? As light bodies are shaken and torn by every breath of wind, while those that are solid resist the blast; so it is only the little and mean mind that loses possession of itself on every trifling provocation; while a great and firm spirit keeps its place, and rests on a basis of its own, unshaken by the common disturbances of life.—Of what small moment to your real happiness, are many of those injuries which draw forth your resentment? They may affect in some degree your worldly interests; but can they affect your true honour as a man! Can they deprive you of peace of conscience, of the satisfaction of having acted a right part, of the pleasing sense of being esteemed by men, and the hope of being rewarded by God, for your generosity and forgiveness?—In the moments of eager contention all is magnified and distorted in its appearance. A false light is thrown on every object. Nothing appears to be what it really is. But let the hour of violence pass over; let the course of time bring forward recollection and calmness, and you will wonder at your former violence. Objects, which once were so formidable, will then have disappeared. A new scene has taken place; and the grounds of former contention will seem as dreams of the night, which have passed away.—Act then now the part of a man, by anticipating that period of coolness, which time will certainly bring. You will then cease to break the peace of society with your angry contentions. You will show that magnanimity which belongs to those who depend not for their happiness merely on the occurrences of the world. *He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.\**

LET us consider the different consequences of a contentious spirit, and of a peaceable disposition, with respect to our happiness and enjoyment. The foundation of happiness must certainly be laid within our breasts. If one be pained and uneasy

\* Prov. xvi. 32.

there, external circumstances, how flourishing soever, avail him nothing: And what feelings are more uneasy and painful than the workings of sour and angry passions? Great and manifold as the natural and unavoidable distresses of our present state are, they are small in comparison of the evils which men bring upon themselves, and bring upon one another, by variance and discord. I speak not now of public calamities, of faction and ambition raging through the world, and hostile armies laying waste the earth with desolation and bloodshed. Confining our views solely to private life, how miserably is all its comfort and order destroyed by those jealousies, feuds, and animosities, that so often break the peace of families, tear asunder the bonds of friendship, and poison all that social intercourse which men were formed to entertain with one another? From a small chink, which some rude hand has opened, the bitter waters of strife easily flow. But of this we may be assured, that a full portion of their bitterness shall be tasted by him who has let them forth. Never was any man active in disquieting others, who did not at the same time disquiet himself. While the tempest which he has raised may be bursting on his neighbour, he will be obliged to feel the hurricane raging in his own breast; and from his restlessness, impatience, and eagerness, joined with anxious trepidations and fears, will often suffer more than all that he can inflict on his adversary.

From such painful sensations the man of peace is free. A mild, unruffled, self-possessing mind is a blessing more important to real felicity, than all that can be gained by the triumphant issue of some violent contest. Never was a truer axiom pronounced by any mouth, than what was uttered by the wise man of old; *Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox, and hatred therewith.*\* With a scanty provision of the good things of this world, a wise man may be contented and happy; but without peace, all the luxuries of the rich lose their relish.—While among the sons of strife, all is tempestuous and loud; the smooth stream, the serene atmosphere, the mild zephyr, are the proper emblems of a gentle temper, and a peaceable life. Nor is this merely a poetical allusion. The ordinary language of discourse, where the terms are so often employed of a storm of passion, a calm mind, a rough or a fiery temper, plainly show that all men are sensible of some analogy between a peaceable disposition, and those scenes of external nature that are universally agreeable and pleasant. The condition of those who are living in unity with their brethren, is likened by the psalmist David *to the dew of Hermon; the dew that descended on*

\* Prov. xv. 17.

*the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.\**

While the man of this disposition is happy within himself, let it not be forgotten, that he is at the same time gaining on all around him. From the quarrelsome and rude, all men naturally recoil; and except when necessity obliges them, avoid their intercourse. But the lover of peace conciliates general good-will, and is both respected and beloved. Though no absolute security can be devised against the malice and injustice of the world, yet, for the most part, it will be found that there is no more effectual guard against violence, no surer road to a safe enjoyment of life, than an established character for benignity and regard to peace. The man of this character, if unjustly attacked, will have many to defend him and take his part. In his prosperity he will be unenvied, and his misfortunes will be alleviated by general sympathy.

LET US consider, in the last place, how strongly the precept in the text is enforced by the most sacred religious obligations. You all know what a high place charity, under all its forms of meekness, forbearance, and forgiveness, possesses in the Christian system. To bring authorities in support of this, were to recite a great part of the New Testament before you. The God whom we worship, is known by the title of *the God of peace*.—That evil spirit who is opposite to him, is described with all the characters which express malignity; *the enemy, the accuser, the liar, the destroyer*. When Christ came into the world as our Saviour, he is styled the Prince of Peace. The blessings which were proclaimed at his birth were, *peace upon earth, and good-will towards men*. The whole of his life was one continued exemplification of all the virtues that characterise the meek, the peaceable and forgiving spirit. Never was any one's temper tried by so many and so great provocations; never did any one retain under these provocations such a calm and unruffled tenor of mind; insomuch that the Apostle Paul, on an occasion of earnest intreaty to the Corinthians, *beseches them by the meekness and gentleness of Christ*, as the most noted and well-known parts of his character.† What can be said higher of any virtue than that it is the quality, under the denomination of which the Son of God chose to be known when he dwelt on earth? Let us add, that it is also the distinguishing character of God's own spirit. The Holy Ghost is called the *Spirit of peace*. *Meekness, gentleness, and long-suffering*, are expressly denominated *his fruits*; and on a certain memorable occasion, his appearance was marked with signals that express the mild and quiet spirit as distinguish-

\* Psalm cxxxiii. 3.

† 2 Corinth. x. 1.

guished from violence. When Elijah the great prophet was called to go forth and stand before the Lord, *behold, a great and strong wind rent the mountains, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After that, there came forth a still small voice. When Elijah heard it, he knew the symbol of God's spirit; he wrapped his face in his mantle, and worshipped.\**

AFTER so many testimonies given by the sacred writings to the high importance of a meek and peaceable spirit, what shall we think of those, who in their system of religion, make slight account of this virtue; who are ready to quarrel with others on the most trifling occasions; who are continually disquieting their families by peevishness and ill humour; and by malignant reports, raising dissension among friends and neighbours? Can any claims to sound belief, or any supposed attainments of grace, supply the defect of so cardinal a virtue as charity and love?—Let such persons particularly bethink themselves how little the spirit which they possess, fits them for the kingdom of heaven, or rather how far it removes them from the just hope of ever entering into it. Hell is the proper region of enmity and strife. There dwell unpeaceable and fiery spirits, in the midst of mutual hatred, wrath and tumult. But the kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of peace. There, *charity never faileth*. There, reigneth the God of love; and, in his presence, all the blessed inhabitants are of one heart and one soul. No string can ever be heard to jar in that celestial harmony: and therefore the contentious and violent are, both by their own nature and by God's decree, for ever excluded from the heavenly society.—As the best preparation for those blessed mansions, let us ever keep in view that direction given by an Apostle, *Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*† To the cultivation of amity and *peace* in all our social intercourse, let us join *holiness*; that is, piety, and active virtue; and thus we shall pass our days, comfortably and honourably on earth, and at the conclusion of our days, be admitted to dwell among saints and angels, and *to see the Lord*.

\* 1 Kings, xix. 11, 12, 13.

† Heb. xii. 14.



## SERMON LXXXVII.

ON RELIGIOUS JOY, AS GIVING STRENGTH AND SUPPORT TO  
VIRTUE.

---

—*The joy of the Lord is your strength.*—NEHEMIAH, viii. 10.

NEHEMIAH, the governor of Jerusalem, having assembled the people of Israel immediately after their return from the captivity of Babylon, made the book of the law be brought forth and read before them. On hearing the words of the book of the law, we are informed that *all the people wept*; humbled and cast down by the sense of their present weak and forlorn condition, compared with the flourishing state of their ancestors. Nehemiah sought to raise their spirits from this dejection; and exhorts them to prepare themselves for serving the God of their fathers with a cheerful mind, *for*, says he, *the joy of the Lord is your strength.*

Abstracted from the occasion on which the words were spoken, they contain an important truth, which I now purpose to illustrate; that to the nature of true religion there belongs an inward joy, which animates, strengthens, and supports virtue. The illustration of this position will require that I should show in the first place, that in the practice of religious duties there is found an inward joy, here styled the *joy of the Lord*; and in the next place, that this joy is justly denominated the *strength* of the righteous.

I. JOY is a word of various signification. By men of the world, it is often used to express those flashes of mirth which arise from irregular indulgencies of social pleasure; and of which it is said by the wise man, that in such *laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness*.\* It will be easily understood that the *joy* here mentioned partakes of noth-

\* Prov. xiv. 13.

ing a-kin to this ; but signifies a tranquil and placid joy, an inward complacency and satisfaction, accompanying the practice of virtue, and the discharge of every part of our duty. A joy of this kind is what we assert to belong to every part of religion ; to characterise religion wherever it is genuine, and to be essential to its nature. In order to ascertain this, let us consider the disposition of a good man with respect to God ; with respect to his neighbours ; and with respect to the government of his own mind.

WHEN we consider in what manner religion requires that a good man should stand affected towards God, it will presently appear that rational enlightened piety opens such views of him as must communicate joy. It presents him, not as an awful unknown Sovereign, but as the Father of the universe, the Lover and Protector of righteousness, under whose government all the interests of the virtuous are safe. With delight the good man traces the Creator throughout all his works, and beholds them every where reflecting some image of his Supreme perfection. In the morning dawn, the noontide glory, and the evening shade ; in the fields, the mountains, and the flood, where worldly men behold nothing but a dead, uninteresting scene ; every object is enlivened and animated to him by the presence of God. Amidst that Divine presence he dwells with reverence, but without terror. Conscious of the uprightness of his own intentions, and of the fidelity of his heart to God, he considers himself, by night and by day, as under the protection of an invisible guardian. *He lifts up his eyes to the hills from whence cometh his aid ;* and commits himself without distrust to the *Keeper of Israel, who never slumbers nor sleeps.* He listens to the gracious promises of his word. With comfort he receives the declarations of his mercy to mankind, through a great Redeemer ; in virtue of whose atonement provision is made for pardon to human infirmities, and for our reception in the end into a happier world. All the various devotional exercises of faith and trust in God, all the cordial effusions of love and gratitude to this Supreme Benefactor in the acts of prayer and praise, afford scope to those emotions of the heart, which are of the most pleasing kind ; and which diffuse a gentle and softening tenderness over the affections. In a word, a truly pious man, who has always before him an object so sublime and interesting as this great Father of the universe, on whom his thoughts can dwell with satisfaction, may be truly said to partake highly in the *joy of the Lord.*

But it may here be objected, are there no mortifications and griefs that particularly belong to piety ? What shall we say to the tear of repentance, and to that humiliation of confession and

remorse, which may, at times, be incumbent on the most pious, in this state of human infirmity?—To this I reply, first, that although there may be seasons of grief and dejection in a course of piety, yet this is not inconsistent with the joy of the Lord, being on the whole, the predominant character of a good man's state; as it is impossible that, during this life, perpetual brightness can remain in any quarter, without some dark cloud. But I must observe next, that even the penitential sorrows and relentings of a pious heart, are not without their own satisfactions. A certain degree of pleasure is mingled with the tears which the returning offender sheds, in the hours of compunction; the ingenuous contrition that he feels, relieves his heart, at the same time that it gives it pain. If we attend to the workings of human nature on other occasions we shall find that it is no unusual thing for a secret mysterious pleasure to be mixed with painful feelings. This we all know to be the case in those exercises of pity and commiseration to which we are led by sympathy with the afflicted. We grieve and are pained for their distress; yet we choose to indulge that grief; satisfaction is felt in the indulgence; and we are unwillingly separated from the object which has occasioned this painful, but tender sympathy. A mixture somewhat similar, of pleasure and pain, takes place in the sentiments of penitential sorrow, which good men sometimes feel. In the midst of their distress, they are soothed by an internal consciousness, that they are affected as it becomes them to be; that they feel as they ought to feel; and they are gradually relieved by the hope rising in their breast of finding mercy and acceptance with their Creator and Redeemer. Where the mind is properly instructed in religion, it will not long be left in a state of overwhelming dejection, but will return to tranquillity, and repossess again the *joy of the Lord*.

WHEN we consider, next, the disposition of a good man towards his fellow-creatures, we shall find here the joy of the Lord exerting its influence fully. That mild and benevolent temper to which he is formed by virtue and piety; a temper that is free from envious and malignant passions, and that can look with the eye of candour and humanity on surrounding characters, is a constant spring of cheerfulness and serenity. Indeed if there be joy at all in human life, it is, perhaps, in this state of the mind that it is most sensibly felt, and felt with the least check or allay. It is truly said, *to the wicked there is no peace*. In proportion as any one of the bad passions predominates in the breast, it never fails, in the same proportion, to corrode the heart, and to shed over all the comforts of life a poisonous and baneful influence. Whereas all those exercises of friendship, compassion, and generosity, which are essential to the disposition of a virtuous man,

are to him lively enjoyments of pleasure in themselves, and increase the satisfaction which he tastes in all the other innocent pleasures of life. He knows that he enjoys them along with the good-will and the blessings of all to whom he has studied to do good. When he can cheer the dejected or gladden the sorrowful, he is cheered and gladdened himself. If his circumstances allow him not to do all the good he wishes to have done, yet in the consciousness of good intentions there is always an inward satisfaction; and in those lesser offices of kindness and humanity which are within the sphere of every man to perform, he enjoys innumerable occasions of being pleased and happy.

WITH respect to that part of religion which consists in the government of a man's own mind, of his passions and desires, it may be thought that much joy is not to be expected. For there religion appears to lay on a severe and restraining hand. Strict temperance and self-denial are often requisite; and much is on some occasions abridged, of what is apt to be reckoned the full and free enjoyment of life. Yet, here also it will be found, that the *joy of the Lord* takes place. To a person just reclaimed from the excesses of sensual indulgence, the restraints imposed by virtue will, at first, appear uncooth and mortifying. But let him begin to be accustomed to a regular life, and his taste will soon be rectified, and his feelings will change. In purity, temperance, and self-government, there is found a satisfaction in the mind, similar to what results from the enjoyment of perfect health in the body. A man is then conscious that all is sound within. There is nothing that knows his spirit; that makes him ashamed of himself; or discomposes his calm and orderly enjoyment of life. His conscience testifies that he is acting honourably. He enjoys the satisfaction of being master of himself. He feels that no man can accuse him of degrading his character by base pleasures or low pursuits; and knows that he will be honoured and esteemed by those whose honour and esteem he would most desire; all which are sensations most pleasing and gratifying to every human heart.

FROM this slight sketch it plainly appears that there is an inward satisfaction, justly termed *the joy of the Lord*, which runs through all the parts of religion. This is a very different view of religion from what is entertained by those who consider it as a state of perpetual penance; to which its votaries unwillingly submit, merely from the dread of punishment in hell; and who bargain for the rewards of another world, by a renunciation of all that is agreeable or comfortable to man in this world. Such conceptions of religion are contradicted by the experience of every truly virtuous man, and are directly opposite to the views of religion given us in the word of God; wherein its ways are

termed *ways of pleasantness and paths of peace*; and where we are assured that *in the keeping of God's commands*, there is an immediate *great reward*.

But what it concerns us at present to remark is, that some experience of this *joy of the Lord* which I have described, enters as an essential part into the character of every good man. In proportion to the degree of his goodness, to his improvement and progress in virtue, will be the degree of his participation in the pleasure and joy of religion. But wherever such pleasure is entirely unknown; wherever there is no satisfaction and delight in the discharge of virtuous duties, there we are obliged to conclude, that religion does not subsist in its genuine state.— It is either a sanctimonious shew merely; a forced appearance of piety and virtue, tinctured, perhaps, with some deep shades of superstition; or at best, it is religion in its most weak and imperfect state. It is deficient in the regeneration of the heart. The man himself is in a divided and hovering state, between two opposite principles of action; partly affecting to be obedient to God's commands, and partly a slave to the world. The truth and importance of this observation will more fully appear, when we proceed to what was proposed for the

II<sup>d</sup> Head of discourse—to show in what respects the joy of the Lord is justly said to be *the strength of the righteous*.

IN the first place, it is the animating principle of virtue; it supports its influence, and assists it in becoming both persevering and progressive. Experience may teach us that few undertakings are lasting or successful, which are accompanied with no pleasure. If a man's religion be considered merely as a task prescribed to him, which he feels burdensome and oppressive, it is not likely that he will long constrain himself to act against the bent of inclination. It is not until he feels somewhat within him which attracts him to his duty, that he can be expected to be constant and zealous in the performance of it. Was it ever found that a person advanced far in any art or study, whether of the liberal or mechanical kind, in which he had no pleasure, to which he had no heart, but which, from motives merely of interest or fear, he was compelled to undertake? Is it then to be thought that religion will prove the only exception to what holds so generally, and will continue an actuating principle of conduct, whether we love it for his own sake, or not? It is true, that a sense of duty may sometimes exercise its authority, though there be no sensations of pleasure to assist it. Belief of those religious principles in which we were educated, and dread of future punishment, will, in cases where no strong temptation assails us, restrain from the commission of atrocious crimes, and produce some decent regularity of external conduct. But on

occasions when inclination or interest prompt to some transgression of virtue, which safety or secrecy encourages, and which the example of the world seems to countenance; when the present advantage or pleasure appears to be all on one side, and no satisfaction arises to counterbalance it on the other; is it to be thought that conscience will then stand its ground, with one who never was attached to virtue on its own account, and never experienced any joy in following its dictates?—But these are the occasions when the *joy of the Lord* proves the *strength of the righteous man*. Accustomed to take pleasure in doing his duty; accustomed to look up to God with delight and complacency, and to feel himself happy in all the offices of kindness and humanity to men around him; accustomed to rejoice in a clear conscience, in a pure heart, and the hope of heavenly bliss; he cannot think of parting with such satisfactions for the sake of any worldly bribe. There is something within his heart, that pleads for religion and virtue. He has seen their beauty; he has tasted their sweetness; and having such pleasures within himself, to oppose to all the pleasures of sin, he is enabled to maintain his integrity inviolate; or if in any degree he has deviated from it, speedy remorse is awakened, and he cannot be satisfied with himself till he returns back to the right path.—Thus, through the *joy of the Lord*, religion becomes in him *the spirit of love, and power, and of a sound mind*.\* It is the *peace of God, which passeth understanding, keeping his mind and heart*.† It is the *path of the just which is as the light, shining more and more unto the perfect day*.

In the next place, the joy of the Lord is the *strength of the righteous*, as it is their great support under the discouragements and trials of life. In the days of their ease and prosperity, it guards them, as has been shown, against the temptations of vice; and in the general tenour of conduct, attaches them to the side of virtue, and when the evil days come, wherein they shall have no pleasure from the world, it supplies them with pleasures of another kind, to preserve them from improper despondency, or from entering into evil discourses for the sake of relief.—A good man's friends may forsake him; or may die, and leave him to mourn. His fortune may fail, or his health decay. Calumny and reproach may unjustly attack his character. In circumstances of this kind, where worldly men become peevish, dispirited and fretful, he who is acquainted with the pleasures of religion and virtue, can possess himself calm and undisturbed. He has resources within unknown to the world, whence light *arises to him in darkness*. From the gloom or turbulence of external

\* 2 Tim. i. 7.

† Philipp. iv. 7.

evils, he can retreat to the enjoyment of his own mind. In the exercises of devotion, his heart is elevated, and the cares of the world are forgotten. In his regular discharge of all the social duties of life, he finds cheerfulness and pleasure. Hence his temper is not soured. He accuses neither God nor man for the unavoidable misfortunes of life. He submits with patience to the common lot; looking forward with good hope to better days; retaining always honourable thoughts of God's providence, and sentiments of candour towards men.—In this manner, his experience of the joy of the Lord becomes *his strength*; as infusing into his mind a principle of firmness and stability, and enabling him, in every situation of fortune, to continue the same.

FROM the view which we have now taken of the subject, it must clearly appear, that to every one who wishes to possess the spirit, and to support the character of genuine goodness and virtue, it is an object most desirable and important, to acquire a prevailing relish for the pleasures of religion. As this is a most important object, so also it is an attainable one by every man whose intentions are sincerely upright. For let it be remembered, that the *joy of the Lord*, which I have described as *the strength of the righteous*, is not to be understood as a priviledge belonging only to saints of the highest order, who can assuredly trust to their being the chosen of God. It is not to be understood of high raptures, and transports of religious fervour. It is not even confined to the sole pleasures or intercourse with God in devotion; though assuredly these constitute one great part of the *joy of the Lord*, and are auxiliary to its exercises on every other occasion. The *joy of the Lord* is to be understood of that joy, which accompanies the whole of religious and virtuous practice; that satisfaction which a good man feels in the discharge of his duty, which accompanies the performance of all the offices which belong to the station of life in which he is placed; whether these be of a public nature or private; social or domestic, or relating particularly to the exercises of religious worship and devotion.

To attain this spirit, of considering the discharge of our duty as our pleasure and happiness, is certainly not incompatible with our present state of infirmity. It is no more than what good men have often attained, and have testified of it; that *their delight was in the law of God*; that *his statutes were sweet to their taste*: that *they had taken them as an heritage for ever, for they were the rejoicing of their heart*. *I delight to do thy will, Oh my God; thy law is within my heart.*\*—According to the proficiency which men have made in virtue, will be the de-

gree of satisfaction which they receive from the performance of it; but where no pleasures or satisfactions of this kind are known, men have much ground to distrust their pretensions to godliness or christianity.

It is therefore of high importance, that all proper means be employed to form our internal taste to a proper relish for this joy of the Lord. For it is not to be dissembled, that much is against us in our endeavours to have our disposition formed for relishing virtuous pleasures. We breathe in this world a sort of vitiated air, very unfriendly to the health and soundness of all our moral feelings. From our earliest youth we are bred up in admiration of the external advantages of fortune; and are accustomed to hear them extolled as the only real and substantial goods. We must therefore begin by studying to correct these false ideas, and persuading ourselves that there are other things besides riches, honours and sensual pleasures, that are good for man; that there are joys of a spiritual and intellectual nature, which directly affect the mind and heart, and which confer a satisfaction both more refined and more lasting than any worldly circumstances can confer. In order to have a fair trial of the value and effect of those spiritual enjoyments, we must forbear polluting ourselves with gross and guilty pleasures; we must even refrain from indulging worldly pleasures that appear innocent, in a profuse and intemperate degree, lest they sensualise and debase our feelings. By preserving a wise and manly temperance in lower pleasures and pursuits, we will then allow those of a higher kind to occupy their proper place; and shall be in a situation fairly to compare the pure sensations of pleasure which arise from the consciousness of discharging our duty, with the transient and turbid gratifications of sin and the world. To such endeavours of our own, for rectifying and improving our taste of pleasure, let us join frequent and fervent prayer to God, that he may enlighten and reform our hearts; and by his spirit communicate that joy to our souls, which descends from him, and which he has annexed to every part of religion and virtue as the *strength of the righteous*.



## SERMON LXXXVIII.

ON THE FOLLY OF THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD.

---

*The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.*

1 CORINTH. iii. 19.

THE judgment which we form of ourselves, often differs widely from that which is formed of us by God, whose judgment alone is always conformable to the truth. In our opinion of the abilities which we imagine ourselves to possess, there is always much self-flattery; and in the happiness which we expect to enjoy in this world, there is always much deceit. As there is a worldly happiness, which God perceives to be no other than concealed misery; as there is a worldly honour, which in his estimation is reproached; so, as the text informs us, there is a *wisdom of the world*, which is *foolishness with God*. Assuredly there is nothing in which it imports us more that our judgment should agree with the truth than in what relates to wisdom. It is the qualification upon which every man is inclined to value himself more than on any other. They who can with patience suffer imputations on other parts of their character, are ready to lose their temper, and to feel sore and hurt when they are attacked for deficiency in prudence and judgment. Wisdom is justly considered as the guide of conduct. If any capital errors shall take place respecting it; if one shall mistake that for wisdom, which at bottom is mere folly; such a mistake will pervert the first principles of conduct, and be perpetually misleading a man through the whole of life.—As the text plainly intimates that this mistake does often take place in the world, and as it materially concerns us all to be on our guard against so great a danger, I shall endeavour to shew, first, what the nature and spirit of that *wisdom of the world* is, which is here condemned.

and next, in what sense and on what account it is styled *foolishness with God*.

I. LET us consider the nature of that wisdom which is repro- bated in the text as foolishness with God. It is styled the *wisdom of this world*; that is, the wisdom which is most current and most prized in this world; the wisdom which particularly distinguishes the character of those who are commonly known by the name of *men of the world*. Its first and most noted distinction is, that its pursuits are confined entirely to the temporal advantages of the world. Spiritual blessings, or moral improvements, the man of this spirit rejects as a sort of airy unsubstantial enjoyments, which he leaves to the speculative and the simple; attaching himself wholly to what he reckons the only solid goods, the possession of riches and influence, of reputation and power, together with all the conveniences and pleasures which opulent rank or station can procure.

In pursuit of these favourite ends, he is not in the least scrupulous as to his choice of means. If he prefer those which are the fairest, it is not because they are fair, but because they seem to him most likely to prove successful. He is sensible that it is for his interest to preserve decorums and to stand well in the public opinion. Hence he is seldom an open profligate man, or marked by any glaring enormities of conduct. In this respect, his character differs from that of those who are commonly called *men of pleasure*. Them he considers as a thoughtless, giddy herd, who are the victims of passion and momentary impulse. The thorough-bred man of the world is more steady and regular in his pursuits. He is for the most part, composed in his manners, and decent in his vices. He will often find it expedient to be esteemed by the world as worthy and good. But to be thought good, answers his purpose much better than subjecting himself to become really such; and what he can conceal from the world, he conceives to be the same as if he had never been.—Let me here remark in passing, that the character which I am now describing, is one less likely to be reclaimed and reformed, than that of those whom I mentioned above as the men of pleasure. With them, vice breaks forth in occasional fits and starts; with the other it grows up into a hardened and confirmed principle. In the midst of the gross irregularities of pleasure, circumstances often force remorse on the sinner's mind. Moments of compunction arise, which may be succeeded by conviction and reformation. But the cool and temperate plan of iniquity, on which the man of worldly wisdom proceeds, allows the voice of conscience to be longer silent. The alarm which it gives, is not so loud and violent as to awaken him at once from his evil courses, and instantly to prepare him for a better mind.

The man of the world is always a man of selfish and contracted disposition. Friends, country, duty, honour, all disappear from his view, when his own interest is in question. He is of a hard heart; he chooses indeed to be so, lest at any time the unguarded effusions of kind affections should carry him beyond the line of worldly wisdom. The more thoroughly that the spirit of the world has taken possession of him, the circle of his affections becomes always the narrower. His family will perhaps find place, as connected with his own importance, and with his plans either of power or wealth; but all beyond that circle are excluded from any particular regard. It is his great principle never to embark seriously in any undertaking from which he foresees no benefit likely to redound to himself. Public spirit he considers either as a mere chimera created by the simple, or a pretence employed by the artful for their own purpose. Judging of the rest of the world by what he feels within himself, he proceeds on the supposition that all men are carrying on interested designs of their own, and of course is ever on his guard against them. Hence to the cordialities of friendship he is an entire stranger; too much wrapt up in himself, indeed, to be a friend to any one, and if his prudence restrain him from being an open and violent enemy, yet he is always an unforgiving one.

Candour, openness, and simplicity of manners, are ridiculed by the man of this description, as implying mere ignorance of the world. Art and address are the qualities on which he values himself. For the most part, he would choose to supplant a rival by intrigue, rather than to overcome him by fair opposition. Indeed, what men call policy and knowledge of the world, is commonly no other thing than dissimulation and sincerity. The world is a great school, where deceit in all its forms is one of the lessons that is first learned, and most eagerly caught by such as aspire to be proficient in worldly wisdom. A man of the world, in short, is one, who, upon any call of interest, flatters and deceives you; who can smile in your face, while he is contriving plans for your ruin; who, upon no occasion thinks of what is right, or fit, or honourable; but only of what is expedient and useful to himself.

I HAVE dwelt the more fully on the delineation of this character, that each of us might learn whether there be any feature in it that applies to himself; as it is a character too frequently met with in the world, and not always so severely reprobated as it ought to be. Let me now ask, whether such a character as I have described be in any respect an amiable one? Is the man of the world, polished, and plausible, and courtly, as in his behaviour he may be, one whom you would choose for a companion and bosom friend? Would you wish him for a son, a brother, or

a husband? Would you reckon yourself safe in confiding your interests to him, or entrusting him with your secrets? Nay, let me ask, if he be one whom in your hearts you respect and honour? His shrewdness and abilities you may perhaps admire; stand in awe of him you may; and, for the sake of advantage, may wish him to be on your side. But could you honour him as a parent, or venerate him as a magistrate; or would you wish to live under him as a sovereign? Of what real value then, let me ask, is that boasted wisdom of the world, which, can neither conciliate love, nor produce trust, nor command inward respect?—At the same time, I admit that the man of the world may be a man of very considerable abilities. He may display talents of many different sorts. Besides art and sagacity, he may possess genius and learning; he may be distinguished for eloquence in supporting his own cause; he may have valour and courage to defend himself against his enemies.—But observe, I entreat you, a consequence that follows. You see in this instance, that the most distinguished human abilities, when they are separated from virtue and moral worth, lose their chief eminence and lustre, and are deprived of all valuable efficacy. They dwindle into despicable talents, which have no power to command the hearts, nor to ensure the respect and honour of mankind. Let it be carefully observed, and always remembered, that integrity, probity, and moral worth, are essentially requisite to give the stamp of real excellence to any powers or abilities which the human mind can possess.—Having now considered the nature and effect of worldly wisdom with respect to men, let us inquire,

II. How it stands with respect to God. It is said in the text, to be *foolishness with God*. It is so in three respects: It is contemptible in God's sight; it is baffled in its attempts by God; or, when its attempts are successful, they are allowed to produce nothing but disappointment and vanity.

FIRST, it is contemptible in God's sight. Pleased and satisfied as the wise man of the world may be with himself, and honoured as he may fancy himself to be by the multitude, let him be mortified with reflecting that, in the eye of him who is the Supreme Judge of all worth, his character is mean and wretched. That which God declares himself to love and honour, is *truth in the inward parts*: the fair, sincere, and candid mind. He who *walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness*, is the person who shall *abide in his tabernacle, and dwell in his holy hill*. When our blessed Lord designed to mark one of his followers with peculiar distinction and honour, he said of him, *Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile*;\* a character so directly the reverse of

\* John, i. 47.

worldly wisdom, that from this circumstance alone you may judge in what rank that wisdom stood with him.

But it is not only from the declarations of the Scripture, but from the whole course of Providence, that we learn the contempt in which God holds the wisdom of the world. Who were they on whom he conferred the highest marks of distinction which ever honoured mankind; whom he singled out to be the companions of Christ, the workers of miracles, the publishers of everlasting happiness to mankind? Were they the wise men of the world, the refined and the political, who were employed as the instruments of God on this great occasion? No: he chose a few plain, simple, undesigning men, in order to make foolish the *wisdom of the world*, and by their means to overthrow the establishments of the artful, the learned, and the mighty.—To this day, God in the course of his Providence bestows those external advantages which the men of the world so earnestly pursue, with apparent disregard of worldly wisdom. He allows no fixed nor regular connection to subsist between an artful, political conduct, and riches, reputation, or honours; he allows them not this mark of value; he does not always give the race to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor riches to men of understanding; but, on the contrary, scatters the advantages of fortune with a promiscuous hand; and often allows them to be attained by the vilest and lowest of men, who neither by worldly wisdom, nor any other talent whatever, had the smallest title to deserve them.—Judge then, ye wise men of this world, whether your characters and pursuits be not most contemptible in God's sight, when you behold those spiritual blessings which he esteems, withheld from you, and bestowed only on the good and the pious; and those worldly blessings which you covet, when at any time they are allowed to you, yet allowed only as a portion in common to you with the refuse of mankind, with many characters so infamous that you yourselves despise them?

In the *second* place, the wisdom of the world is *foolishness with God*, because it is baffled by him. Some triumphs he has occasionally allowed it to gain, in order to carry on some special purpose that his Providence had in view. Hence a splendid conqueror, or a successful conspirator, dazzle at times the public eye, and attract imitators of their characters and exploits. But, if you extensively consult historical annals, and much more, if you will attentively consider what is known to happen in private life, you will find the examples to be few and rare, of wicked, unprincipled men attaining fully the accomplishment of their crafty designs.—It is true that the justice of Heaven is not, in the present state, fully manifested, by rendering to every man according to his deeds. But I believe it will be found by

attentive observers, that there are two cases in which, perhaps more than in any other, the Divine government has, throughout all ages, rendered itself apparent and sensible to men. These are, humbling the high imaginations of the proud, and taking the wise in their own craftiness. By many signal instances of the intervention of Providence in both these cases, God hath deeply marked the traces of an awful government, even in this introductory state; and forced a reverence of his justice upon the minds of men. As he will not permit any greatness to lift itself up against his power, so neither will he permit any art to prevail against his counsels. While the crafty project many a distant plan, and wind their way most warily and cunningly, as they think, to success; how often does the Almighty, by means of some slight and seemingly contingent event, stop the wheel at once from farther motion, and leave them to the bitterness of humbling disappointment? *He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. Then, it is immediately added, shall he speak to them in wrath, and vex them in sore displeasure.\** The edifice of crooked policy which they had erected against his decree, was an edifice of dust: no sooner does he blow upon it with the breath of his mouth, than it falls to the ground. *The wicked are snared in their own devices. They are caught in the pit which their hands had digged. This is the purpose that is proposed upon the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all nations †*

In the *third* place, the wisdom of the world is *foolishness with God*; because, though it should be allowed by Providence to run without disturbance, its fullest career, and to compass successfully whatever it had projected, yet it can produce nothing in the issue, worthy of the pursuit of a truly wise man. It is a wisdom which overreaches and counteracts itself; and instead of expected happiness, ends in misery.—If the existence of another world be admitted, can he be accounted wise, who frames his conduct solely with a view to this world, and beyond it has nothing to look for but punishment? Is he a wise man, who exchanges that which is eternal, for that which is temporary; and though it were to gain the whole world, exposes himself to lose his own soul?—But laying another world out of the question, taking things on the footing of this life only, still it can be clearly shown, that the crooked wisdom of the world is no better than foolishness. For what is the amount of all that this wise man hath gained, or can gain, after all the toil he has undergone, and all the sacrifices he has made, in order to attain success? He has supplanted a rival; he has defeated an enemy; he has ob-

\* Psalm. ii. 4, 5.

† Isaiah xiv. 26.

tained, perhaps, a splendid establishment for himself and his family. But how is all this success enjoyed? with a mind often ill at ease; with a character dubious at the best, suspected by the world in general, seen through by the judicious and discerning. For the man of the world flatters himself in vain, if he imagines that, by the plausible appearances of his behaviour, he can thoroughly conceal from the world what he is, and keep them ignorant of the hollow principles upon which he has acted. For a short time the world may be deceived; but after a man has continued for a while to act his part upon the public stage, and has been tried by the different occurrences of life, his real character never fails to be discovered. The judgment of the public on the character of men, as to their worth, probity, and honour, seldom errs. In the mean time, the advantages of fortune or station, which the man of the world has gained, after having been enjoyed for a while, become insipid to him; their first relish is gone, and he has little more to expect. He finds himself embarrassed with cares and fears. He is sensible that by many he is envied and hated; and though surrounded by low flatterers, is conscious that he is destitute of real friends. As he advances in years, all the enjoyments of his troubled prosperity are diminished more and more, and with many apprehensions he looks forward to the decline of life.

Compute now, Oh wise man, as thou art! what thou hast acquired by all thy selfish and intricate wisdom, by all thy refined and double conduct, thy dark and designing policy? Canst thou say that thy mind is satisfied with thy past tenour of conduct? Has thy real happiness kept pace, in any degree, with the success of thy worldly plans, or the advancement of thy fortune? Are thy days more cheerful and gay, or are thy nights more calm and free of care, than those of the plain and upright man, whom thou hast so often treated with scorn? To thine own conscience I appeal, whether thou darest say, that aught which thou hast gained by the wisdom of the world, be a sufficient compensation for incurring the displeasure of thy Creator, for forfeiting self-approbation within thy breast, for losing the esteem of the wisest and worthiest part of mankind around thee?—*How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? How long will ye love vanity, and seek after lies?*

FROM what has been said of the nature and the effects of worldly wisdom, you will now judge how justly it is termed *foolishness with God*, and how much it merits the severe epithets which are given it in Scripture, of *earthly, sensual, and devilish*. Opposite to it stands the *wisdom that is from above*, which is described by an Apostle, as *pure, peaccable, gentle, and easy to*

*be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.\**—This, and this only, is that real wisdom, which it is both our duty and our interest to cultivate. It carries every character of being far superior to the wisdom of the world. It is masculine and generous; it is magnanimous and brave; it is uniform and consistent. The wise man of the world is obliged to shape and form his course according to the changing occurrences of the world; he is unsteady and perplexed; he trembles at every possible consequence, and is ever looking to futurity with a troubled mind. But the wise man in God's sight, moves in a higher sphere. His integrity directs his course without perplexity or trouble. He inquires only what is right becoming and honourable for him to do. Being satisfied as to this, he asks no farther questions. The issue it is not in his power to direct; but the part which is assigned to him, he will act; secure, that come what will, in life and death, the Providence of that God whom he serves, will effectually guard all his great interests. At the same time, the spirit of this wisdom is perfectly consistent with proper foresight, and vigilant attention. It is opposed to art and cunning, not to prudence and caution. It is the mark, not of a weak and improvident, but of a great and noble mind; which will in no event take refuge in falsehood and dissimulation, which scorns deceit, because it holds it to be mean and base; and seeks no disguise, because it needs none to hide it.—Such a character is both amiable and venerable. While it ennobles the magistrate and the judge, and adds honour and dignity to the most exalted stations, it commands respect in every rank of life. When the memory of artful and crooked policy speedily sinks, and is extinguished, this true wisdom shall long preserve an honourable memorial among men, and from God shall receive everlasting glory.

\* James, iii. 15, 17.



## SERMON LXXXIX.

ON THE GOVERNMENT OF HUMAN AFFAIRS BY PROVIDENCE.

---

*A man's heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps.*—PROVERBS, xvi. 9.

MANY devices there are, and much exercise of thought and counsel ever going on among mankind. When we look abroad into the world, we behold a very busy and active scene: a great multitude always in motion, actuated by a variety of passions, and engaged in the prosecution of many different designs, where they commonly flatter themselves with the prospect of success. But, much of this labour, we behold at the same time, falling to the ground. *The race is far from being always to the swift, or the battle to the strong, or riches to men of understanding.* It plainly appears, that the efforts of our activity, how great soever they may be, are subject to the control of a superior invisible Power; to that Providence of Heaven, which works by secret and imperceptible, but irresistible means. Higher counsels than ours, are concerned in the issues of human conduct. Deeper and more extensive plans, of which nothing is known to us, are carried on above. The line is let out, to allow us to run a certain length; but by that line we are all the while invisibly held, and are recalled and checked at the pleasure of Heaven.—Such being now the condition of man on earth, let us consider what instruction this state of things is fitted to afford us. I shall first illustrate a little farther the position in the text, that though a *man's heart may devise his way, it is the Lord who directeth his steps*; and then point out the practical improvement to be made of this doctrine.

AMONG all who admit the existence of a Deity, it has been a general belief that he exercises some government over human affairs. It appeared altogether contrary to reason, to suppose that after God had erected this stupendous fabric of the universe, had beautified it with so much ornament, and peopled it with such a multitude of rational beings, he should then have thrown it out from his care, as a despised, neglected offspring, and allowed its affairs to float about at random. There was indeed one set of ancient philosophers who adopted this absurd opinion; but though they nominally allowed the existence of some beings whom they called gods, yet as they ascribed to them neither the creation nor the government of the world, they were held to be in reality Atheists.

In what manner Providence interposes in human affairs; by what means it influences the thoughts and counsels of men, and notwithstanding the influence it exerts, leaves to them the freedom of will and choice, are subjects of dark and mysterious nature, and which have given occasion to many an intricate controversy. Let us remember that the manner in which God influences the motion of all the heavenly bodies, the nature of that secret power by which he is ever directing the sun and the moon, the planets, stars, and comets, in their course through the heavens, while they appear to move themselves in a free course, are matters no less inexplicable to us, than the manner in which he influences the counsels of men. But, though the mode of Divine operation remains unknown, the fact of an overruling influence is equally certain in the moral, as it is in the natural world. In cases where the fact is clearly authenticated, we are not at liberty to call its truth in question, merely because we understand not the manner in which it is brought about. Nothing can be more clear from the testimony of Scripture, than that God takes part in all that happens among mankind; directing and overruling the whole course of events so as to make every one of them answer the designs of his wise and righteous government. This is distinctly and explicitly asserted in the text. Throughout all the sacred writings, God is represented as on every occasion by various dispensations of his Providence, rewarding the righteous, or chastening them, according as his wisdom requires, and punishing the wicked. We cannot indeed conceive God acting, as the governor of the world at all, unless his government were to extend to all the events that happen. It is upon the supposition of a particular Providence, that our worship and prayers to him are founded. All his perfections would be utterly insignificant to us, if they were not exercised on every occasion, according as the circumstances of his creatures required. The Almighty would then be no more than an uncon-

cerned spectator of the behaviour of his subjects, regarding the obedient and the rebellious with an equal eye.

It were needless to prosecute any farther the argument in favour of a particular Providence. The experience of every one must, more or less, bear testimony to it. We need not for this purpose have recourse to those sudden and unexpected vicissitudes, which have sometimes astonished whole nations, and drawn their attention to the conspicuous hand of Heaven. We need not appeal to the history of the statesman and the warrior; or the ambitious and the enterprising. We confine our observation to those whose lives have been most plain and simple, and who had no desire to depart from the ordinary train of conduct. —In how many instances, my friends, have you found, that you are held in subjection to a higher Power, on whom depends the accomplishment of your wishes and designs; Fondly you had projected some favourite plan. You thought you had forecast, and provided for all that might happen. You had taken your measures with such vigilant prudence, that on every side you seemed to yourself perfectly guarded and secure. But, lo! some little event hath come about, unforeseen by you, and in its consequences, at the first seemingly inconsiderable, which yet hath turned the whole course of things into a new direction, and blasted all your hopes. At other times, your counsels and plans have been permitted to succeed. You then applaud your own wisdom, and sit down to feast on the happiness you had attained. To your surprise you found, that happiness was not there; and that God's decree had appointed it to be only vanity. We labour for prosperity, and obtain it not. Unexpected, it is sometimes made to drop upon us, as of its own accord. The happiness of man depends on secret springs, too nice and delicate to be adjusted by human art. It requires a favourable combination of external circumstances with the state of his own mind. To accomplish on every occasion such a combination, as far beyond his power; but it is what God can at all times effect; as the whole series of external causes are arranged according to his pleasure, and the hearts of all men are in his hands, *to turn them wheresoever he wills, as rivers of water.* From the imperfection of our knowledge to ascertain what is good for us, and from the defect of our power to bring about that good when known, arise all those disappointments which continually testify, that the *way of man is not in himself*; that he is not the master of his own lot; that, though he may *devise*, it is God who *directs*; God who can make the smallest incident an effectual instrument of his Providence for overturning the most laboured plans of men.

Accident and chance, and fortune, are words which we often here mentioned, and much is ascribed to them in the life of man,

But they are words without meaning: or, as far as they have any signification, they are no other than names for the unknown operations of Providence. For it is certain, that in God's universe nothing comes to pass causelessly, or in vain. Every event has its own determined direction. That chaos of human affairs and intrigues, where we can see no light, that mass of disorder and confusion which they often present to our view, is all clearness and order in the sight of Him who is governing and directing all, and bringing forward every event in its due time and place. *The Lord sitteth on the flood. The Lord maketh the wrath of man to praise him, as he maketh the hail and the rain obey his word. He hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps.*

Having illustrated the doctrine of the text, I proceed to show how it is to be improved by us. I must begin with warning you, that the doctrine I have illustrated has no tendency to supersede counsel, design, or a proper exertion of the active powers of man. Because Providence is superior to us, it does not follow that therefore man has no part to act; or because our industry is sometimes disappointed, that therefore it is always vain. It is by the use of ordinary means, that Providence, for the most part, accomplishes its designs. Man *devising his own way*, and carrying on his own plans, has a place in the order of means which Providence employs. To exertions therefore of his own, he is called by God. His Maker framed him for action; and then only he is happy, when in action he is properly employed. To supine idleness, to a vain and presumptuous trust in Providence, while we neglect what is incumbent on us to perform, no encouragement is given in Scripture; on the contrary, threatenings are denounced against it. But the doctrine of the text is to be improved,

IN the first place, for correcting anxious and immoderate care about the future events of our life. This anxiety is the source of much sin, and therefore is often rebuked in Scripture, as alienating the mind from God, and from the higher objects of virtue and religion, and filling the heart with passions which both annoy and corrupt it. If it be the parent of much sin it is certainly also the offspring of great folly. For in such a state as human life has just now been represented to be, what means this mighty bustle and stir, this restless perturbation of thought and care, as if all the issues of futurity rested wholly on our conduct? —Something depends upon thyself; and there is reason, upon this account, for acting thy part with prudence and attention. But upon a hand unseen it depends, either to overturn all thy projects, or to crown them with success: and therefore, when

the issue is so uncertain, thine attention should never run into immoderate care. By disquieting thyself so much about futurity, thou takest upon thy shoulders a load which is not thine, and which indeed thou art unable to bear.

The folly of such anxiety is aggravated by this consideration, that all events are under a much better and wiser direction than we could place them. Perhaps that evil which we have dreaded so much in prospect, may never be suffered to arrive. Providence may either have turned into a quite different course, that black cloud which appeared to carry the storm; or before the storm burst, our heads may be laid so low as to be out of its reach. Perhaps, also, the storm may be permitted to come upon us, and yet under its dark wings may bring to us some secret and unexpected good. *Who knoweth what is good for man all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow? Who knoweth this, my brethren, except God? And who consulteth it so effectually as he, who by his infinite wisdom maketh all things work together for good to them who love him? Is it not, then our greatest happiness, that when man deviseth, God directeth? Is it not far better for us than if the case were reversed; if the all-wise God were only ineffectually to devise, and man, blind and ignorant, and rash as he is, were to have the full direction of his own steps?—Wherefore vex not thyself in vain. To the unavoidable evils of life, add not this evil of thine own procuring a tormenting anxiety about the success of thy designs.—The great rule both of religion and wisdom is, Do thy duty, and leave the issue to Heaven. Commit thy way unto the Lord.—Act thy part fairly and as wisely as thou canst, for thine apparent interest; and then with a steady and untroubled mind, wait for what God shall see meet to appoint. This is wisdom all beyond this, is vanity and folly.*

In the second place, the doctrine of the text is calculated not only to repress anxiety, but to enforce moderation of mind in every state; it humbles the pride of prosperity, and prevents that despair which is incident to adversity.—The presumption of prosperity is the source both of vices and mischiefs innumerable. It renders men forgetful of God and religion. It intoxicates them with the love, and immerses them in the indulgence of pleasure. It hardens their hearts to the distresses of their brethren. Now, consider, how little ground the real situation of the most prosperous man affords for this vain elation of mind. He is dependent every moment on the pleasure of a superior; and knows not, but Providence may be just preparing for him the most unforeseen reverses. Shall he *boast himself of to-morrow, who knoweth not what a day may bring forth?* He hath perhaps said in his heart, *my mountain stands strong; I shall*

never be moved. But God needeth only to *hide his face*, and presently *he is troubled*. That little eminence on which he stood, and from which he surveyed with pride his fellow-creatures below him, was no more than an eminence of dust.—The Almighty blows upon it with the breath of his mouth, and it is scattered. Belongs it to him whose tenure of prosperity is so insecure, to utter the voice of contempt, or to lift the rod of oppression over his fellows, when over his own head is stretched that high arm of Heaven, which levels, at one touch, the mighty with the low?

The government of God is accompanied with this signal advantage, that at once it humbles the proud, and revives the distressed. As long as we believe in one higher than the highest, to whom all must look up, the greatest man is taught to be modest, and to feel his dependence; and the lowest man has an object of continual resource and hope. Injured by men, he can fly to that righteous Governor who rules the earth, and from his interposition, hope for better days. Providence is the great sanctuary to the afflicted who maintain their integrity. Consolation they always find in the belief of it; and often there has issued from this sanctuary the most seasonable relief. There issues from it, at all times, this voice of comfort; *trust in the Lord, and do good; and so thou shalt dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.*\* Thine enemies may conspire; *the Heathen may rage, and the people imagine a vain thing. But he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision.* For the Lord is *the keeper of Israel*; he is *the shield of the righteous. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth and for ever.*†

In the third place the doctrine that has been illustrated, of the interposal of Providence in all human affairs, places the vanity and folly of all sinful plans in a very strong light.—All sin, in every view of it, must be attended with danger. He who embarks in any unjust or criminal enterprise, besides the manifest peril to his own soul, incurs the risque of his character being discovered, and of meeting with hatred, contempt, and just resentment from the world. One would think that when the consequences on one side are so dangerous, the bribe on the other side must be very high, and the prospect of success very fair and promising. Now, consider how this matter truly stands. The sinner hath against him, first, that general uncertainty which I before showed to take place in all the designs and projects formed by men. Could the most artful and best devised means always ensure success to the end we sought to obtain, some apol-

\* Psalm xxxvii. 3.

† Psalm cxxv. 2.

ogy might then be made for departing occasionally from the path of rectitude. But it is far from being true, that such road to sure success can, on any occasion, be found. On the contrary, we every day see the most plausible and best concerted plans, baffled and thrown to the ground; and there is nothing which on many occasions has been more remarked, than Providence seeming to make sport of the wisdom of man.

This view of things alone were sufficient to show to the sinner the insecurity and danger of the system on which he acts. But there is much more against him than this. For he, by his guilty plans, hath engaged against himself one certain and most formidable enemy, to whom he hath great reason to look up with terror. He cannot possibly believe that the righteous Governor of the universe, beholds with an equal eye the designs of the virtuous who honour him, and the designs of the guilty who despise his laws, and do injustice to his servants. No; against these latter. Providence hath pointed its darts, hath bent its bow in the heavens; *the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*\*—Other designs may fail; but those of the wicked, God is concerned in overthrowing. It is true, that this life is not the season of rendering to every man according to his works. But though retribution does not on every occasion take place at present, yet neither is the exercise of Divine justice always delayed. The history of the world is continually furnishing us with examples of the wicked *taken in their own devices*; of the crafty *snares in the works of their own hands*; of sinners *falling into the pit which themselves had digged*. How often, when signal crimes were ready to be perpetrated, hath God remarkably interposed; hath spread his shield before the just, unnerved the arm of the assassin, or struck a sudden damp into his mind at the critical moment!—Obnoxious then as the sinner is to so many dangers: exposed perpetually to the disappointment of his designs by the uncertainty of human events; exposed, over and above, to the avenging interposition of Heaven; what strange infatuation has tempted him to depart from the plain and safe path of integrity?

In the last place, from all that has been said on this subject, we clearly see how much it concerns us to perform those duties which a proper regard to Providence requires, and to obtain protection from that power which directeth and disposeth all.—A more incontrovertible axiom there cannot be than this, that if man only deviseth his way, while God overrules his devices and directs his steps, an interest in God's favour is far more important than all the wisdom and ability of man. Without his favour, the wisest will be disappointed and baffled; under his protection

\* Psalm xxxiv. 16.

and guidance, the simple are led in a plain and sure path.—In vain would the giddy and profane throw Providence out of their thoughts, and affect to think and act as if all depended on themselves. This boldness of self-sufficiency is affectation, and no more. For moments there are, when the man of stoutest heart feels the strong subjection under which he is held, and would gladly grasp at the aid of Heaven. As long as human affairs proceeds in a smooth train, without any alarming presages of change or danger, the man of the world may remain pleased with himself, and be fully confident in his own powers. But whose life continues long so undisturbed? Let any uncommon violence shake the elements around him, and threaten him with destruction; let the aspect of public affairs be so lowering as to forbode some great calamity; or in his private concerns let some sudden change arrive to shatter his fortune, or let sickness, and the harbingers of approaching death, show him his frailty; and how ready will he then be to send up prayers from the heart, that Providence would befriend and relieve him? Religion, my friends, is not a matter of theory and doubt. Its foundations are laid deep in the nature and condition of man. It lays hold of every man's feelings. In every man's heart and conscience it has many witnesses to its importance and reality.

Let us then neglect no means which may be of avail for procuring the grace and favour of that Divine Providence on which so much depends. Let no duties be overlooked which belongs to us as subjects of God: devout worship, and grateful praises for all his blessings, humble trust in his goodness, and implicit submission to his will; and constant and cheerful obedience to his laws. Let us be thankful that God hath clearly made known all that he requires of us in order to be accepted in his sight; and that not only he has revealed the rule of duty, but also hath pointed out to us in the gospel, the direct method of reconciliation with him, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Providence hath condescended to become our instructor in this great article; hath taught us in what way our sins may be forgiven, our imperfect services be accepted, and an interest in the Divine grace be attained by means of our Redeemer. Inexcusable we must be, if all this offered grace we shall wantonly throw at our feet. In a world so full of vicissitudes and uncertainty, let us take pains to secure to ourselves one resting place; one habitation that cannot be moved. By piety and prayer, by faith, repentance, and a good life, let us seek the friendship of the Most High; so shall he who *directeth the steps of man* now, conduct our path in such a course as shall bring us in the end to himself.



## SERMON XC.

### ON PRAYER.

---

*O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come!*  
PSALM LXXV. 2.

THE Supreme Being is represented under many amiable characters in the sacred writings; as the *Father of mercies*, the *God of Love*, the *Author of every good and perfect gift*. But there is no character which carries more comfort, or which renders God so properly the object of confidence and trust, as this, of his being the *Hearer of Prayer*. This view of the Almighty accommodates his perfections to our necessities and wants, and in our present frail and distressed state affords a constant refuge to which we can fly. *Unto Thee shall all flesh come*. To thee, shall an indigent world look up for the supply of their wants; to Thee, shall the proudest sinner, at some time or other, be compelled to bow; to Thee, shall the distressed and afflicted have recourse, as to their last relief and hope.

Prayer is a duty essential to natural religion. Wherever the light of nature taught men to acknowledge the being of a God, to that God also it directed them to pray. In the Christian revelation great stress is laid upon this duty, and great encouragement given to it. Our blessed Saviour not only set the example himself, and enjoined the practice to his followers, but thought it worthy his express instruction to teach them in what manner to pray, and even to put words in their mouth. We are assured that prayers are not in vain; but that as *the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous*, so *his ears are open to their cry*: that if we ask aright, *we shall receive*; if we seek, *we shall find*; if we knock, *it shall be opened to us*. It is, indeed, hard to say, whether prayer is to be most properly considered as a duty incum-

bent on all, or as a privilege allowed to them. But a blessed circumstance it is, that our duty and our privilege thus concur in one; that we are commanded to do what our wants naturally dictate to be done; even to ask what is good from God, who *giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not*.—In treating of this subject, it will be proper to consider first, the nature and the subjects of prayer; next its proper qualifications; and lastly, the advantages and blessings which attend it.

I. THE Nature of Prayer supposes, in the first place, that we have a just sense of our own wants and miseries, and of our dependence on God for relief. To be suitably impressed with this sense, we need only think what our present situation is.—We live in a world, where every thing around us is dark and uncertain. When we look back on the past, we must remember that there we have met with much disappointment and vanity. When we look forward to the future, all is unknown. We are liable there to many dangers which we cannot foresee; and to many which we foresee approaching, yet know not how to defend ourselves against them. We are often ignorant what course we can steer with safety; nay, so imperfect is our wisdom, and so great the darkness which covers futurity, that while we imagine that we are in the road to prosperity, we are often rushing blindly into the most fatal evils.—Besides these contingencies of life, which make us feel so deeply the necessity of looking up to some more powerful Guide and Protector, there are other circumstances in our state which lead to reflections still more alarming. We know that we are the subjects of a supreme righteous Governor, to whom we are accountable for our conduct.—We were sent into this world by his appointment, and we are removed from it at his decree. How soon the call for our removal may be given, none of us know; but this we profess to believe, that upon our going hence we are brought into new and unknown habitations, suitable to our behaviour here. Who amongst us can say that he is perfectly ready to appear before his Creator and Judge, and to give an account to him for all the actions of his life? How much do the best of us stand in need of mercy and forgiveness for our offences past, and of direction and assistance from Heaven to guide us in our future way!—What reason to dread that if we be left entirely to ourselves, we will be in the utmost danger of departing from virtue and from happiness, and of leaving life under the displeasure of Him who is to judge us!—While with this sense of our imperfections, our dangers, and our guilt, we come to the Hearer of Prayer, we must in the next place,

Pray to God, in the belief that with him there is power which can give us relief, and goodness which will incline him to give it.

Prayer supposes a full persuasion that his Providence rules and governs all; that through all futurity his eye penetrates; that there are no events of our life in which he interposes not; that he knows the most secret motions of our hearts; and that to the hearts of all men he has access, by avenues unknown to us, and can turn them according to his pleasure. It supposes at the same time, a firm confidence in the declarations he has made in his word, that a plan is established for dispensing grace to fallen and guilty mankind, through a great Redeemer. It supposes a humble hope that as he *knows our frame and remembers we are dust*, he will not reject the supplications of the penitent returning sinner; that he is one who hath no pleasure in our sorrows and distress, but desires the happiness of his creatures, and beholds with complacency the humble and sincere worshipper.

Now these things being supposed, this just sense of our own imperfections and guilt, and this proper impression of the Divine nature, when the soul is in this posture of devotion, breathing forth its sorrows and its wants before its Creator, and imploring from him protection and aid, it cannot but give vent to the high conceptions with which it will then be affected, of God's supreme perfection. This of course becomes the foundation of that part of devotion which is styled adoration or praise.—As it is the experience of past goodness which warms the heart of the worshipper, and encourages his present supplication, he will naturally be led to a grateful celebration of the mercies of Heaven; whence thanksgiving becomes an essential part of his devotion.—As he cannot put up petitions without acknowledging his wants and as his wants are closely connected with his frailty and ill-deserving, hence the most humble confession of guilt must necessarily enter into Prayer.—If there be any terms on which we may expect the Deity to be most propitious; if there be any meritorious Intercessor through whom we may prefer our request to him, this assuredly will be the method which the pious worshipper will choose for addressing the Almighty; and this will be the ground of his praying in the name of Christ, sending up his petitions to God through his beloved Son, whom he heareth always.

Thus it appears that there is a just foundation for Prayer, in all its parts, naturally laid in the present circumstances of man, and in the relation in which he stands to God. But as petition is the chief and most distinguishing part of prayer, it will be requisite that we consider particularly what those requests are, which are proper to be offered up to God. These may all be classed under three heads: first, requests for temporal blessings; next, for spiritual mercies; and lastly, intercessions for the welfare of others.

WITH regard to temporal blessings, though men may lay a restraint upon themselves in the expressions which they utter in Prayer, yet it is much to be suspected, that the inward wishes of their hearts for such blessings are often the most fervent of any. To wish and pray for the advantages of life is not forbidden. Our Saviour hath so far countenanced it, as to command us to pray that God would *give us our daily bread*; that is, as his words have been always understood, that he would bestow what is necessary for the sustenance and comfort of life. Yet the very sound of the words retrenches every superfluous and extravagant wish. Not for riches and honours, for great advancement or long life, or for numerous and flourishing families, has he given us any encouragement to pray. Foreign are such things to the real improvement, foreign very often to the true happiness of man. Foolishly they may be wished for, when the wish accomplished would prove our ruin. Let health and peace, contentment and tranquillity, bound the humble prayer which we send up to Heaven; that God may *feed us with food convenient for us*; that whatever our outward circumstances are, they may be blessed to us by him, and accompanied with a quiet mind. Even health and peace themselves may not always prove blessings. Sweet and desirable as they seem, God may, at certain times, foresee their tendency to corrupt our hearts, and may, in mercy, reject a prayer for them, which, on our part, may be allowably put up. For the nature of all temporal things is such, that they have not one fixed and stable character, but may be convertible on different occasions either into good or ill; and therefore, some reserve in our wish must always be maintained; and to the wiser judgment of God, it must be left to determine what is fit to be bestowed, and what to be withheld.—But this we may lawfully pray, that, as far as to God seems meet, he would make our state comfortable, and our days easy and tranquil; that he would save us from falling into any severe and extreme distress; that he would preserve to us the enjoyment of those friends and comforts that we most love; or if he bereave us of any of them, that he would in mercy assist and support us under the loss; in fine, that he would so order our lot that we may be kept as free from pain, trouble, and anguish, as shall be consistent with the higher improvements of our souls in piety, virtue, and wisdom.

In the next place, with regard to spiritual mercies, we are unquestionably allowed to be more fervent and explicit in our requests at the throne of grace. God can never be displeased in hearing us implore from him those graces and endowments of the soul, that beautify us in his sight, that are good for all men, good at all times, indeed the only certain and immutable goods;

and therefore to these only pertain that earnestness, that urgency of Prayer, which is represented as acceptable to the Almighty.—Our petitions of this nature, our Saviour has ranked under the two great heads of forgiveness for past offences, and deliverance from future temptations. It is chiefly for these important blessings, that we are to prostrate ourselves before our Father in Heaven, begging of him, who knows our heart with all its frailties, that he would accept our sincere repentance, and pardon our errors for the sake of Jesus Christ. We must earnestly pray, that he would strengthen us by his grace to resist the temptations that hereafter may assault us: and whatever he appoint to befall us without, may enable us to preserve a good conscience within; that he may teach us to know ourselves, and assist us to control and govern our passions; that he may endow us with temperance and prosperity, and resignation under adversity; that in no situation of life we may be allowed to forget what we owe to our Maker and Redeemer; and that after having discharged the duties of life, through the assistance of Divine grace, with some measure of integrity and honour, we may be prepared for going through the last scene of life without dismay; and when we have made a decent and peaceful retreat from this world, we may then find ourselves in some better and happier state.

IN the last place, it is to be remembered that intercessions for the welfare of others from a material part of Prayer. The sincere worshipper is not to consider himself as a single and separate being, confining his concern wholly to himself. Our Saviour has initiated us into a more noble and enlarged spirit of devotion. when he taught us to begin with praying that the kingdom of God may be advanced over all, and that mankind may be rendered as happy by doing his will, as the angels are in heaven. When we bow our knee to the common Father, let it be like affectionate members of his family, desiring the prosperity of all our brethren. In particular, the happiness of our friends and relations, of those whom we love, and by whom we are loved, ought then to be near our heart; praying that the Almighty may be our God, and the God of our friends and family, for ever; that he may watch over them, and bless them; and may make us long happy in mutual comfort and affection. We ought to remember our benefactors before God. and pray for a return of divine blessings on their head. The distressed and afflicted ought to share our sympathy; remembering them *who suffer adversity as being ourselves in the body*; and shedding the friendly tear at the thought of human woe. Our enemies themselves ought not to be forgotten in our prayers: in fine, our prayers ought to be an exercise of extensive benevolence of

heart ; a solemn testimony offered up to the God of Love, of our kind and charitable affection to all men.

BUT now, after what has been suggested concerning the proper subjects of prayer, I am aware that it may be said by some, To what purpose, is all this detail?—Do we propose, by our prayers, to give to the Supreme Being any new information, regarding our situation, of which he is not possessed? Does he not already know all our wants and distresses; and will He not be prompted by his goodness and wisdom to do for us in such circumstances, whatever is fit and proper to be done? Do we imagine that by the importunity of our solicitations and requests, He can be prevailed upon to alter his purpose, or depart from his system in the government of the world, in order to gratify our desires. Such objections against the reasonableness of prayer, have been often urged with all the parade of scepticism. Though, on the first view, they may carry some appearance of speciousness, yet on a slight discussion they fall to the ground; for they all rest on a mistaken idea of the nature and design of prayer. No man in his sober senses could ever believe that, by lifting his feeble voice to Heaven, he could convey to the ear of the almighty any new knowledge or information. None but the most ignorant could imagine, that, by his prayers he could raise any new emotions in the unchangeable Sovereign of the universe, and prevail upon him to alter his decrees in consequence of his request.—The efficacy of Prayer lies, not in working a change upon God, but in working a change upon ourselves; in begetting or improving right dispositions of heart, and thereby making us fit subjects of the Divine mercy. It is not for the sake of our asking, that God grants the requests we perfer in prayer; but as our asking, with proper dispositions, produces that frame of mind which qualifies us to receive.—Hence Prayer has been appointed by God as an instrument for improving our nature, and is required on our part as a condition of receiving his favours. Thus, when upon a certain occasion he had by his Prophet predicted and promised circumstances of prosperity to the Jewish nation, the Prophet was directed to add, *Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.*\*—Is there any one who will say, that it is not incumbent on all rational creatures to feel their dependence on the God who has formed them, and to refer to him all the blessings which they either enjoy or hope to receive? Would not the want of such becoming sentiments be altogether unworthy and sinful? And if they are such sentiments as ought to be entertained, must it not be proper to ex-

\* Ezekiel, xxxvi. 27.

press them by words in prayer, and thereby to strengthen the impression of them on our minds?

But in truth there is no occasion for entering into any long discussion of argument in order to evince the reasonableness of Prayer. It is the natural dictate of the human heart. Though in the days of prosperity and ease it may, like other duties, have been neglected and forgotten, yet on all great and trying occasions, men are prompted by an irresistible impulse to lift their eyes, and address their voice to Heaven. Who is there, for instance, that feeling himself cruelly oppressed by injustice and violence, without any prospect of procuring redress, can forbear appealing to a Power that rules above, and invoking Divine interposition to vindicate his innocence, and avenge his wrongs? Who that is standing by the death-bed of a beloved friend, of a spouse, a brother, or a son, and sees them struggling with the last agonies, but finds himself impelled to look up to Heaven, and to pray from the heart that where men can give no aid, God would in his mercy support the dying man? Was there ever a sinner so hardened, that when he finds himself leaving the world, and standing on the brink of an unknown eternity, is not disposed with earnest and trembling voice to pray that God would forgive his errors, and receive in peace his departing spirit? In such situations as these, man feels what he truly is, and speaks the native unadulterated language of the heart.—Accordingly, throughout all ages and nations, the obligation to Prayer as a duty has been recognized, and its propriety has been felt. Over all the world, even among the most savage tribes, temples have been built, worshippers have assembled in crowds; and the wildest superstition has, by the various forms of homage which it adopted, borne testimony to this truth, that there is some God, to whom, as *the Hearer of Prayer, all flesh should come.*

IN order that prayer may produce its proper effect, there are certain qualifications necessarily belonging to it, which come next to be considered.

One of the first and chief of these is seriousness, or an attentive and solemn frame of mind, in opposition to thoughts that wander, and to words that drop forth unmeaning from the lips. One would think it unnecessary to mention such a qualification to be requisite, when we are to be employed in so solemn an act as an immediate address to our Maker. Yet there is ground to apprehend, that an admonition of this nature is necessary to be given to many professed Christians. Men from their childhood have been so oft accustomed to repeat certain expressions, which they call, saying prayers, with little understanding, and less

attention to what they say, that the habit of it is apt to be continued throughout life ; as if the mere uttering of words, or presenting themselves, at set times, in a certain posture before God, had some charm in it to attract the blessings of Heaven. —My brethren, this is trifling with one of the most important exercises in which the human mind can be employed ; it is turning devotion into childish folly. Let us never forget that it is the heart which must pray. The heart may pray when no words are uttered. But if the heart be not engaged in Prayer, all the words we can utter are no better than rude offensive sounds in the ear of the Almighty.—Collect then thy mind within itself, before thou preferrest a single petition ; nay, before thou pronouncest the name of God in prayer. Be alone with him, and thine own soul ; under the same impression as if thou wert just about to appear before the judgment-seat of that God, to whom thou prayest.

To seriousness, we must join affection in prayer ; I mean that devotion of the heart which is inspired by gratitude and love, in distinction from forced prayer, or what is unwillingly preferred from servile fear, or mere regard to decency. We must come into the presence of God, as to a Father in Heaven ; not to a hard and oppressive master, to whom we are obliged to pay obeisance to prevent him from destroying us.—Profound humility is perfectly consistent with this affectionate spirit in prayer. No presumptuous familiarity must enter into our addresses to God. We are enjoined to serve him *with reverence and godly fear*. Our devotion will be most fervent and affectionate, when we entertain the humblest thoughts of ourselves, joined with the most exalted conceptions of that God to whom we pray. *Remember that God is in heaven, and thou art on earth ; therefore let thy words be few.\**

Faith is a qualification of prayer expressly required in Scripture. He that prayeth, says the Apostle James, *let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.*†—By faith in prayer, two things are meant ; first a general persuasion that God is a Being of infinite goodness and mercy ; to whom, therefore, the prayers of his creatures are not put up in vain. *He that cometh unto God must believe*, not only that he is, but that he *is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him* ;‡ without some belief of this kind, prayers were altogether superfluous. For who would send up supplications to a God who was believed to be inaccessible to his creatures, and to have no regard to their circumstances and wants ? —At the same time, much ground we have to be conscious of our own unworthiness, and to tremble at the remembrance of it,

\* Eccles. v. 2.

† James, i, 6.

‡ Heb. xi. 6.



when we address ourselves to Heaven ; and therefore, secondly, to pray in faith is, in the scripture sense of it, to pray in the name of Christ ; that is, in the faith that it is through his merits and mediation only we can find acceptance with God. We acknowledge our guilt ; we disclaim all trust in our own righteousness ; and implore grace from God on account of what his Son has done and suffered for us. This is the clear and express doctrine of the New Testament. *We have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. We have this new and living way which he hath consecrated for us within the veil. Having this High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.\**

HAVING thus pointed out the chief and most essential qualifications of prayer, it remains that I lay some considerations before you, to show the importance and advantages of it.

IN the first place Prayer is one of the most powerful means of recalling our minds from the vanities of life to serious thoughts ; to a proper sense of God, and our duty ; and to all the high objects with which we are intimately connected as rational and immortal beings. Surrounded, as we are, with the objects and pleasures of the world ; busied with its avocations, and continually immersed in its pursuits, man would become altogether the victim of sense, and a prey to its temptations, if there were not some stated occasions which brought him home to himself, and to the thoughts of another world. Prayer has a much more impressive effect for this purpose, than can be expected from simple meditation. An immediate and solemn address to an omniscient Being, in whose presence we consider ourselves as then particularly sisted, tends to produce a higher degree of serious and awful recollection, than would arise from a mere soliloquy of the mind with itself. In prayer, the soul approaches to the borders of an invisible world, and acts as a spirit holding intercourse with the Father of spirits. It drops for a time the remembrance of its earthly connections, to dwell among everlasting objects. Prayer, by this means, both composes and purifies the heart ; it gives the soul its proper elevation towards God, and has a happy effect to counterwork the dangerous impressions made by the corruptions of the world around us.

IN the next place, Prayer is useful, not only as a corrective of our natural levity and forgetfulness of God, but as an actual exercise of the best affections of our nature, which are thereby confirmed and strengthened. As far as prayer is not a mere emission of empty words, but speaks as it ought to do, the language of the heart, it is an assemblage of all the affections which constitute piety. It implies the highest sentiments of reverence

\* Heb. x. 19—22.

and adoration of love and gratitude to God, of trust in his mercy, and of faith in our blessed Redeemer, all animating the heart. Whatever nourishes such affections as these in the soul, gives strength and support at the same time to active virtue; and thereby prepares and assists us for every duty of life.—With respect to ourselves, the view which prayer gives, of our necessities and wants, of our sins and offences against God, and of the dangers which we have thereby incurred, produces becoming humility of mind. Prostrate before that Great Being whom we have so much offended, all the pride of man is laid in the dust. He is impressed with a sense of what he truly is, and taught how far removed from what he ought to be. By the prayers he puts up for being assisted to repent of past follies, and to make improvements for the future in virtue, the desire of virtue is cherished, and the pursuit of it excited; and if this desire after virtue which is expressed in prayer be genuine, it is a degree of goodness already in some measure begun within the heart.—Prayer is, at the same time, an exercise of benevolence towards men as well as of piety towards God; when, as was before observed, not merely as individuals, but as members of the great family of God, we come before our heavenly Father, and express our affectionate wishes for all our brethren.—While prayer in this manner gives exertion to many of the highest parts of goodness, it is attended moreover with this great advantage, that it tends to fortify the worshipper in the practice of all his duties. For it impresses him with a sense of God as the great friend and protector of righteousness in the world; to whom, therefore, all righteous men may look up with confidence and hope; whose strength is more than sufficient for their weakness; whose gracious aid none that served him ever implored in vain.

In the last place, Prayer is important, not only as a means of high improvement in religion, but as an instrument of consolation and relief under the distresses of life. How many situations are found in the world, where men have no resource left to them but prayer to God! How forlorn would the persecuted and afflicted, the sad and the sorrowful be, if even this last sanctuary were shut against them; if they had no Protector in Heaven to whom they could look up in the hours of anguish!—We all know what a relief it is to be able to unbosom our griefs to some friend whom we believe compassionate and kind, even though it be not in his power to give us any effectual aid. In our Heavenly Father we can look up not only to one in whom *compassions flow*, who *knows our frame*, *remembers we are dust*, and *pities us as a father pitieth his children*; but to One whose arm is all-powerful, either to support us under our distress, or, if to his wisdom it seem meet, to relieve us altogether from it.—Hence, Prayer is so often the last retreat of the miserable. Where men

can give them no aid, *God is their present help*. To him they can pour forth those secret griefs, which to men they sometimes cannot disclose. He hears these groans of the labouring heart, which no words can utter; and circumstances which would expose our requests to be despised by the world, prevent not our prayers from finding acceptance with God. It is his character to *hear the cry of the poor, and to regard the prayer of the destitute*: He is the *helper of them who have no help of man*.—Hence, prayer may be termed the Temple of Tranquillity to the unhappy: where their minds are soothed, and their cares and sorrows are, for a time, hushed and forgotten. It may justly be said, that there only, on this side of the grave, *the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. There, the prisoners rest together; they hear no more the voice of the oppressor.—The small and the great are there; and the servant is free from his master*.\*

THE reasonableness of prayer as a duty, and the advantages attending it, being such as I have now endeavoured briefly to set forth, there is no wonder that so many repeated recommendations of it occur in the Sacred Writings; and that we are enjoined to be *fervent in prayer*, to be *instant in prayer*, nay, to *pray without ceasing*.†—By such precepts I do not understand that we are bound to frequent repetitions of long and tedious prayers. Our Saviour, in his excellent discourse on this subject‡ has sufficiently cautioned us against the hypocrisy of those who *use vain repetitions, and think that they shall be heard from their much speaking*. But besides the stated times of both public and private prayer, which we ought devoutly to observe, there is a habit of devotion, in occasional elevations of the soul towards God, which highly deserves to be cultivated. A thousand occurrences which happen when we are engaged in the affairs of the world, and a thousand objects which present themselves to our view in the earth and the heavens when we are solitary and alone, may suggest matter of devout ejaculation towards God. By cherishing such a habit, we preserve on our minds the native spirit of prayer. We correct those evil dispositions which intercourse with the world is always apt to introduce; we improve our contemplation of the objects which surround us into an act of devotion; and either from the crowded city, or the solitary field, can send up to heaven that homage of the heart, which is no less acceptable to the Almighty, than if it arose in vocal form from the midst of the temple. In this sense I understand the injunction given to *pray without ceasing*.—And surely, my brethren, when we consider the high value of those blessings for which we depend on Heaven, it must appear to every reflecting mind, that

\* Job, iii. 17—19.

† 1 Thess. v. 17.

‡ Matth. vi.

we cannot be too earnest in our supplications to obtain them. To what purpose tend all our present solicitude and care; all the application of the thoughtful, and all the industry of the active and diligent? Is it not in order to pass through life, contented, easy, and happy? But can you pass through life with contentment and happiness, unless you enjoy peace within, a good conscience, and a comfortable hope of a future existence? Are not all these things directly and immediately the gifts of God, imparted by him to the souls of men? And can you expect to receive such gifts, unless you confess your dependence on Him who bestows them, and implore them from that gracious God, who *giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not?*

## SERMON XCI.

### ON THE LAST JUDGMENT.

---

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.—2 CORINTHIANS, v. 10.*

THESE words present to our view the great event which is to determine the fate of all mankind. No article of christian faith is more clearly ascertained in Scripture, is of greater importance in itself, and more worthy to dwell upon our minds than this, of the final judgment of God. It adds solemnity to every part of religion; it introduces an awful seriousness into our thoughts, by placing in the most striking light, the close connection between our present behaviour and our everlasting happiness or misery. In the Gospel it is described with so many circumstances of awe and terror, as may, to many, render the consideration of this subject dark and disagreeable. But we must remember, that though religion be often employed to sooth and comfort the distressed, and though this be one of its most salutary effects, yet this is not the only purpose to which it is to be applied by Ministers of the Gospel. In the midst of that levity and dissipation with which the world abounds, it is necessary to awaken the giddy and unthinking, by setting before them, in full, view, all the dangers they incur by their conduct.—*Knowing the terror of the Lord*, adds the Apostle, in the verse immediately following the text, *we persuade men*.—In treating of this subject, I shall, in the first place, state the arguments which reason affords for the belief of a judgment to come; and shall next shew the improvements which we ought to make of the particular discoveries the Gospel hath made to us concerning it.

I. By taking a view of the arguments which reason affords for the belief of a general judgment, our faith in the discoveries of the Gospel will receive confirmation, from discerning their consonance with the natural sentiments of the human heart.

IN the first place, and as the foundation of all, I begin with observing, that there is in the nature of things a real and eternal difference between right and wrong, between a virtuous and immoral conduct; a difference which all men discern of themselves, and which leads them unavoidably to think of some actions as deserving blame and punishment, and of others, as worthy of praise and reward. If all actions were conceived as indifferent in their nature, no idea of justice and retribution would be found among men; they would not consider themselves as in any view accountable for their actions to any superior. But this is far from being the case. Every man feels himself under a law; the law of his being, which he cannot violate without being self-condemned. The most ignorant heathen knows and feels, that when he has committed an unjust or cruel action, he has committed a crime and deserves punishment. Never was there a nation on the face of the earth, among whom there did not prevail a consciousness that, by inhumanity and fraud, they justly exposed themselves to the hatred of those around them, and to the displeasure of any secret invisible power that ruled the world. This, therefore, may be assumed as an incontrovertible principle, that the difference of good and evil in actions, is not founded on arbitrary opinions or institutions, but in the nature of things, and the nature of man; and accords with the universal sense of the human kind. This being the case, it is certainly reasonable.

IN the second place, to think that the ruler of the world will make some distinction among his creatures according to their actions; and if this distinction be not made, or only imperfectly made in this life, there will be some future state of existence in which he will openly reward and punish. To suppose God to be a mere indifferent spectator of the conduct of his creatures, regarding with an equal eye the evil and the good, is in effect to annihilate his existence; as it contradicts every notion which mankind have entertained of a Supreme Being as just and good. It would represent him as inferior in character to many of his creatures on earth: as there is no man of tolerable virtue and humanity who is not shocked at the commission of atrocious crimes, and who does not desire to see the guilty punished, the innocent protected, and the virtuous rewarded.—If there exist at all a God who governs the world, (and what nation has not acknowledged him to exist?) as a governor he undoubtedly will act; and as such, will, somewhere, and at some period or other,

reward and punish, according as his creatures obey, or violate, that law which he originally implanted in their hearts.—Whether this be completely done in the present world, is not a point that requires long discussion. The experience of all ages has shown, that pain and pleasure, prosperity and adversity, are not at present distributed by Providence exactly according to the measure of men's probity and worth, but are apparently scattered with a promiscuous hand. Hence the ancient complaint, that *all things come alike to all men ; that there is one event to the righteous and the wicked ; that to poverty and disappointment the righteous are often left, while the tabernacles of robbers prosper.*—An inference from hence might at first view arise, not favourable to the doctrine we now support ; but we have to observe,

IN the third place, that although full retribution be not as yet made to the good and to the evil, yet plain marks appear of a government already begun and carried on by God in the universe, though not fully completed ; marks of his favouring and taking part with virtue, and of his providing punishments for vice. This observation deserves to be particularly attended to, as it is one of the chief arguments for a future judgment.—In the present system of things, had the righteous been uniformly happy, and the wicked at all times miserable, future judgment might have appeared unnecessary, as justice had already taken place. On the other hand, had no distinction whatever taken place in the present system between the righteous and the wicked as to happiness and misery, there might have been ground to suspect that, since universal disorder at present prevailed, disorder would ever continue, and never be rectified by any future judgment. But neither of these suppositions is founded in fact. The present state of the moral world is neither a state of complete justice and order, nor of absolute disorder, but a state of order and justice begun and carried to a certain length, though left as yet imperfect.—Observe, my brethren, that, in the whole structure and constitution of things, God hath shown himself to be favourable to virtue, and inimical to vice and guilt. He hath made a fixed provision for happiness to virtue by the powerful recommendation which it carries to universal esteem and love ; by the manifold benefits which it procures to society ; by the health, peace and comfort of mind which it brings to the virtuous man. At the same time, from the crimes of the wicked, a multitude of miseries is made infallibly to spring ; loss of character and esteem, and of confidence and regard in society ; health always impaired by vice ; and all comfortable enjoyment of life disturbed by an uneasy companion, which the sinner carries about with him in his own conscience, upbraiding him for his

crimes, and threatening him with the displeasure of the Almighty.

These are not things of casual or accidental occurrence, but of universal experience, taking their rise from the constitution of our nature, and from the fixed laws which regulate human events. They show us what the direct tendency of virtue and vice is appointed by Providence to be ; and if this tendency be not, in every instance, carried into effect, owing to circumstances, which belong to our present state of probation and discipline, yet such an established natural tendency carries a sufficient intimation of the will and pleasure of our Creator.

We see his *throne already set for judgment*. By his beginning in this world both to reward and to punish, we clearly behold him acting as a governor and a judge, and are led to prognosticate what course he will hereafter hold. By the constitution of things which he has fixed here, he has as plainly signified that he favours the virtuous, and is displeased with the wicked, as if he had declared it to us by a voice from the clouds.—Although the present state of mankind requires that the just should sometimes suffer, and the sinner be allowed to prosper, the strongest presumption still remains that there is a period to come, when God will complete his righteous government, by making the one fully blest, and rendering the other as miserable as they deserve to be ; especially as we can observe,

IN the fourth place, that a satisfactory account may be given why judgment is at present postponed, and complete retribution not made, either to the good or bad. We are to take notice, that even among men, the wisdom and justice of government do not consist in immediately rewarding and punishing on every occasion, but in exercising these acts of government publicly, at such times, and with such circumstances as may have the most powerful effect for the benefit of society. A similar consideration perfectly accounts for the full execution of justice being delayed by God in this world ; for rewards and punishments being only begun here, but left unfinished. Were they completed in this world to their full extent, all the purposes of a state of trial and discipline would be defeated. No room would be left for exercise and improvement to the good in many virtues, if they never were to undergo any trials ; if they felt full reward immediately conferred on every righteous action they performed, and saw the wicked instantly cut off, as soon as a crime was committed. For salutary discipline, therefore, to the good, in order to improve their virtues ; and from patience to the bad, in order to give them room for repentance ; it was fit and wise that final judgment should at present be postponed. Divine justice stands for a while as behind the veil, and leaves men a full scope to act ac-



cording to their different dispositions, that their real characters may be fully displayed; the fidelity of the upright be tried and proved, and the obstinately wicked left without excuse.—The delay of Judgment, therefore, and the seeming inequality that now takes place in the ways of Providence, is so far from forming any ground of suspicion that judgment will never come, that, on the contrary, it is an argument of the wisdom of the Divine government, and necessarily enters into the plans it is now carrying forward.

Such are the presumptions which reason furnishes for rendering it more than probable that, at the conclusion of human things, God will *render to every one according to his works*. They may serve to strengthen our faith; but on mere reasonings our faith rests not. God in his mercy has given us surer light in an article of so great importance. To the consideration, therefore, of the discoveries which the gospel of Christ hath made to us, we now proceed.

II. You all know how often we are assured in the New Testament, that God hath *appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness*; a day and an hour which no man knoweth, but which is fixed in the counsels of Heaven. In the Sacred Writings a very particular account is given us of the whole procedure of that solemn day, accompanied with all assemblage of circumstances of the most awful and terrific nature. The scene is such as forbids all attempts to heighten, or even to do it justice by human description. Beneath such a subject all imagination sinks. The efforts of the declaimer or the poet are here alike in vain.—We are informed that the Last Day shall be ushered in by *signs in the sun, and signs in the moon and stars; upon the earth, distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after the things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of Heaven shall be shaken. The sound of a trumpet shall be heard, at which the dead shall rise out of their graves. The sign of the Son of Man shall appear. He shall come in a cloud with power and great glory, and all the holy Angels with him. A great white throne shall be set, and he shall sit thereon in his glory. Before Him shall be gathered all nations. Books shall be opened, and the dead shall be judged out of the things which are found written in the books. He shall separate the righteous from the wicked as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the righteous on his right hand, and the wicked on his left? Then shall he say to them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. To them on his left hand he shall say Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels; and these shall go into ever*

*lasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.\**—Whether every one of the circumstances, here set forth, is to be understood in a strictly literal sense, or with some measure of mystical and allegorical interpretation, it is not easy to determine, nor is it essential for us to know. Regard must be had to the figurative style frequently employed by the sacred writers, of which we find so many examples in the prophetic writings and the Book of Revelations, wherein those spiritual divine things which are above our conception, are set forth under such representations of sensible objects and appearances as are most calculated to strike and impress our minds. The circumstance, for instance, of books being opened before the judge, as containing a register of every man's actions, and of the dead being judged from what had been written in those books, is plainly a metaphorical allusion to what is practised among men; designed merely to convey the strongest impression of God's strict and accurate observation of the minutest particulars of men's behaviour on earth. It is sufficient for us to be satisfied, that whatever tremendous grandeur may attend the judgment of the Last Day, it will be conducted in such a manner as shall be perfectly suitable to the perfections of the Almighty.—Resting on such facts as are plainly and explicitly revealed on this subject, let us consider,

IN the first place, the Person who is to act as a Judge, even the eternal Son of God. We must all, says the text, appear *before the judgment-seat of Christ*. This is repeated in many passages of the New Testament. The day of judgment is termed *the day of the Son of Man*. *The Father*, we are told, *judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son.*†—This constitution of Providence is, in many respects, wise, fit, and gracious. It was highly proper that He who once, in the cause of God and mankind, stood as a criminal before impious judges on earth, should be thus signally vindicated and honoured, by appearing in the illustrious character of the Judge of all the earth. It was fit that the character of Judge and Sovereign should be made known, as added to the other characters he bore, of Priest and Prophet, in order to give weight and authority to all his precepts, from the awful consideration that on our obedience to him depends our everlasting fate.—But the most striking and important circumstance in this appointment of providence is the assurance which it affords us of the perfect equity of this final judgment. For here we behold a Judge who is taken, as we may say, from among ourselves. He dwelt among us on earth, and did not disdain to call us brethren. He knows experimentally what human passions and human frailties are; and what

\* Luke, xvi. 25. Daniel, vii. 9. Matth. xxv. 31. † John, v. 22.

the Apostle to the Hebrews says of him as a Priest, may be as fully applied to him as a judge. *We have not a judge who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; but one who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.* The infinite majesty of the Supreme Being is an object at all times overwhelming to the mind. In the situation of a Judge particularly, it might fill us with dismay. But in the Person of our blessed Redeemer, that majesty is placed in a milder light. The attribute of mercy comes forward in so conspicuous a manner as to allay the dread we would otherwise entertain. To the obstinate and hardened sinner, the judgment of our Saviour may indeed justly occasion terror. Well may they be afraid of appearing before the judgment-seat of Christ, who have scorned and despised him and his religion. But to the pious and the humble, no consideration can carry more comfort than that they are to appear in judgment before him who so loved the human race as to die for them ; and from whom, therefore, may be expected every favourable allowance which their case will admit.—From the contemplation of the Judge, let us,

IN the second place, turn our thoughts towards the persons who are to be judged. These, we are again and again informed, shall be all mankind ; both the quick and the dead ; those who shall then be found upon the earth ; and all the past generations who have finished their course, and been long ago gathered unto their fathers. *We must all, says the text, appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.*—No privilege shall exempt the great, no obscurity shelter the low, from the judgment of God. All the frivolous distinctions which fashion and vanity had introduced among men, shall at that day be annihilated. No longer shall we then appear under the personated characters of high and low, of rich and poor.—Under the simple characters of men and subjects of God, we shall be brought forth to be judged according to our works. In the one great distinction of good and bad, of righteous or wicked, all other distinctions shall then be eternally lost. Let the foresight of this humble the pride of the ostentatious and the great. Thou who now carriest thy head so high, shalt, upon the same footing with thy lowest dependent, stand before the tribunal of the Almighty. Thou who now oppresseth thy weak brother with impunity, shalt then tremble for thine own safety as much, perhaps more, than he. For *there is no respect of persons with God.*—The Last Day is justly stiled the *day of the revelation of the secrets of all hearts.* Stripped of all disguise, the character of every man shall be unveiled to public view. Then shall the false friend be detected, the concealed slanderer be exposed, the secret adulterer, the treacherous enemy, the hypoeritical pretender, be all brought to light.

—What a check should the thoughts of this discovery give to the arts of dissimulation and falsehood? What avails it thee, O wiseman of the world! to pass for a short time with fair colours before the eye of men, if by the eye of God thou art already discovered, and shalt, at last, be discovered to the view of all mankind? If now thou art so solicitous to conceal thy real character from the world, and canst not bear that the designs and intrigues which have passed through thy mind in the course of but one day should be all made known, dost thou not tremble at the thought of the whole machinations of thy life being brought forth and proclaimed before assembled men and angels?—At this great day too, when secret vice is made known in order to be punished, secret virtue shall be disclosed and rewarded. The humble good man, who passed unnoticed through the obscurity of private life; whose days, if not marked by any splendid deeds were ennobled by virtuous actions, shall then be singled out from the crowd, and brought forward as the friend of God and Heaven.—The anguish of the wicked, upon the discovery and comparison of the life of such a person with their own, is thus beautifully described by one of the Apocryphal writers; *This was he whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. Now he is numbered among the Children of God, and his lot is among the saints. But we wearied ourselves in the way of destruction. What hath pride profitted us! Or what good hath riches with our vaunting brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow, and as a post that hasted by. But the righteous live forevermore. Their reward also is with the Lord; and the care of them with the most High.\**—From this view of the persons who are to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, let us,

In the third place, go on to the consideration of the things for which they are to be judged. These, we are told in the text, are all *the things done in the body, whether they be good or bad.*—This is the constant tenor of Scripture, that men are to be judged *according to their actions.* It is not said that men are to be finally judged according to their principles or belief, but *according to their works.* This does not lead to any conclusion that principles or belief are not essential in forming a character.—Without good principles it cannot be expected there can be any regular tenor of good actions. But actions are the test of principles. Whatever we may pretend as to our belief, it is the strain of our actions that must shew whether our principles have been good or bad; and supposing them ever so good, whether we have

\* Wisdom of Solomon, v. 3—15.

allowed them to exert a proper influence on our conduct. The constant doctrine of the Gospel is, *by their fruits ye shall know them.* Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, but he that doeth the will of my Father shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.\* Of all the actions we have done, it is represented that, in the day of judgment, strict examination shall be taken. Not our public conduct only, and what we reckon the momentous parts of our life, but the indulgence of our private pleasures, the amusements of our secret thoughts and idle hours, shall be brought into account. According to that emblematical representation given in the Gospel, which I before mentioned as an expressive figure, there is an invisible pen always writing over our heads, and making an exact register of all the transactions of our life.—How careful and circumspect ought this to render us over every part of our behaviour? If any of our actions were of a transient and fugitive nature; if they were to die with us, and to be forgotten as soon as we are gone, there might be some excuse for a loose and inconsiderate conduct. But we know the case to be widely different; and that what we are doing now, we do for eternity. None of our actions perish and are forgotten.—They will all accompany us to the tribunal of God. They will there testify, either for or against us; and, however much we might wish to disclaim some of them, they may be considered as lifting up their voices and saying, “We are thine, for thou hast done us; we are thy works, and we will follow thee!”

It will now be said, if so severe a scrutiny must be undergone for all we have done and thought, who shall be able to stand before God in Judgment?—How far from innocence shall the best of us be found at that day?—The thought is undoubtedly alarming. But let us not despond; we are assured, *there is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared.* He is not extreme to mark iniquity; for he knows our frame, and remembers we are dust. Powerful is the atonement of our blessed Redeemer to procure pardon for the greatest sinner who has been penitent.—We have all reason to believe, that, amidst numberless infirmities which attend humanity, what the great Judge will chiefly regard, is the habitual prevailing turn of our heart and life; how far we have been actuated by a sincere desire to do our duty. This we know for certain, that all the measures of this judgment shall be conducted with most perfect equity. God will not exact from any man what he had never given him. He will judge him according to the degree of light that was afforded him, according to the means of knowledge and improvement that were put into his hands. Hence many a virtuous heathen shall be preferred

\* Matth, vii. 21.

before many mere professors of Christian faith. *They shall come from the east and the west, the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God; when the children of the kingdom are cast out.\** For as the Apostle to the Romans has taught us, *they who sinned without the law*, that is, without the knowledge of the written law, *shall perish*, shall be judged *without the law; for when the Gentiles which have not the law, do, by nature, the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves.†*—In the account given by our Lord of the procedure of the last judgment, in the 25th chapter of the gospel of Matthew, particular stress is laid upon works of beneficence and mercy; on the hungry being fed, the naked being clothed, and the sick being visited by the righteous. But though, in that parable, no virtues of any other kind are particularized, we are certainly not to infer any exclusion of other parts of duty; of piety, justice, temperance, and purity; as requisite to the character of the man, who, at the Last Day, will be accepted by God. The scope of the parable was to impress that covetous and selfish nation of the Jews, to whom the parable was addressed, with a deep sense of the importance of those virtues in which they were remarkably deficient, and which are in themselves so essential; compassion and humanity to their brethren.—It now only remains,

In the last place, to fix our attention on that final definitive sentence which is to close the whole procedure of the Last Day, and to terminate forever the hopes and fears of the human race. The righteous are by the Great Judge called to eternal life and happiness, and the wicked appointed to go into everlasting punishment.—Into those future habitations of the good and the bad, it is not ours to penetrate. All that we know is, that after the Judge hath pronounced the righteous to be the *bles- sed of his Father*, they shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so they shall be ever with the Lord;‡ received into mansions where all the inhabitants shall be blest; but where we are taught there shall be different degrees of exaltation and felicity, according to the advancement which men had made in holiness and virtue: *one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, and one star differing from another in glory.§* On the misery prepared for the reprobate it would be shocking to dwell, and in a high degree improper and presumptuous in us to descant on the degree and duration of those punishments which infinite justice and wisdom may see cause to inflict on the incurable wicked.—The whole

\* Luke xii. 29. Matth. viii. 11.

† Rom. ii. 12. 14.

‡ Thess. iv. 17.

§ 1 Corinth. xv. 41.

great scheme of Providence being now completed, and its ways fully justified to all rational beings, well may universal acclamations of praise arise from all the heavenly hosts; *Hallelujah to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lam bof God, for ever and ever! Great and marvellous are all thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are all thy ways. thou King of Saints!*—This earth, which had been so long the theatre of human actions and human glory, having now accomplished the purpose for which, as a temporary structure, it was erected, shall, at this consumation of things, finally disappear from the universe.—*The heavens shall pass away with a great noise; the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth and the works that are therein shall be burnt up;\* and its place shall know it no more!*

*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man;* the whole of his duty, his interest, and his happiness. It is the road to a comfortable life, to a peaceful death, to a happy eternity. *For God, addeth the wise man, shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*—Let the prospect of this judgment so dwell on our minds as to produce that degree of seriousness, which, in this vain and changing world becomes us as Christians, becomes us as men. If it be our care, to preserve a good conscience, and to do the things that are right, that judgment will not be to us an object of dismay. On the contrary, amidst the many discouragements which our virtuous endeavours meet with at present, it will be a comfort to think that *verily there is a just God to judge the earth, who shall in the end make all crooked things straight, and fully recompense his servants for the hardships they may now suffer by persevering in the path of integrity.*—This is the season, not of reaping, but of sowing; not of rest and enjoyment, but of labour and combat. You are now running the race; hereafter you shall receive the prize. You are now approving your fidelity, in the midst of trials; at the Last Day you shall receive the crown of the faithful. *Be patient, therefore, establish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. The Judge is at hand; and his reward is with him.*

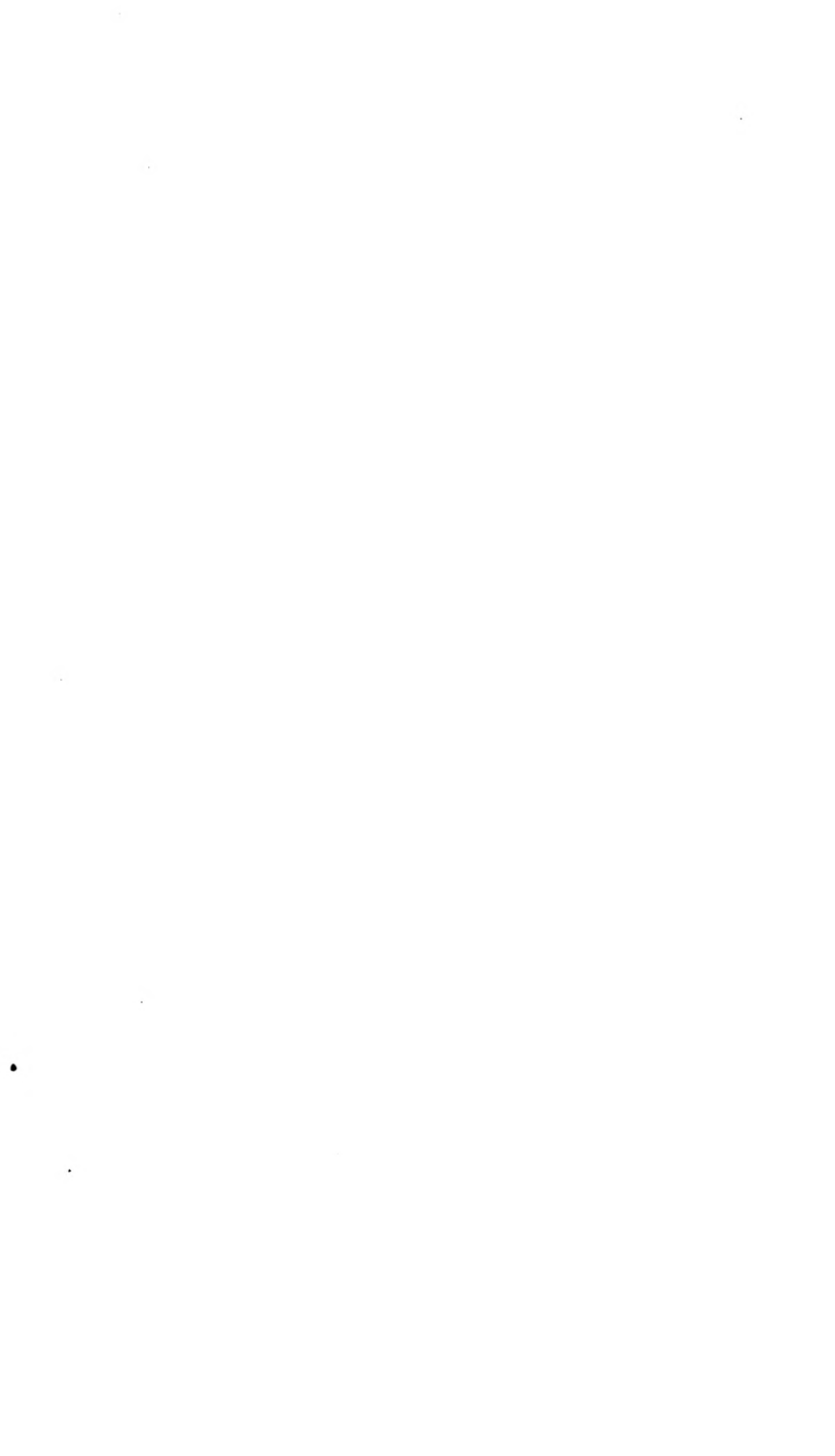
\* 2. Pet. iii. 10.

*If the righteous scarcely be saved  
where shall the ungodly and the sinner  
appear.*

THE END











**THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY  
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT**

**This book is under no circumstances to be  
taken from the Building**

