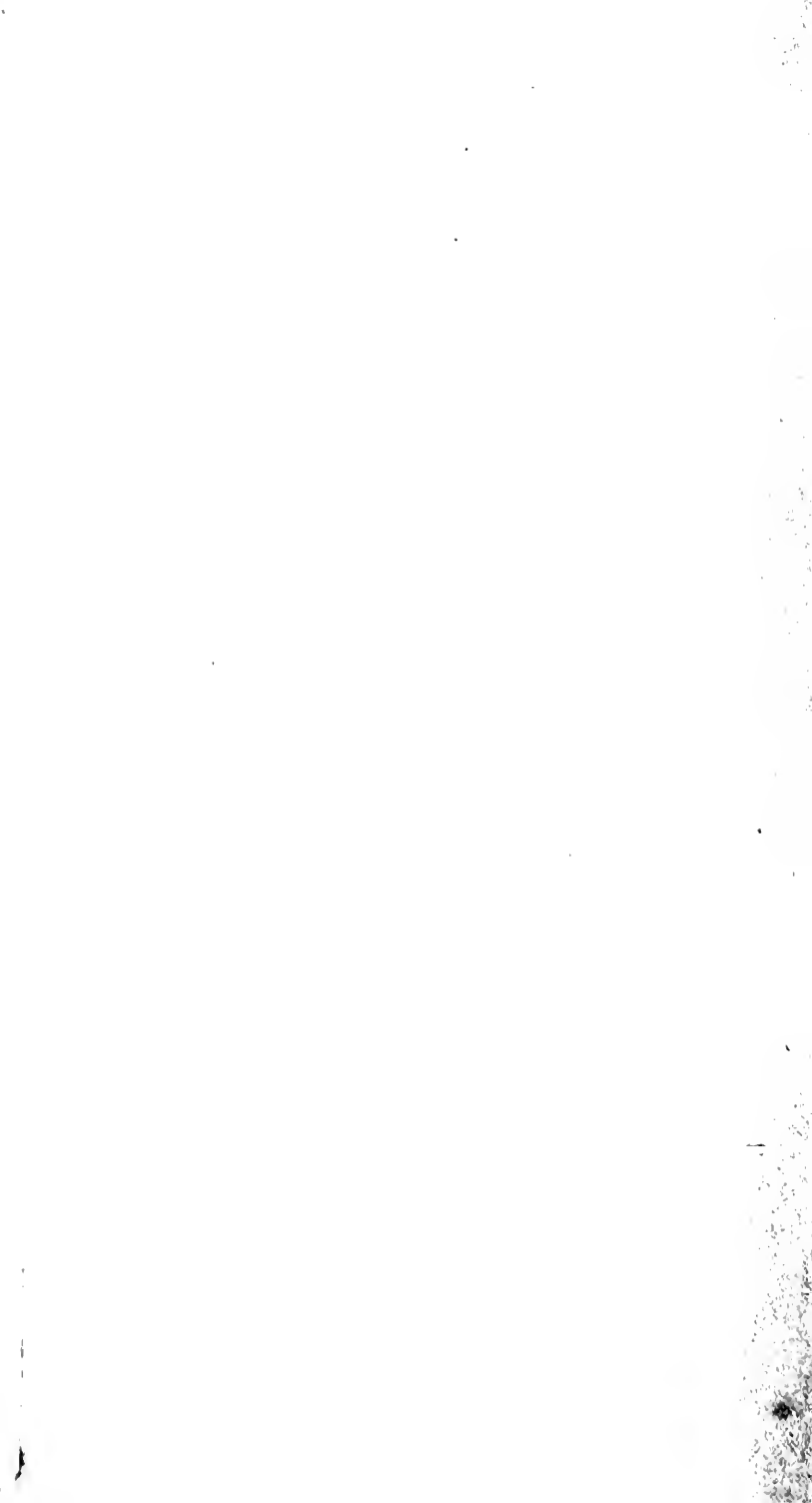


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SERMONS,

CHIEFLY ON

PARTICULAR OCCASIONS.

BY ARCHIBALD ALISON, LL. B.

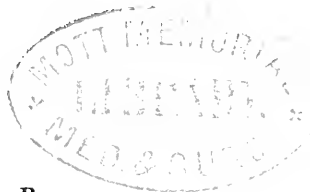
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TO THE

REVEREND ROBERT MOREHEAD, M. A.

JUNIOR MINISTER,

TO

THE DIRECTORS, AND TO THE CONGREGATION

OF THE EPISCOPAL CHAPEL, COWGATE, EDINBURGH,

THESE

SERMONS

ARE INSCRIBED, IN TESTIMONY OF THE MOST SINCERE GRATITUDE, AND THE MOST
RESPECTFUL AFFECTION.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Sermons were written in the course of duty, without any view to publication ; and they are now published only in obedience to the desire of those who heard them. To them they have a value very different from that of literary merit ; the value which kindness ever gives to the objects upon which it has long been employed ; the value, still more, which time bestows upon the feelings and the memories of former years. To the rest of the world, I feel, they have no recommendations ; and had it been possible for me, therefore, to have limited the publication to the congregation to whom they were originally addressed, I should never have presumed to intrude them upon the notice of the world.

To those who are unacquainted with that Congregation, it is necessary for me to state, that it is of a peculiar kind ; that it is composed almost entirely of persons in the higher ranks, or in the

more respectable conditions of society ; and that one very interesting part of it is formed by the young, who, in the course of academical education, are preparing themselves for the important stations or the liberal professions of future life. The recollection of these circumstances may, I hope, sometimes account for the choice of subjects, and sometimes for the views and illustrations that are employed.

Such as these sermons are, I now submit them to the world, with no other sentiment than that of the most unfeigned humility ; and I request it may be believed, that their appearance is not the result of voluntary presumption, but of the simple obedience to grateful duty.

Edinburgh, March 24, 1814.

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SERMON I.

ON THE BEGINNING OF THE CENTURY.

PSALM CII. 27.

“Thou art the same : and thy years shall not fail.”

THE commencement of a new year is an event which leads even the most thoughtless to some degree of reflection. There is something always solemn in the return of these stated memorials of time. They call upon us to some review of our conduct in the years that are past, and to some estimate of what we have gained or have lost in our commerce with the world. They remind us of the progress of time, and of our own progress to eternity. But, far more than all, they remind us of our dependence upon him, who is “the Ancient of Days ;” who, while we change, “is still the same,” and “whose years alone shall never fail.”

Life, while it thus is passing from us all, leaves us the sense of its importance. It was given us for the greatest and most magnificent purpose. It was given us by Him who alone is good, that we might advance in knowledge, in virtue, and in happiness ; that we might rise in the system of being to some unknown ends of moral and intellectual

perfection : and that, at the last, under the light of the Sun of Righteousness, we might join -- that innumerable multitude of all nations, and kindred, and tongues, who stand before the Throne and the Lamb for ever."

On the return, then, of those seasons by which we number our days, it is wise in us to think how our years have hitherto been employed ; what it is that we have been doing in the time we have enjoyed ; and whether we have indeed been fulfilling the great ends for which we were brought into being. Meditations of this kind become us all ; and, while they remind us of the magnificent purposes for which we were born, they fit us to enter upon a new year with comfort and resolution. I pray God that it may be with these solemn, but elevated sentiments, that all of us may now enter upon the new season, which is given us by "Him that liveth for ever."

At this time, however, my brethren, we have entered upon a greater period. The same hour which closed the year, closed also a Century of years, and, what is to us more important, it closed the eighteenth century of the religion of Him "who has brought Life and Immortality to light by his Gospel." There are innumerable reflections which will arise in every thoughtful mind upon so solemn and so unusual an occasion. The course of time has led us, as it were, to a higher eminence in the prospect of human nature. The past and the future seem more distinctly to lie before us, and

a solemn pause is afforded us, in which we can more truly estimate what life has brought, and what it is to bring.—The moment itself is profuse in instruction : and I shall limit myself to suggest to you some of those simple and obvious reflections, which seem most naturally to arise from the circumstances in which we now assemble.

1. The first and the most powerful of these reflections is, that of our dependence upon “Him who inhabiteth eternity.” We are arrived, in our generation, at the opening of the nineteenth age of the Religion of Christ, and we have presented this day, to the Throne of Heaven, the same petitions which have been offered by the faithful who have gone before us, in every age of that memorable time. They are all now mouldering in their graves ; but He that made them never dies. The same ear which listened to their petitions, now listens to ours. The same spirit which was in the midst of them, and the infant assemblies of the church, is in these moments in the midst of us, and of every congregation that is met in his name : and the same arm, which, in every difficulty or danger, has made the Church of Christ triumphant to our day, is still uplifted to protect the progress of the “everlasting Gospel.” There is something, my brethren, inexpressibly consoling to the weakness of humanity, in this reflection : while we stand as it were amid the ruins of time, and see the races of men thus successively rising and falling before us, we see, at the same

time, the Eternal Mind that governs the whole design. We see a system carrying on, in which all things "are working together for good" to the wise and to the virtuous; and which is to close at last, "in honour, in glory, and in immortality." Meditations of this kind are fitted to strengthen and elevate every heart. They are fitted to give a voice to time as it passes, and to make it speak to us of the goodness "of Him who liveth for ever and "ever." They are fitted still more to prostrate us, in the opening of a new age, before the Throne of Eternity; to dispose us to cast all our cares upon that God who careth for us; and to subject every thought and desire of our own to the will of Him, in whom alone are all the treasures of wisdom, "and who" alone "was, and is, and is to come."

2. In descending from this first and greatest reflection, we are led to consider, in the second place, the nature of that age, of which we have witnessed the close. Every thing tells us that there is some progress going on in Nature,—some advance of the human race, either to improvement or degradation; and it is natural to us to inquire, whether the age which is gone is likely to transmit happiness or misery to posterity. In this respect also, my brethren, we have much reason for consolation. The century which has now left us, has doubtless been one of the most distinguished in the annals of human nature. It succeeded ages of rudeness and barbarism, and has

fully discharged its duties in the improvement of humanity. Nations who before lay in darkness and ignorance, have emerged into day, and taken their position upon the theatre of society. A new world has risen with gigantick steps into maturity, and already begins to display the lights of knowledge, and the wealth of industry. The boundaries of that world we inhabit have at length been explored : and a path is opened for the introduction of the gospel to the remotest habitations of man.

In the progress which will for ever distinguish the eighteenth century, our own country, my brethren, has taken an exalted share. In the course of a period, so long for the instability of man, we have enjoyed the greatest portion of national happiness and prosperity that has ever fallen to the lot of the societies of men. The crimes and agitations of a former age have expired : and the constitution of our land has settled into that wise balance of power and of liberty, which no speculation of philosophy could have foreseen, but which is now substantiated, for the instruction of the future world, by the evidence of a hundred years of unprecedented welfare, and of expanding prosperity. Even in the present moments, my brethren, an event has taken place, which promises to give no mean addition to the prosperity and dignity of the empire. The union with our sister kingdom, so long wished for by the wise and benevolent, and so long opposed by national, and, above all, by religious preju-

diées, at length, by the perseverance of the legislative wisdom, dignifies the opening of the new century : and I trust in God, that the same sound of publick rejoicing which announced it to us, will announce to that long neglected, and perhaps oppressed people, the commencement of a new era of wealth, of liberty, and of happiness.

The age which is past has left us another subject of national gratulation.—that, I mean, of the extension which it has given to human knowledge. In no age, certainly, has the spirit of science so fully been awakened, or so generally disseminated : and were we to compare the state of knowledge at the beginning and the end of the period we are considering, the step which the human mind has made in that time would appear almost incredible. On every side, indeed, the boundaries of science have been enlarged ; our acquaintance with nature increased ; and the labours of philosophy withdrawn from visionary speculation, to those practical ends by which humanity may be bettered or improved. Under this influence, the arts of social life have been cultivated with unprecedented success ; the foundations of national wealth and greatness have been investigated ; and that great doctrine first taught from the schools of science, which unites national prosperity with national justice, and which will one day reduce the conduct of nations to the strictest rules of Christian benevolence. But, above all, the extension of know-

ledge has ministered to the happiness of men, by the support which it has afforded to the cause of religion,—not only in the memorable labours of those who have either displayed the beauty, or demonstrated the truth of Christianity.—but also in the unparalleled discoveries with which, in the age that is past, the perseverance of science has been rewarded, with respect to the Works of the Almighty ;—discoveries, in comparison of which all former knowledge was trifling ; which, at every step, lead us to more exalted conceptions of the goodness as well as greatness of Him that made us, and which have now engraved the name of God upon the altar of the universe with the hand of demonstration.

3. I trust I may add, in the third place, my brethren, that the age which has past has also improved in virtue. However much we may still have to regret the weakness or the vices of our nature, it were unjust and uncandid not to acknowledge, that, in comparison with the ages that preceded it, the last age has added eminently to social happiness. Many of the barbarities of ancient manners have been softened ; many of the prejudices which divided men from each other have been dissolved. Learning and knowledge have found their way to every rank of mankind ; and, while they have given new dignity and happiness to the higher conditions of society, they have, at the same time, improved the conduct, while they have ele-

vated the minds of the people. But, above all, the virtue which peculiarly distinguishes the last age, is that of humanity,—the humanity that has sprung from the fountain of the Gospel: a humanity not capricious and momentary, but principled and enlightened; which directs the labours of the legislator, as well as the meditations of the philosopher; which, in every moment of distress, associates the great and opulent in the service of the poor and the distressed; and which, even in the midst of war and animosity, unites all the wise and benevolent of every Christian nation, in the common cause of alleviating the distresses, or improving the condition of the human race.

Such, my brethren, is the view which we may justly take of the century that has passed. And, if it be pleasing to think that, under the influence of the Gospel of Christ, human nature has, in that period, made some advance towards knowledge and happiness, it is, at the same time, solemn to remember the duties that fall upon *us*. In the opening of a new age, *we* are the actors in this great system. Upon us it depends, whether the progress of mankind is to be accelerated or retarded. And there is no sentiment with which we can more nobly meet the season, as the profound conviction, that, upon our conduct, in our different situations or conditions, depends the character and happiness of the age that is to follow us.

4. There is another reflection, my brethren, of a still more solemn kind, which must naturally have occurred to us all. Of the period of which we have seen the beginning, none of us can see the end. Long ere the century closes, all of us, young or old, rich or poor, will be numbered with the dead. "The silver cord will be loosed," and "the golden bowl broken," and "every spirit" will have returned "to the God who gave it."—It is a reflection, in truth, to which no ignorance nor barbarity hath rendered the human mind insensible. Even amid all the licentious worship of antiquity, it was upon these occasions the plaintive call of the herald, "Come to those solemnities, which no living eye hath seen, and which no eye will see again."

Amid this dark and tremendous prospect, is there no voice which whispers to you, my brethren, how good "for you it is to be here : " or that prostrates you in these moments before the throne of Nature, in "thankfulness to Him" who hath given "you the victory," through Jesus Christ your Lord? "And I was in the spirit, (says the evangelist) upon the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as that of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last. And I turned to the voice that spake with me, and I saw one like unto the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about with a golden girdle. His head

“and his hairs were white like snow, and his eyes
 “were as a flame of fire, and his voice as the
 “sound of many waters. And when I saw Him,
 “I fell at his feet as dead; and He laid his right
 “hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not, I am
 “the First and the Last, I am He that liveth, and
 “was dead—And behold I am alive for evermore,
 “and have the keys of Hell and of Death.”

These, my brethren, are the sublime anticipations of the true Christian—these the hopes which He, “who liveth for ever and ever,” hath given to the weakness of mortality. It is to that greater world, (which, ere this century shall close, all of us must know) that the eye of piety is permanently directed. It is there that the great system of Almighty Wisdom shall finally be displayed; when all doubts shall cease, and all anxieties be dispelled; when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality; and when all the tears which life hath raised, shall be wiped away for ever.

It is to this great termination that time is advancing; every thing that we see around us, teaches us that life is an imperfect scene, of which the mighty conclusion is yet to come: and every year, as it passes, takes to a better world some of those whom we have loved or honoured. In the last receptacle of mortality, the rich and the poor “make their bed together;” and there we alike deposit the youthful head, whose opening virtues are to blos-

som in a nobler clime ; and the “ hoary hairs,” which descend at last to the grave, “ full of years “ and of honour.”

This last scene, my brethren, we have lately witnessed. The same hours which closed the century, closed also the life of one,* who, for half its period, has been the greatest ornament of the church of this land, and who has left to every church a model of piety and virtue which no age can destroy. Over this recent and ever memorable grave, the tears of humanity will fall ; but it is not fit they should be the tears of unmanly sorrow : it is fit, on the contrary, while we stand around it, that our hearts should kindle at those ashes which yet are scarcely cold : that while we see the “ death of the “ righteous,” we should pray that “ our life” and our “ end may be like his ;” and that we should think what is the power of that religion, over which the “ grave hath no victory,” and to “ which death “ hath no sting.” Happy, indeed, beyond the usual lot of mortality, was that long and venerable life, of which, alas ! we have witnessed the close : and, to Him “ whom he had made good in his “ sight,” the Almighty dispensed, even here, no common measure “ of knowledge, and wisdom, “ and joy.”—Happy, in being called into existence

* THE REVEREND DR. HUGH BLAIR.—This great and amiable man died a few days before this Sermon was preached ; and, after the lapse of so many years, I confess that I have still a melancholy satisfaction in being able to pay this humble tribute to a memory which I have not ceased to love and to venerate.

in the most splendid age of his country, in being the friend and contemporary of all those who have enlightened or adorned it, and in sharing with them in the applause and admiration of mankind:—Happy in an old age, in which “his eyes waxed not dim,” nor his “natural strength decayed,” and in a death, which, after no long suffering, removed him from the service of the “sanctuary below,” to that of the sanctuary above:—but happier far than all, in having devoted the great powers with which he was entrusted, to the sole ends of religion and virtue; in being the minister of salvation to ages yet unborn; and in having established a name, before which all the future generations of man will rise up and call it blessed!

It is with this illustrious example before us, that we enter upon a new age; upon that age, my brethren, in which we are all to live and all to die.—May He, who liveth for ever and ever, be our Protector and Friend! May He dwell in all our hearts, and strengthen all our resolutions, and listen to all our prayers. And whatever be the scenes that lie before us, may we so advance, under his guidance, upon the road of mortal life, that in the “last day, when the Saviour of the world shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may all rise to the life immortal, through Him who reigneth with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, now, henceforth, and for ever!”

SERMON II.

ON SPRING.

JOB XLII. 5.

“I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee.”

THESE are the words with which Job concludes the interesting account of his sufferings and his doubts. After a speculative and fruitless conversation with his friends, to discover the cause of those afflictions with which the providence of God had visited him, he is represented as at last raising his eyes from himself and his own concerns, towards the Government of Nature: And the Almighty is brought forward as speaking to him from amid the whirlwind of his power, and pointing out to him, amid his despondence, some of the most striking instances in which His greatness and wisdom are manifested in the world that surrounds him. Then Job answered, in the sublime and memorable words of the text, “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee.”

The words, my brethren, are still applicable to us. Even now, the greatest and most important

part of our religious knowledge, our knowledge of the nature and attributes of “Him that made “us,” is acquired solely “by the hearing of the “ear.” The early instruction of the parent; the occasional hours of reading and meditation; and the publick exhortations of the pulpit,—constitute all that the generality of men know upon the most momentous subject of human information. There are few who have been taught in infancy to raise their minds to the contemplation of His works; who love to kindle their adoration at the altar of nature, or to lose themselves in astonishment amid the immensity of the universe; and who thus “seeing Him with their eyes,” learn to associate the truths of religion with all the most valued emotions of their hearts. It is the natural consequence of these partial views of the Deity, to narrow our conceptions of his being; to chill the native sensibility of our minds to devotion; and to render religion rather the gloomy companion of the church and the closet, than the animating friend of our ordinary hours.

Reflections of this kind, my brethren, seem very naturally to arise to us from the season we experience, and the scenes we at present behold. In the beautiful language of the wise man, “the winter is now over and gone; the flowers appear “on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is “come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our “land.”—In these moments, we are the witnesses

of the most beautiful and most astonishing spectacle that nature ever presents to our view. The earth, by an annual miracle, rises again, as from her grave, into life and beauty. A new creation peoples the wintry desert ; and the voice of joy and gladness is heard among those scenes which but of late lay in silence and desolation. The sun comes forth, “like a bridegroom from his chamber,” to diffuse light and life over every thing he beholds ; and the breath of Heaven seems to brood with maternal love over that infant creation it has so lately awakened into being. In such hours, there is a natural impulse which leads us to meditation and praise. We love to go out amid the scenery of nature, to mark its progressive beauty, and to partake in the new joy of every thing that lives ;—and we almost involuntarily lift our eyes to that Heaven from whence cometh the hope of man, “which openeth its hand, and filleth all “things with plenteousness.” Even upon the most uncultivated minds, these seasons have their influence ; and wherever, over the face of the earth, the spring is now returning, even amid nations uncheered by the light of the Gospel, the poor inhabitant is yet every where preparing some rude solemnity, to express the renewal of his joy, and the return of his praise. In obedience to this pleasing instinct of religion, I shall endeavour, at present, to lay before you some of the reflections which seem most fitted for this season, and which

may be most useful for the ends of piety and virtue.

I.—1. The first reflection which the return of spring presents to us, is with regard to the unchangeableness of the *power* of the Almighty. We learn from reason, and from scripture, that “God is unchangeable, as He is eternal: that to his years there is no end; that he was, and is, and is to come.” All this is the “hearing of the ear.” In the present hours “our eyes may see it.” It is but a little time, when the earth around us, like the chaos from which it sprung, was without form and void, and when darkness dwelt over the face of the deep. It is now, as in the astonishing hour of creation, lighted up into life and order. The great word of EXISTENCE has again gone forth;—every breeze that blows appears to call some new species of being from the dark womb of nature;—and every returning sun seems to glory, with increasing splendour, over that progressive beauty which his rays have awakened. While we are witnessing this scene of wonder, can we forget, my brethren, that it is but the *yearly* workmanship of God! In the many thousand years that have passed since the beginning of time, the same season has annually been renewed; and the eyes of our fathers, and the old time before them, have regularly witnessed those displays of Omnipotence in which *we* now rejoice. They all are gone,—they and the generations which were before them,

are now withdrawn from the light of the sun into the silence of the grave. But the great Parent of Nature is the same. To Him, and to his power, "there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning:" He now visits the earth, and blesses it with the same profusion as in its infant years; and when we too, and our children, are gathered to our fathers; when the age in which we live shall be lost in the obscurity of forgotten time,—even then, the seasons of spring and harvest will return, and the voice of praise will be heard among the dwellings of man.

2. The second reflection which the return of spring teaches us, is with regard to the unchanging *goodness* of the Almighty. This also, my brethren, is a truth which we learn by "the hearing of the ear;" but which nowhere can be learnt with such efficacy and power, as in those hours when "our eyes may see it." If there is an instinct which leads us now into the scenery of nature, it is not only to amuse us with a transitory pleasure, but to teach us just and exalted conceptions of "Him that made us." In no hours of existence are the traces of his love so powerfully marked upon nature, as in the present. It is, in a peculiar manner, the season of happiness. The vegetable world is bursting into life, and waving its hues, and spreading its fragrance around the habitations of men. "The desert" even, and "the solitary place is glad, and the wilderness springs

“and blossoms as the rose.” The animal world is marked by still deeper characters of happiness. Myriads of seen, and far greater myriads of unseen beings are now rising, from every element, into life, and enjoying their new-born existence, and hailing, with inarticulate voice, the Power that gave them birth. The late desert of existence is now filling with animation, and every element around us is pregnant with life, and prodigal of joy. Is there a time, my brethren, in which we can better learn the goodness of the universal God? Is it not wise in us to go abroad into nature, and to associate His name with every thing that, at this season, delights the eye, and gratifies the heart? And is there any image under which it is so useful for us to figure “him that inhabiteth “eternity;” as under that of the Father of his Creation; as having called every thing into existence for “his pleasure;” in communicating happiness; and as, in these moments, listening, with placid ear, to every articulate voice that speaks gratitude, and to every inarticulate voice that testifies joy.

II. Such, my brethren, are some of the reflections which most naturally arise at this time, with regard to the great Mind and Parent of existence. They are such as every age, however untaught, has felt; which the wise of every country have cherished; and by which, even amidst ignorance, they have been fully consoled. There are some

other reflections, which, at this season, seem very naturally to arise to us as Christians; and there is a beautiful analogy, which I could earnestly wish to impress upon your minds, between the coming of the Gospel, and the arrival of the season of spring. In no respect, perhaps, is our conduct of religious education more imperfect, than in every thing that relates to the system of Christianity; and there is no light in which it can be represented to the young, so useful as that which unites it with every thing that is most exalted and most beautiful in nature.

1. The appearance of spring is then, in the first place, an emblem of the Gospel of our Lord, as it reminds us of the darkness and gloom by which it was preceded. When we look on the state of the world before the coming of Christ, there is no image that can more justly or more forcibly picture it to our minds than that of the *winter* of humanity. It was a season of moral cold and darkness,—when every expanding principle of piety and virtue was checked by ignorance and doubt—and when men wandered amid the severities which surrounded them, uncheered by any effulgence from Heaven. It was a season also, we may remember, peopled with the phantoms of superstition, in which every power of darkness seemed to roam and bear sway, and of which the gloom was only enlightened by the dark flames of a sanguinary altar. Such was the winter of our nature, until the Son of God came to bring us light.

2. The appearance of spring is, therefore, in the second place, an emblem of the Gospel of our Lord, as it reminds us of that light which his coming hath shed on all the concerns of men. It is in this magnificent and beautiful view, that the Gospel is always predicted by the prophets, and represented by the followers of Jesus. It is the "Day-spring from on high," which has come to visit us. It is "the morning spread upon the mountains." It is the Sun of Truth, which shone upon those "that sat in darkness, and in the shadow of" more than mortal "death;" and when we look, accordingly, on the state of the world since the coming of our Lord, nothing can more accurately resemble the influence and the beneficence of spring. Wherever His religion has spread, a new verdure (as it were) has been given to the soul of man. Whatever blesses, or whatever adorns humanity, has followed the progress of his doctrines; laws have been improved, governments enlightened, manners refined, and the mild and gentle virtues of humanity and peace, have sprung into new life and fragrance. "Even the desert," (in the beautiful words of the prophet,) "and the solitary place have been glad," and in many a "wilderness" of life—in many a "solitary place" of wo, where the eye of man comes not, the light of Heaven has been revealed, and many a flower of Faith and Hope have blown, unknown to all but the "Sun of Righteousness" which cherished them.

How well, my brethren, would it be for us all, if, under those great and prescribed images, we represented to ourselves the Gospel of our Lord!—if, leaving for a while the narrow and selfish views of the closet, we went forth into the scenes which remind us of the present God, and saw in every instance of his beneficence, an emblem of the “glad tidings” of his Son. Nature herself would then become the friend of piety. The truths of natural, and the truths of revealed religion, would be blended together in our hearts; and every returning spring would bring us with it new motives of love to the God who made, and to the Saviour who redeemed us.

In what I have now said, my brethren, I have presented to you only the religious reflections which the season is fitted to excite. There are some other impressions of a moral kind, which it is also calculated to give us, and which it would be wise in us to associate with the present appearances of nature.

The first of these is the love of *innocence*. It is the *youth* of the year we are witnessing. The trees are putting forth their tender green; and the fields are covered with their young inhabitants. How well is this spectacle fitted to awaken every thoughtful mind to meditation! It reminds us of our own infancy, when the mind was pure, and the heart was happy. It reminds us of that original innocence in which man was created, and for

the loss of which no attainments of mortality can make any compensation. It reminds us of that greater spring “which awaits the righteous : when “the pure in heart shall see God ; when the Lord “shall feed them like a shepherd, and lead them “to fountains of living water, and when God shall “wipe all tears from their eyes.”

The second impression which the season of spring is fitted to make upon us, is the love of nature and of humanity. The ordinary scenes of life have a tendency to limit our benevolence, and to confine our interest in nature to the few that surround us. The spring yearly returns, as it were, to dissolve this insensibility, and to expand our affections to a greater circle. We are then the witnesses of the benevolence of God,—the Father of Nature seems to come from the dark clouds that surround his throne, to bestow life and happiness over the universe of nature. “Hope riseth “in the heart of man;” and every animated being pours forth its song of joy. Is it possible we can contemplate this scene, without feeling our own benevolence exalted? without being reminded anew of the ties which relate us to all the family of God : and without blending with the love of Him “who alone is good,” the love also of every thing that He hath made?

The last impression which this season is fitted to make upon us, is that of the love of industry. It is the time when the great labour of nature is

carrying on; when the breath of the Almighty is operating upon the earth and upon the deep, “and “making all things work together for good.” How simple, but how solemn is the call which this scene makes upon man! We also, my brethren, are parts of the system of God: to us all, some share is delegated in the administration of the universe,—some power of contributing to the happiness of the world which he hath made. How happy for us would it be, if we suffered Nature to teach us those unrepublishing lessons; if every spring, as it returned, awakened us to new zeal in the service of God, and kindled the noblest ardour of religion, that of being fellow-workers with him in the good of humanity!

I have thus presented to you, my brethren, some of the reflections which seem most naturally to arise at this season, and pointed out some of the uses to which they may be applied. If they are not the direct exhortations of religion, they are not perhaps less important. To contemplate nature with the eye of piety,—to associate the image of God with every thing that is great or beautiful in his works,—to see every different scene around us, as only varying testimonies of his love,—and to feel those analogies which unite the system of Nature with that of Revelation,—are acquisitions which every wise man would wish to make, and which no man can make, without becoming happier and better.

May this, my brethren, be the case with us all! May the mighty scene which we are now permitted to see, exalt our minds to legitimate conceptions of "that God who inhabiteth eternity, and "yet humbleth himself to behold the things that "are upon earth." And, while Heaven is pouring forth its bounty, and Nature rejoicing around us, may we lift our hands in humble adoration to the Parent of Existence, and feel, with the grateful transport of Job! "I have heard of Thee by the "hearing of the ear, but NOW MINE EYE SEETH "THEE."

SERMON III.

ON THE YOUTH OF SOLOMON.

1 KINGS III. 7, &c.

“ And Solomon said : And now O Lord my God ! Thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father ; and I am but a little child : I know not how to go out and to come in.

“ Give, therefore, thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad, for who is able to judge this so great a people ?

“ And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.”

THESE words are part of that celebrated prayer in which Solomon is represented as addressing himself to God on his accession to the throne of Israel. The form of the book in which it is related, permits it only to be considered as a fact in the history of his reign, and necessarily leaves the sentiments and disposition which led to this beautiful address, to the imagination of the reader to supply. But in the apocryphal book of his wisdom, it is related at much greater length ; and represents the feelings and character of the author, with a simplicity which is singularly affecting, and with an eloquence which cannot be too much ad-

mired. It opens with a very beautiful description of the character and effects of wisdom, and of the early admiration which it had excited in his mind.

“Now, when I considered these things,” says he, “by myself, and pondered it in mine heart, how
 “that to be joined to wisdom is immortality, and
 “great pleasure in her friendship, and glory by
 “communing with her, I went about seeking how
 “I might take her unto me. Nevertheless, when I
 “perceived that I could not enjoy her, except God
 “gave her me, I went unto the Lord and besought
 “Him, and with my whole heart I said,

“O! God of my Fathers, and Lord of Mercy,
 “who hath made all things by thy word, and or-
 “dained man through thy wisdom, that he should
 “have dominion over the creatures which Thou
 “hast made, and govern the world according to
 “equity, and execute judgment with an upright
 “heart, give me that wisdom which sitteth by thy
 “throae, and put me not out from among thy chil-
 “dren; and send her out of thy holy Heavens, and
 “from the throne of thy Majesty, that she may
 “dwell with me, and that I may know what is plea-
 “sing unto Thee. So shall my works be accepta-
 “ble.—so shall I govern thy people righteously,
 “and be meet for my father’s throne.”

There is not, perhaps, in the history of mankind, a more beautiful picture than that which is here represented:—A young man in the bloom of life, when every thing was gay and alluring around him,—in the moment of ascending to a throne,

when pleasure and ambition were before him, and eastern servility, with its wonted adulation, told him, that all things were in his hand,—betaking himself thus humbly to his God, and imploring of Him that wisdom which might enable him to resist the temptations with which his situation surrounded him, and to fulfil the duties to which he was called. Had it been in the latter periods of his reign, when satiated with pleasure, and disappointed in ambition,—when fatigued with the cares and pageantry of a throne, he looked abroad for better comforts,—had it been at such a time that Solomon had directed his soul to Heaven, much of the merit of his piety would have been lost. It would have then appeared only as the last refuge of a discontented mind, which interest, not disposition, had led to devotion; and which sought only for repose in piety, when it had been disappointed in every thing else. But at such a season, to be guided by such sentiments,—in such an hour to betake himself to God,—bespeaks a mind so humble and yet so pure; a disposition so ardently and yet so rightly inclined; and a soul so well fitted for every kind of excellence, that no language of praise seems too great for its desert.

It is not, however, from the peculiar situation of Solomon, that the beauty of this memorable instance of devotion arises. The charm of it chiefly consists in its suitableness to the season of

youth ; in its correspondence to the character and dispositions which distinguish that important age ; and which no length of acquaintance with the world prevents us from wishing to find in the young. In all situations, indeed, of human life, piety is the duty and the interest of mankind : but in youth, it has something singularly graceful and becoming ; something which ever disposes us to think well of the mind in which it is found ; and which, better than all the other attainments of life, appears to promise honour and happiness in future days.

It is suited, in the first place, we think, to the opening of human life,—to that interesting season, when nature in all its beauty first opens on the view, and when the wisdom and goodness of the Almighty fall on the heart, unmingled and unimpaired. It is suited, in the next place, to the nature of youthful imagination ; to that love of excellence and perfection which nothing mortal ever can realize, and which can find only in the truths of religion, the objects of which it is in search. It is suited still more, perhaps, to the tenderness of young affections ; to that sensibility which every instance of goodness can move ; and to that warm and generous temper which meets every where with the objects of its gratitude or love. But, most of all, it is suited, in our opinion, to the *innocence* of the youthful mind, to that sacred and sinless purity which can lift its unpol-

luted hands to Heaven; which guilt hath not yet torn from confidence and hope in God; and which can look beyond the world to that society of kindred spirits, “of whom is the kingdom of Heaven.” The progress of life, we know, may bring other acquisitions; it may strengthen religion by experience, and add knowledge to faith: But the piety which springs only from the heart,—the devotion which nature, and not reasoning inspires,—the pure homage which flows unbidden from the tongue, and which asks no other motive for its payment than the pleasures which it bestows,—these are the possessions of youth, and of youth alone.

The feelings of piety, however, are not only natural and becoming in youth; they are still more valuable, as tending to the formation of future character; as affording the best and noblest school in which the mind may be trained to whatever is great or good in human nature. I shall, at present, endeavour to illustrate some of the important consequences which, in this respect, follow from youthful piety.

That the convictions of religion form the great foundation of moral conduct,—that piety, in itself, is fitted to exalt the human mind to its greatest degree of virtuous perfection,—are truths which every one acknowledges, and which the experience of mankind sufficiently proves.—But the misfortune is, that, in general, religion is acquired too late in

life, to produce all the effects on the mind which it is fitted to have, and when, instead of forming the character, it is itself formed by it. The habits of worldly pursuit have, ere this period occurs, contracted the mind to narrow views, and sordid occupations. The ambition, which once grasped at excellence, and which thought no honours were impossible to be obtained in the conflict of human life, has, ere this, expired under the daily pressure of trivial cares, and the daily demand of unimportant exertions. The testimony of conscience has, long before now, armed the Deity with terrour, and extinguished all the fascinating views which immortality affords, in the gloom with which it now is covered. At such a period of life, religion is embraced, rather because it is necessary, than because it is pleasing. It is an occasional, rather than a permanent affection,—which comes rather to console the hours of distress, when every other comfort leaves us, than to influence the general thoughts, and animate the general conduct. To most men, accordingly, the best effects of religion are altogether unknown. It mingles not in their daily pursuits, nor softens their usual duty. It is banished from their thoughts in the days of happiness and tranquillity, and is sought after only when misfortunes press, or diseases alarm. It possesses, therefore, only a negative effect on their conduct or character. It intimidates them, perhaps, from great violations of duty,—but it

stimulates them to no positive virtue. It terrifies them by the prospect of punishments,—but it excites them to no ambition of doing well. It is a slavish and a timid service, and not “the glorious liberty of the sons of God.”

The piety which is formed in youth has a different character, and leads to very different effects. It springs in the first and purest state of the human mind, when the soul comes fresh from the hands of its Creator, and when no habits of life have contracted the reach of its powers. It comes in that happy season, when life is new, and hope unbroken; when nature seems every where to rejoice around, and when the love of God rises unbidden in the soul. It comes not, then, to terrify or to alarm, but to afford every high and pleasing prospect in which the heart can indulge,—to withdraw the veil which covers the splendours of the eternal mind,—to open that futurity which awakens all their desires to behold, and, in the sublime occupations of which they feel already, as by some secret inspiration, the home and destiny of their souls. At such a period, religion is not a service of necessity, but of joy. It is not an occasional, but a permanent subject of meditation,—a subject which can fill their solitary hours with rapture; which involuntarily occurs to them in every season, when their hearts are disposed to feel; and to which they willingly return from all the disappointments or follies of life, and resume again their unblemished joys.

If there be a moment in human life, in which the foundation of virtuous character can be laid, it is at this period. If there be a discipline which can call forth every nobler faculty of the soul, it is such early exercises of piety. They establish a tone and character of thought, which is allied to every virtuous purpose. They present those views of man, and of the ends of his being, which awaken the best powers of the soul. They afford those prospects of the Providence of God, which can best give support and confidence to virtue.

1. The first advantage of youthful piety is, that it tends to establish that tone and character of thought which is allied to every virtuous purpose. There is no man perhaps, who, in some fortunate moments of thought, has not felt his mind raised above its usual state, by religious considerations. There are hours in every man's life, when religion seems to approach him in all her radiance; when its truths break upon his mind with a force which cannot be resisted; and when, in the contemplation of them, he feels his bosom swell with emotions of unusual delight. In such moments, every man feels the dignity and the purity of his mind increased; the illusions and the temptations of the world appear beneath his regard; his heart opens to nobler and purer affections, and his bosom regains for a while its native innocence. In the greater part of mankind, however, these moments are transient; life calls them back again

to their usual concerns—the habits of usual thought return,—and they relapse again into all the folly and weakness of ordinary conduct. It is the tendency of early piety, on the contrary, to fix this character of thought, and of emotion,—to render that temper of mind permanent, which in most men is only temporary and transient. By the great objects to which it directs the minds of the young; by its precedence to every other system of opinions which might oppose its influence; by its power to arrest and retain their attention, it tends gradually to establish in the soul a correspondent dignity in every other exercise. While yet the world is unknown, and the calm morning of life is undisturbed by passions, it awakens desires of a nobler kind than the usual pursuits of life can gratify, and forms in secret those habits of elevated thought, which are, of all others, the most valuable acquisitions of youthful years; and which, whether in the pursuits of action or of speculation, fit it for future attainments in truth and virtue, beyond the reach of ordinary men.

2. It is a second advantage of early piety, that it presents those views of man, and of the ends of his being, which call forth the best powers of our nature. We naturally accommodate our acquisitions to the opinions we entertain of the scene in which they are to be employed, and to the expectations that are formed with regard to us.

It is hence that the different situations of human life produce so great diversities of character and of improvement. The poor man, whose life is to pass in obscurity, and on whose humble fortunes the regard and observation of the world is never to fall, is seldom solicitous to distinguish himself by any other acquisitions than those which are suited to the humility of his station, and which the exigencies of his situation demand of him. The great and the opulent, on the contrary, who are born to be the objects of observation and attention, feel themselves called upon to suit their ambition to the opinions of mankind; and, if they have the common spirit of men, usually endeavour to accommodate themselves to these expectations.

It is in this manner that the piety of early life has an influence in forming the future character. It represents man in colours which afford the most dignified aspect of his nature: It represents him as “formed in the image of God,” as but a little lower “than the angels,” and as crowned with glory and honour. It represents life, not as the short and fleeting space of temporary being, but as the preparation only for immortal existence; as a theatre, on which he is called to act in the sight of his Saviour and his God, and of which the rewards exceed even the power of his imagination to conceive. It represents all this, too, in the season when no lower passions have taken the dominion of his heart, and when his powers are

all susceptible of being moulded by the ends which are placed before him. In such views of man, all the best qualities of his nature arise involuntarily in the soul;—the Benevolence which burns to diffuse happiness, and to be a fellow worker with God in the designs of his providence—the Fortitude, which no obstacles can retard, and no dangers can appal in the road of immortality—the Constancy, which, reposing in the promises of Heaven, presses forward in the path of strenuous and persevering virtue. Such views also have the tendency to fortify the mind against all those narrow and unjust conceptions of life, which are the source of the greatest part of the follies and weakness of mankind. They level all those vain distinctions among men, which, in one class of society, are productive of oppression and of pride, and in the other of baseness and servility. They silence that feeble and complaining spirit which is so often mistaken for sensibility and superiour feeling, and which, from whatever cause it springs, gradually poisons the source of human happiness, and undermines the foundation of every real virtue. They dispel those dark and ungenerous views of man, and of his capacity for happiness and virtue, which are in general only the excuses for our own indolence or selfishness, and which, wherever they have prevailed, have so often withheld the arm that was made to bless, and silenced the voice that was destined to enlighten

them. "Whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely and of good report,"—these are the objects at which the spirit of early piety forms the mind to aim,—wherever, by the production of happiness, Virtue is to be acquired, or, by the performance of duty, Praise is to be won.

3. It is the last advantage of early piety, that it affords those views of the providence of God, which can best give support and confidence to conduct. There is a natural belief in mankind of the connexion between prosperity and virtue; and there is an instinctive hope, that the laws of the divine administration have prepared happiness for the righteous. If it is from life, however, that we judge, a variety of appearances occur at first to perplex our understandings. Here, as of old, "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill, but time and chance happen unto them all."—No permanent law seems to regulate the course of human affairs, and no just hand appears to distribute the balance of good and evil. A broken and imperfect system only appears, in which all things happen alike to all, and fortune disposes at pleasure of the blessings and miseries of humanity. To such vulgar views of Nature and Providence, the commerce of life, and the habits of attention to temporal pursuits, too naturally lead: and hence

it is, that we so often find the pious and the wise themselves, to whom religion ought to have taught better things, complaining under the unequal distribution, and nourishing in their hearts those secret murmurs against Providence, which unnerve every virtuous purpose of the soul, and cover religion itself in gloom and melancholy. It is the piety of youthful days which can afford the best preservative against these dark and unjust conceptions. Before the experience of life has made any impression on their minds,—before they descend into the “wilderness” through which they are to travel, it shows them from afar the “promised land.” It carries their view to the whole course of their being, and, while no narrow objects have yet absorbed their desires, shews them its termination in another scene, in which the balance of good and evil will be adjusted by the unerring hand of God. Under such views of nature, the system of Divine Providence appears in all its majesty and beauty. Beginning here, in the feeble and imperfect state of man, it spreads itself out into forms of ascending being, in which the heart expands, while it contemplates them; and closes at last in scenes which are obscured only from the excess of their splendour. With such conceptions of their nature, life meets the young in its real colours;—not as the idle abode of effeminate pleasure, but as the school in which their souls are formed to great attainments;—not as the soft

shade in which every manly and honourable quality is to dissolve, but as the field in which glory, and honour, and immortality are to be won. Whatever may be the aspect which it may assume, —whatever the scenes in which they are called to act, or to suffer,—the promises of God still brighten in their view; and their souls, deriving strength from trial, and confidence from experience, settle at last in that humble but holy spirit of resignation, which, when rightly understood, comprehends the sum of religion; which, reposing itself in undoubting faith in the wisdom of God, accepts, not only with content, but with cheerfulness, of every dispensation of his Providence; which seeks no other end than to fulfil its part in His government; and which, knowing its own weakness and his perfection, yields up all its desires into His hand, and asks only to know His laws, and to do his will.

Such are the natural effects of youthful piety upon the formation of human character; yet there is one advantage of it to be mentioned still greater than all; I mean, the hope which it affords of the favour of God, and of the assistance of his Holy Spirit.

“Now the prayer of Solomon pleased the Lord
“that he had asked this thing. And God said
“unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing,
“and hast not asked for thyself long life, neither
“hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the

“life of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself
“understanding to discern judgment: Behold, I
“have done according unto thy words.—Lo I
“have given thee a wise and understanding heart:
“so that there was none like thee before thee,
“neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.—
“And I have also given thee that which thou
“hast not asked, both riches and honour, so that
“there shall not be any among the kings like unto
“thee all thy days.” In every part of scripture,
in the same manner, it is remarkable with what
singular tenderness the season of youth is always
mentioned, and what hopes are afforded to the
devotion of the young. It was at that age that
God appeared unto Moses when he fed his flock
in the desert, and called him to the command of
his own people.—It was at that age he visited the
infant Samuel, while he ministered in the temple
of the Lord, “in days when the word of the Lord
“was precious, and when there was no open
“vision.”—It was at that age that his spirit fell
upon David, while he was yet the youngest of his
father’s sons, and when among the mountains of
Bethlehem he fed his father’s sheep.—It was at
that age, also, “that they brought young children
“unto Christ that he should touch them: And his
“disciples rebuked those that brought them: But
“when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased,
“and said to them, Suffer the little children to
“come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such
“is the kingdom of Heaven.”

If these, then, are the effects and promises of youthful piety, rejoice, O young man! in thy youth, —rejoice in those days which are never to return, when religion comes to thee in all its charms, and when the God of Nature reveals himself to thy soul, like the mild radiance of the morning sun, when he rises amid the blessings of a grateful world. If already devotion hath taught thee her secret pleasures;—if, when Nature meets thee in all its magnificence or beauty, thy heart humbleth itself in adoration before the hand which made it, and rejoiceth in the contemplation of the wisdom by which it is maintained;—if, when revelation unveils her mercies, and the Son of God comes forth to give peace and hope to fallen man, thine eye follows with astonishment the glories of his path, and pours at last over his cross those pious tears which it is a delight to shed;—if thy soul accompanieth him in his triumph over the grave, and entereth on the wings of faith into that Heaven “where he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High,” and seeth the “society of angels and of the spirits of just men made perfect,” and listeneth to the “ever lasting song which is sung before the throne :”—If such are the meditations in which thy youthful hours are passed, renounce not, for all that life can offer thee in exchange, these solitary joys. The world which is before thee,—the world which thine imagination paints in such brightness,—has

no pleasures to bestow which can compare with these. And all that its boasted wisdom can produce, has nothing so acceptable in the sight of Heaven, as this pure offering of thy infant soul.

In these days “the Lord himself is thy shepherd, and thou dost not want. Amid the green pastures, and by the still waters” of youth, he now makes “thy soul to repose.” But the years draw nigh, when life shall call thee to its trials; the evil days are on the wing, when “thou shalt say thou hast no pleasure in them;” and, as thy steps advance, “the valley of the shadow of death opens,” through which thou must pass at last. It is then thou shalt know what it is to “remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth.” In these days of trial or of awe, “his spirit shall be with you,” and thou shalt fear no ill; and, amid every evil which surrounds you, “he shall restore thy soul.—His goodness and mercy shall follow thee all the days of thy life;” and when at last “the silver cord is loosed, thy spirit shall return to the God who gave it, and thou shalt dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

SERMON IV.

ON THE GENERAL FAST, 1801.*

PROVERBS xix. 21.

“There are many devices in man’s heart ; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.”

THE calamities of the social world have assembled us in the House of God, to humble ourselves before his eternal throne ; to call our past ways to remembrance ; and to implore his protection in the year that is to come, upon our councils and our arms. Since the people of this country last met upon a similar occasion, the hopes of patriotism, and the wishes of humanity, have alike been vain. The giant power which has arisen in the midst of the civilized world to mock the calculations of human wisdom, has, within that short period, matured its strength, and expanded its dominion. Wherever his arms have turned, empires have shrunk before them ; and many thousands of

* Preached after the peace of Luneville had terminated the war on the Continent, and when the French armies were assembling professedly for the invasion of England.

the human race, who, in the year that is past, met this day in youth and joy, have since poured their blood to cement the fabrick of his despotick throne.

In the opening of a new season, when all the calamities of war are to be renewed,—when the avenging angel pauses only for a time, that he may collect new force, and renovated vigour,—and when the hearts of men wait in a dead calm “for those “things that are coming upon the earth,” there is an instinct, superiour to wisdom, which leads us to follow the multitude into the House of God, and to seek that support from the Hand of Heaven, which we have so long failed to find from that of man.

It is in general a very narrow and a very selfish view of the Divine government of the world which we take, when we consider it only as the inhabitants of any particular country. In such an aspect, we almost involuntarily consider it as relating only to ourselves. The rest of mankind, with all their rights and all their interests, are thrown into shade; and we consider our own nation, and our own interests, as the sole centre from which all our duties and all our wishes are to arise. We consider, still more, perhaps, the existence of our country as limited by our own; and, forgetting the age and stability of nations, we exult in momentary victory, or tremble at momentary defeat, with the same feeble levity with which we usually regard the transient scenes of private life.

It is to correct this fatal weakness, and to create a firmer and a more elevated tone of mind, that days like these are wisely appointed. When, upon occasions like the present, we enter this house, it is supposed that we leave the world behind us ;—that we raise ourselves from common to religious contemplation ;—that, from the darkness around us, we come to consult the oracles of God ;—and that we prepare our minds to obey the will of Him who is the beginning of existence and the end, and who alone, in the universe of nature, “ was, and is, and is to come.”

If such, my brethren, be the high sentiment with which you meet this day, I know not that, in the whole compass of human life, there is a day of greater sublimity or elevation. While the world is resounding with the noise of war and of sorrow, it is inexpressibly affecting to be privileged to enter into the sanctuary of God ;—to feel that, amid all this disorder, there is yet a “ counsel which shall stand,” and that, from the guilt of man, there is an appeal which the human heart is authorized to make to the justice of God. In such meditations, we are raised from the confusions of Earth, to the order of Heaven ;—we lose the remembrance of our own days and our own prejudices ;—we turn our eyes back to the ages that are past, and the times that have been long before us ;—and, while we seat ourselves, in imagination, among the ruins of former nations, and indulge a melan-

choly pleasure in contemplating their history and their decay, we see the finger of religion pointing to the solemn inscription which is written on all their tombs : “ There are many devices in man’s heart ; but the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.” It is to this elevated point of observation that I would wish, in the present hour, to raise your meditations ;—to lead you back to the tragick history of the human race ;—to observe thence, what is the difference between the “ devices of man,” and the “ counsels of God ;” and thus to awaken some of the sentiments which become the citizens of this country, in the situation of danger in which it now stands.

1. I am to entreat you then, in the first place, to observe, that however deeply the annals of every preceding age of the world have been marked with violence, and stained with blood, there has yet ever been some unknown limit which the Almighty hath imposed to the “ rage of war, and to the madness of the people.” Had human wisdom alone governed the world,—had no greater system been established for the progress of mankind than what human foresight could impose ;—had no unseen hand controlled the violence of national passions, or directed them to ends which they did not foresee,—the race of man must long ago have been extirpated from the earth, and the animosities of barbarous nations closed only in mutual destruction. In the midst, however, of this dark retro-

spect, while we see the stream of war and of conflict descending to us from the beginning of history, we see at the same time, (as if by some enchantment,) the race of man silently growing in number, and increasing in power, and spreading itself over all the surface of the habitable earth. Nations sink into oblivion, or are overwhelmed by mightier arms. The seats of empires are changed, and the traveller scarcely finds the place where their power and their magnificence were known. But **MAN**, in the meanwhile, survives the desolation ;—his generations multiply over that surface which is yet wet with the blood of his forefathers ;—an unseen Providence watches over the infancy of his social being ;—and the same Almighty Power, which restrains the tide of the ocean, hath also in every age said to the tide of war, “Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther ; and here shall thy proud waves be staid.”

2. The second observation which is fitted to impress us upon the review of the history of the world, is, that whatever may have been the revolutions of nations, they have uniformly tended to the progress and improvement of the human race.

It is not thus, indeed, in general, that we either judge or are taught to judge of them. We read the history of particular nations ; but we seldom extend our conceptions to the nobler history of **MAN**.—We read with rapture the history of those mighty empires, which, in their hour, have sub-

duced, or have enlightened the world, and for which, perhaps, the prejudices of our education have given us an unnatural respect. We follow their progress with a kind of national exultation, and we weep at last over their fall, as if, with them, all the honours of humanity had perished.

It is only when we enter the "councils of God," that we descry a nobler prospect. It is then we see, that, in "the eye of Him that inhabiteth eternity, all nations are only as the dust in the balance;"—that, in the progressive system of His Providence, they have all appeared in their successive order, for the improvement of the ages that were to follow them;—that in their prosperity, or their decay, they have alike given the lessons by which mankind are to be made wiser and better;—that there is a final period to which all their errors are conducting them; and that then the mighty prophecy of Revelation will be fulfilled, when, under its unseen, but unceasing influence, "one like the Son of Man shall reign: and when a dominion shall be created in righteousness, that shall not be destroyed."

The historians of nations, indeed, rise not to these speculations. They limit themselves to the history of single countries. In the interest which they labour to create for them, they, in some measure, diminish our interest for humanity in general; and, whatever be their genius or their comprehension, they are not called upon to register

the events of the great system of Nature, or to trace, through every temporary obstacle, the steady march of the Human Mind. It is Religion only,—it is the page of Revelation, which can alone give to us, amid all the devices of men and of nations, the mighty key of human destiny;—which can raise us from the narrow contemplation of individual interests, to the majestick study of the progress of the world;—which can shew us, that, from the beginning of time, all events have been contributing to the gradual illumination of the general race of man;—and which, while it carries our eyes backward to the sanguinary scenes of antiquity, can point out to us, at the same time, that they were all ministering to final good;—that from their errors has sprung our wisdom;—from their poverty our riches;—from their ignorance our knowledge;—and that even the progress of conquest (however infamous in its motives, or unhallowed in its means,) has yet, under the Providence of the Eternal Father, been made subservient to the extension of knowledge, the improvement of laws, the melioration of manners, and, above all, to the final diffusion of religious light over every people of mankind.

3. I leave, however, this magnificent subject, to observe, in the last place, that the history of the world proves to us, that the government of God is the government of Justice; that the laws of morality apply to nations, as well as to individuals;

and that the prosperity or fall of empires has ever been the consequence of their national virtue or their national guilt.

When we look back upon the history of antiquity, the prospect is like that of the waves of the ocean ; and nations are seen arising for their moment above the ordinary level, to fall back again into the mass from which they arose. If we search for the causes of their fall, we shall find them in their views and their policy. All of them, in their day, have had their own devices,—some of them to enslave the people whom they governed,—some to extend their power by the atrocities of conquest,—others to monopolize the commerce of the world, and to become rich by the oppression of all around them. These mighty devices are now past. The sleep of many hundred years has buried their pride and their guilt in oblivion ;—and when we trace the principles upon which they acted, we rejoice, even now, at their fall, and feel the justice of that law, by which “the counsel of God alone” is destined to “stand.”

We live in times, my brethren, when these truths are not “the hearing of the ear,” but when “we see them with our eyes.” We live in times, “when the judgments of the Lord are in the earth,”—when nations are falling around us, and when scarcely a year passes without being marked by the dethronement of monarchs. Do we look for the causes of these awful events? We shall find them in their national sins ; in the corruption of

their private manners ; in the injustice or oppression of their internal governments ; or in the ambition or avarice of their national policy. The period of the “ devices of man’s heart ” has arrived, and the counsel of the Lord arises to stand. The foot of guilt has long trod upon the earth, and legions of armed men are sprung up to avenge and to purify it.

These also, with all their pride, and all their atrocity, will pass. The storm which is now raging over a suffering world, will renovate, but not destroy. The empires which perish, will perish only to be renewed in nobler forms, and under more auspicious rule. The power itself, which the Almighty hath made the instrument of his justice, will last but for the time that is appointed ; and, when the devices of ambition have passed, like the storms of winter, over a suffering world, “ the counsel of the Lord will stand,” and awaken a nobler spring.

While these are the mighty truths in which the voice of history joins with that of religion, there is yet a very common mistake which prevents us from applying them to ourselves. We are all apt to conceive ourselves as of less consequence, and less responsibility in the government of our country than we really are, and to imagine that truths like these are of importance only to the statesman and the legislator, but of little importance to the private citizen.

In every country, however, even the most despotic, much ever depends upon the will of the people; and no projects of government can hope for success, which do not fall in with the wishes and the passions of the nation. But, in this country, my brethren, in a country so long trained to freedom and independence;—in which the representation of the people forms a constituent part of the legislature itself;—in which the long possession of liberty and industry hath disseminated wealth and influence among every class of men; and in which the powers of Government depend in a great degree upon its credit with the publick;—in this country, the voice of the people forms the firmest support of its government; their passions determine the conduct of those who govern them; and it is their wisdom or folly which, in a great measure, marks the character of the national era.

Of this people, we are a part—to this voice, whatever it may be, we contribute—and in the wisdom, or in the guilt of that war in which we are engaged, we also must have our individual share. It is ever wise in us to look upon our duties in this solemn light; in the light, not of expedience, but of conscience; and, in the religious pause which this day affords, I have laid this view of the subject upon you, that you may consider whether it is “the devices of man” you are pursuing, or the “counsel of God.”

If then, in the first place, the war we pursue, be one which is neither founded in justice, nor necessity ; if it be a war undertaken to overturn the independence, or abridge the prosperity of any other people ; if it be to add to our wealth by the spoils of the world, or to seek our glory by the tears of innocent, or the blood of unoffending nations ; if these be our secret objects in the war, let us not think, nor hope, nor pray for success. Victory may follow victory ; achievement may succeed achievement ; the pulse of national vanity may beat high ; but “ the counsel of the Almighty ” is against our devices. The secret vice which silently pursues its end, is undermining the fabrick of all our prosperity, and the destroying angel, who comes from the throne of God to “ justify his ways to man,” rejoices in the triumphs which his hand is so soon to wither ; and in that attitude of presumptuous elevation, which must so soon be humbled in the dust.

But, my brethren, on the other hand, if it be a war of a different description that our hearts tell us we are pursuing ; if it be a war, necessary in its nature, and just in its end ; if it be to maintain the rights, the freedom, and the independence of our country ; if it be to protect that constitution, which is the fountain of all our best enjoyments here, and that religion which is the source of all our hopes hereafter ; if it be to continue to our children that freedom to which they were born,

and that faith in which they were baptized ; if these be our sole objects in the war in which we are engaged, then, in the name of the living God, let us fear not. Defeat may for a time succeed defeat ; misfortune may follow misfortune, and the hearts of the weak and the timid may turn cold ;—but the counsels of God are with us. Every known, and every unknown power of nature are leagued in our favour. Even under circumstances of deeper alarm than we have yet experienced, hope is never to be lost. It is not easy to conquer an united people ;—it is not easy to wrest from a free land the liberty to which it was born ;—it is not easy to tear from a great nation the honours which they have worn in the sight of mankind for so many hundred years, and the glories, which, in every age, their fathers have transmitted to them.

For a long season, my brethren, this country has enjoyed a prosperity unexampled in the history of time. The annals of the world, however, tell us, from the history of many nations, that such prosperity has often been the forerunner of their fall ; and, trusting to such analogies, the enemy endeavours to persuade the rest of mankind, that such also is soon to be our fate. The time, therefore, is come, when we are to know whether prosperity has also corrupted us,—whether wealth has brought with it its usual avengers,—and whether the selfishness of commerce, and the fee-

bleness of luxury, have also made our hands weak, and our hearts cold. If it be so,—if we are become careless or indifferent of the honours of our country;—if we can place interest in opposition to duty;—if we can think of our own private profits, when the existence of our country is at stake;—if we can coolly calculate the price which is to pay us for freedom, for honour, and for independence;—let us not deceive ourselves.—Whatever our fathers may have been, we are no longer a nation,—“we are weighed in the balance” of God, “and are found wanting.” “The kingdom is “taken from us,” and will be given to a nobler people.

I hope, however, my brethren, for better things. I hope that, amid all our wealth and all our luxury, the spirit of our country is yet undecayed. I trust, that, conducting ourselves “by the counsels of God,” we may laugh to scorn “the devils of man.” And I do trust so, from those animating scenes which every where meet our eyes. I trust in it, from that ardour with which the great and the opulent, in every part of our country, have sprung from the lap of affluence into arms, when its liberty and its independence are threatened. I trust in it, from that unexampled charity which has covered years of national suffering with glory,—which has grown with every distress as it arose, and which seems to have no limit but that of the miseries it can relieve. I

trust in it, from the profusion with which the British heart poured forth the treasures of its wealth, whenever the standard of liberty was unfurled, or the blessings which itself enjoyed seemed to be opening upon other men. I trust in it, still more, from that silent but heroick magnanimity with which the great body of our people, conscious of their blessings, have, in late years, borne the visitations of God; and which, while it tells us the affection with which they cling to their country, affords us the deepest and sublimest earnest, that they will not bear the visitations of Man.

The war, however, with all its hopes, and all its fears, *will* cease. When the ends of the Almighty are accomplished, nature will reassume her reign of peace; “the devices of Man will fail,” and “the counsel of God alone will stand.” Yet a few years, and all that trouble, and all that bless humanity, will rest in their graves. The great designs of the Almighty will proceed, and victor and vanquished will alike appear before the Eternal Throne.

In that awful and searching hour, it will be of little consequence to us, in what scenes of suffering or enjoyment life has been passed. All that will be of consequence is,—whether its duties have been discharged,—whether we have acted the part of brave, and pious, and virtuous citizens,—or that of weak, and timid, and selfish men!

I pray God, my brethren, that, with this mighty prospect before us, and the counsel of the Almighty on our side, we may all so meet the dangers which advance upon us, that, in our last hour, we may have the consolation of thinking, that we have done our duty to our children, to our country, and to our God ;—that we may leave the land which gave us birth free, as in the hour when we were born ;—and that the future historian of our country may say, That in our hearts the “ spirit of God had arisen,” and that by *our* arms “ his enemies were scattered.”

SERMON V.

ON SEASONS OF SCARCITY.*

PSALM XC. 3.

“Thou turnest man to destruction: Again Thou sayest, Come again, ye children of men.”

IN this psalm, composed evidently in some season of national affliction and despondence, the Psalmist expresses the great truth of the dominion of the Almighty over nature, and the continual dependence of man upon the God “that made him.” It is not only as an individual, but as the representative of his people, that he here prostrates himself before the throne of Heaven; and, feeling that He whom he addressed, “was God from everlasting,” he acknowledges, at the same time, that it was His power alone which “turned nations to destruction;” and which again could say,—“come again, ye children of men.”

In this deep and awful sentiment, every one who hath lived to the age of understanding must agree with the Psalmist. Life, we all know, is no

* Preached after the severe season of 1300

scene of security; it is a broken and uncertain scene, in which both individuals and nations are mutually subjected to the apparent rule of time and chance. Amid the opening promises of prosperous times, some unwelcome blast often comes to wither the hopes we had formed; and, even when prosperous times return, we tremble to think, that the adversities we have suffered may again be renewed. It is thus now, therefore, as in the days of the Psalmist, that the Governour of Nature displays his power, by, at one season, seemingly “turning man to destruction;” and at another, saying, “come again, ye children of men.”

It is probable, my brethren, that the seasons of adversity and of want which we have witnessed, may have brought this reflection to all our minds, and that the highest as well as the lowest of us must have felt his dependence upon him “who inhabiteth eternity.” With all this, however, it is possible for us to entertain very erroneous and very ungrateful views upon the subject.—We may forget the beneficence of God amid our considerations of his power; and, while we meet adversity with superstitious terror, we may meet prosperity with an unbecoming joy. Suffer me, therefore, in the present discourse, to consider the purpose or end of this apparent uncertainty and instability in the government of nature; and to shew you the important effects it has upon the

improvement and happiness of human nature. On so important a subject, I can offer you only a few very imperfect reflections:—Yet, I trust, that to those who pursue them, they will afford a happiness, and awaken a devotion of no common kind.

1. I must observe, then, in the first place, that there is no other system than this of variableness and uncertainty, which could be fitted to the character of such a being as man. In the human mind, as we all know, there are capacities and virtues of very different kinds, and which respect very different situations of human condition.—There are powers of understanding which are adapted to prosperity, and others to adversity; there are the virtues of patience, of resignation, of magnanimity, in scenes of distress,—as well as those of gratitude, of generosity, or of beneficence, in scenes of enjoyment. The perfection, however, of human nature, and, what is far more, the voice of conscience within us, demands, that both of these should be brought into exercise; and the character of man ever remains mutilated and imperfect, while it is the virtues or the capacities of one condition alone which he possesses or displays. To such a being,—to a state of existence intended to call all those various powers and virtues into action,—no conceivable character of nature around him could be adapted, but that of variableness and uncertainty. Were it in a scene of perpetual prosperity he was placed, all the

nobler capacities of his nature would be lost in indolence and enjoyment.—Were it in a scene of perpetual hardship, on the contrary, whatever is amiable or generous in his character, would equally be extinguished, and uniform selfishness and ferocity would mark his imperfect mind. It is in these vicissitudes of plenty and want, of prosperity and hardship, that all the latent powers of humanity can alone be brought into exercise,—that the understanding can employ all its capacities, and the heart display all its virtues ;—and that thus, according to the expression of the Apostle, “the man, or the creature of God, may be “completely furnished unto all good works.”

2. If this very obvious consideration, my brethren, shews us the wisdom with which the constitution of nature is adapted to that of man ; there is another, equally obvious, which shews us the benevolence which reigns, even in the administration of the seasons of hardship and suffering. When we reflect how dependent the generations of men are upon the laws of nature ; when we consider, too, our ignorance with regard to the causes that influence them, either as to duration or extent, we cannot but be astonished at the limits which they are made to preserve, and at those unknown laws which govern every element of life around us. The winds, for aught that we see, might have been made to blow with a violence, which no labours of man could resist ;—the ocean might have heaved with

waves, which, in the hours of its fury, might have overwhelmed all the dwellings of men ;—the seasons of rain, or of drought, in the same manner, might have been of an intensity or continuance which would have annihilated both seed-time and harvest, and swept, in a short time, the race of man from the face of creation. Powerful, however, as these ministers are, in the hands of the Almighty, they are yet governed in their power. There is some unknown limit which they are not suffered to pass ; and, although we dare not say that all these were made only for the sake of man, it is impossible not to see, that, in the structure of the universe, there is yet an accommodation to his weakness, as well as to his powers,—that these visitations come to awe men, not to destroy,—that they are under the government of Him, “ who knoweth whereof we are made ; who remembereth that we are but dust.”

The circumstances which I have now mentioned,—the suitableness of uncertainty in the government of nature to a being such as man, and, at the same time, the limit which is imposed to its occasional severities,—are sufficient to convince us, that we are not under the dominion of Time or Chance ; that the irregularities, as well as the regularity of nature, are equally in the design of the same All-wise and Beneficent Creator, and that some great purpose is uniformly pursued amid the wants, as well as amid the prosperity of man.

To lead your minds, my brethren, to this great and important truth, suffer me to present to you some of the beneficent purposes which visitations, such as we have lately experienced, serve, both with regard to nations and individuals.

They are, in the first view, the great causes, in every country, of national improvement; of improvement in that first and fundamental art, the cultivation of the earth, upon which all others ultimately depend. If seasons were uniformly prosperous,—if the harvest every year returned whatever was necessary for man and for beast,—every motive to human industry, and even to human thought, would be taken away.—Nature herself would do the whole; man would be left only to enjoy; and, freed from the necessity of thought, would soon sink into animal indulgence, and all the powers of his mind stagnate in stationary corruption. The visitations of scarcity serve greater ends, and call nobler powers into action. By a wholesome but limited severity, they awaken all the force and ingenuity of his mind, to correct or to mitigate the severity of nature. Invention is exercised in new methods of improvement; observation is extended to other soils, and more perfect systems of cultivation; the laws of nature are more carefully studied, and the fruits of other countries are introduced to aid the poverty, or to increase the production of our own.

Such are the acquisitions which are gained to national knowledge and science, by these temporary severities of the seasons. But there is one additional reflection, very deserving of our notice, that they are not lost with the cause that produced them. The years of scarcity pass; but the knowledge which has been acquired, the discoveries which have been made, remain to every future generation; they remain to swell the sum of human science,—to multiply, in happier years, the productions of nature and the number of the people,—to constitute, by these means, new sources of national wealth,—and to form new foundations of national splendour.

I hasten, however, from this wide and comprehensive subject, and from other reflections which it suggests, to state to you the effects which such severities of nature are fitted to have upon the character of the Individual, and to shew you, that here, as every where, we may discern the marks of that Paternal Hand, “who ruleth in the Heavens,” and yet dwelleth “among the children of men.”

1. The first effect of such visitations, is to awaken and exalt our sentiments of devotion. If the feelings of religion are necessary, as God knows they are, to the happiness of human nature;—if they are necessary, as we all know, to the final happiness of his Being,—no other constitution but that which we see, could be suited to this sub-

lime purpose. If life were always prosperous,—if every season showered down its plenty, and the years of men were passed in secure enjoyment,—every thing teaches us to think, that the great truths of religion would soon pass from his mind,—that futurity would be forgot ;—and that this uniformity of beneficence would be referred, not to the will of Supreme Design, but to the unthank-ed direction of Fate or Destiny. If, on the other hand, it were only to an uniformity of hardship that men were born, consequences not less fatal would ensue. The benevolence of the Almighty would be unknown ; the dark character of imagination would form only deities of vengeance and of power ; and the miserable worshipper would have recourse to every base and sanguinary rite by which he could appease the tyrants that seemed to oppress him. It is to provide against these mutual dangers ; to retain at once our sense of the greatness or of the goodness of the Almighty ; to keep alive in our hearts those hopes of religion, which are the noblest prerogative of our being,—that this instability in nature takes place. It is to direct our eyes constantly to some greater being ;—at one time, to shew us how feeble are all the powers of man ;—at another, to open to us all the beneficence of Heaven ; and thus, amid those varying appearances, to lead our minds continually to Him “in whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning,” and to that future state,

“where there is final rest for the people of God.” Such are the views of religion; and such also, as we may all see, amid the severities as well as amid the bounty of nature, are the great ends which He that made us is pursuing, and by which he wishes to make perfect the immortal soul.

2. The next effect, my brethren, which visitations of scarcity have, is upon the moral conduct of men. History and experience tell us all, what have been the fatal consequences of continued prosperity, both with respect to nations and individuals;—our own experience also, and the least knowledge of the history of nations, may tell us, on the other hand, what have been the important effects of temporary suffering. In the present hour, no former examples are necessary. We have all, I trust, wherever we have been, seen many instances of the improvement of human character, both of the poor and the rich, both of the low and the high, by the visitation we have lately suffered.

1st. It has confirmed, if not created, many virtues among the poor. From the prosperity of former years, which then, alas! had too often been wasted in intemperance and profligacy, it has produced sobriety and recollection. The father has been brought back to his family,—the wife to her children. The domestick virtues, far more important to human happiness than all others, have been cultivated and understood; and

many an unfortunate being, who was advancing in the road of guilt and infamy, has returned to the sense of virtue, and the consciousness of its rewards. The value of industry and economy have been known, and by many that knowledge and those habits have been acquired, which may provide for the prosperity of future days. But, above all, my brethren, by these means “their hearts have been turned unto righteousness;” and, I doubt not, that there are many, who, when they come to the bed of death, will acknowledge, that it is to these severities they have owed their conversion; and that, had seasons of prosperity continued, they would have died as well as “lived, without the sense of God in the world.”

2dly. If such have been the consequences to the poor, I am glad to think, that such also have been the effects upon the opulent and the great. However much we may declaim against the weakness or sinfulness of human nature, it is pleasing to reflect, that, in the hours of distress, we have seen the actual proofs of Christian charity. In no age, surely, that has elapsed in the Christian kalendar, —in no country which boasts the name of Christian,—have such exertions of charity been made, as in this island, during the preceding years.—While it is pleasing to remember this truly Christian fact, it is pleasing also to remember the words of the wise man, “that the merciful man doeth good unto his own soul.” I doubt not but there

are many who can justify this fine observation. I doubt not, but there are many among the great and the opulent, whom the past seasons have led to more than ordinary thought; who have been raised by the wants around them, from the cheerless pursuit of selfish pleasure, to the genial experience of benevolence; and who, having once known the true happiness of their nature, will never again depart from it. I doubt not, still further, but that in that awful hour, when high as well as low must submit to the dominion of death, many will tell, that these seasons have been also the seasons of *their* conversion;—that they gave them a juster notion of human nature, and human wants; and that the dark hours in which the benevolence of God seemed to be eclipsed, were those in which, while they felt themselves called to the relief of suffering nature, they were called also to the best enjoyments, and the best hopes of their nature.

The observation which I particularly wish to leave upon your minds, from seasons such as the past, is their importance to morality. And no view that we can take of the benevolence or wisdom of God is more striking. In such seasons, the poor man acquires the habits of thought, of frugality, of temperance, with all the domestick virtues ever connected with these. The rich or great man, on the other hand, acquires the habits of attention, of humanity, and of charity;—and the

wish, not only to relieve distress, but, far more, to prevent it. The season of distress passes,—but these habits remain. They remain to bless the possessors, and to benefit humanity. But, what is far more, they remain, in each rank, if they are preserved, to the age of immortality, and to cover equally the dignified and the undignified head with the crown of eternal glory.—To each the hour will come, when these “light afflictions,” which are indeed but “for a moment,” will meet their full reward; and when, in looking back upon the varying scenes of their trial, they will bless those hours of suffering, when they learnt the knowledge of God, and the comforts of performing their duty.

Such, my brethren, are the sentiments which seem to me to befit the present season. The thoughtlessness of vulgar men meets adversity with despondence, and prosperity with levity. It is the character of religion to teach us nobler sentiments:—to teach us that all events, whether fortunate or unfortunate, are equally under the Government of the Almighty; and that this varying and uncertain scene of being is most wisely accommodated to the nature of that mind which is formed for immortality, and can only “be made perfect by suffering.”

Even in these hours, therefore, my brethren, when our minds are scarcely recovered from the memory of former hardships, I cannot pray that

such seasons may never return,—I pray, on the contrary, that the will of God “may be done in earth, as it is in Heaven;”—that our fears and our hopes may be equally prostrated in holy submission before the Throne of Omniscience;—and that whatever be the seasons which his Providence may send, the Spirit that is from on High may lead us to know His laws, and dispose us to obey His will.

SERMON VI.

ON THE ENCOURAGEMENT WHICH THE GOSPEL AFFORDS TO ACTIVE DUTY.

ST. MARK viii. 9.

“ And they that had eaten were about four thousand : and he sent them away.”

THESE words are the conclusion of the account of the first miracle which our Saviour performed in feeding a multitude in the desert ; and, simple as they seem, they yet contain much valuable instruction.

There is a curiosity natural to every christian mind, to retrace the events of the life of their Master ;—to go back, as it were, to the age in which he appeared ;—to see his humble origin, and his melancholy progress ;—and, amid those scenes of beneficence and of sorrow through which he passed, to listen to the accents of his voice, and to the lessons of his wisdom. It is this natural and becoming curiosity which the books of the Gospel so singularly indulge. In these artless narrations, the mind of the serious reader is satis-

fied in a manner that it is not very easy to express. We see almost now the scenes that have so long been passed ;—we are made the spectators of our Saviour's birth, and the companions of his journey :—we follow into every house where he conversed with men, and to every solitude where he held communion with God ;—and, from these early narratives of his humble and unlearned disciples, we derive a more intimate conception, both of his peculiar character, and of the character of the religion which he taught, than from all the labour-ed expositions of learned skill, or of ambitious eloquence.

The words of the text seem to me to convey to us some instructions of this interesting kind. They represent, in the first place, one singular feature in the character of our Lord,—his superiority to all the selfish passions of our nature. The world, (as ye know, my brethren,) has seen many false religions ; and many prophets have come unto them “ in the name of Heaven.” Whatever may have been the usefulness to barbarous ages of these religious impositions,—whatever even may have been the sublimity of some of the doctrines they contained, they are yet all marked by one decisive feature ;—their combination with some personal interest, or some selfish passion of the Man. They have been mingled, either with that love of glory which aims at the subjugation of the minds of mankind, and which perpetuates its mem-

ory in the temples it erects to Heaven ; with that love of power, which, under the mask of piety, aims at supremacy and dominion ; or with that dark enthusiasm, which unsheathes the sword to propagate its own feverish and frantick imaginations. In the character of our Saviour, on the contrary, there is always something above the world :—a superiority alike to all that is great and all that is weak in man ;—a forgetfulness of himself, which results rather from nature than from effort, and which assimilates him, in our opinion, to some higher and purer order of existence. No love of glory or of power ever betray themselves in his conduct ; and, instead of awakening the enthusiasm of men by revelations, sublime only from their obscurity, his object is ever to veil, as it were, the majesty of the truths he reveals :—to speak to the heart, rather than to the imagination of those who heard him ; and to make them rather the children of God, than the temporal followers of himself. Of this distinguishing feature in our Saviour's character, we have a remarkable proof in the words of the text. The miracle which he had performed, “ that of feeding four thousand men in “ the desert,” you will observe, was of a nature very different from those which he usually performed. It was one, which demonstrated his power over nature itself ; which taught those who witnessed it, that, if his kingdom were of this world, he possessed the power to maintain it ; and which

might lead them to wish to assemble under a leader, whose commands nature obeyed, and whom, therefore, no mortal opposition could withstand. It is accordingly in this singular moment, when his divine commission was most fully manifested, and when we may suppose all the vulgar passions of hope and ambition were working in the minds of the multitude, “that he sends them away;” to shew them that his kingdom was a “spiritual kingdom;”—that there were greater interests which he came to serve, than those of time;—and that the reign of his power was to commence in a sublimer being, when the shadows of mortality were passed, and when time itself was no more.

2. If the words of the text have this instruction to us, with regard to the character of our Lord, they have a second instruction with regard to the character of his religion. When you examine the systems of pretended revelation which have prevailed, or which are still prevailing in the world, you will find, that if their origin betrays the ambition of their authors, their character betrays equally the weakness and imperfection of human nature. To one or other of the fundamental errors in religion;—to the encouragement either of superstition or of enthusiasm, and, by these means, to the fatal separation of piety from moral virtue, they have uniformly led. They have either drawn men from the sphere of social duty, to assemble them,

under the influence of superstition, in impure and sanguinary ceremonies, and persuaded them, that guilt could be expiated by the ritual of an unmeaning devotion ; or they have driven them from all the most sacred relations of life, into solitudes and deserts, and taught them, that the Deity was to be propitiated by the tears of unproductive repentance, or the dreams of visionary illumination. The conduct of our Lord, and the spirit of His religion, are very different.—He assembles the multitude, indeed, around him, in the desert of human life, that he may teach them the end of that journey upon which they are going ;—that he may recal the wandering, and animate the desponding, and invigorate the “weary and the heavy laden ;” —and he points out to them, with no mortal hand, that continuing city to which they travel, where there are mansions for all the holy and the good, and where there “ dwelleth knowledge, and wisdom, and joy.” But when these mighty lessons are taught, he sends them away to their usual abodes and their usual occupations.—He sends them back again to their own homes,—to that sacred though sequestered scene, where all their duties meet them on their return,—where every virtue and every vice of their nature takes its origin,—and where they can best display both the strength of their faith and the purity of their obedience. It is thus that the religion of Jesus blends the great interests of piety and of morality,—that

it lets down the golden chain which unites Earth with Heaven, and forms, even under the “tabernacles of clay,” the minds that are afterwards “to be made perfect,” and to be made citizens of a kingdom “which passeth not away, but which is “eternal as the Heavens.” Such are the general instructions, both with regard to the character of our Lord and the character of his religion, which the words of the text may convey to us.

3. There is, however, another and a nearer instruction which they contain. Distant as the period is, when the event we are considering took place, it has yet a relation to us; and there is not one of us who, from the consideration of it, may not derive some personal improvement. We are the multitude described in this passage of the Gospel;—we have heard from our infant days, that there “was a great prophet come into the “world;” and every time that we assemble within these walls, for the great purposes of spiritual improvement, and of publick example,—and every time, still more, when we ascend to the altar of our Lord, and profess our faith in his name, and our confidence in his mercy,—we profess, at the same time, like the multitude of old, to take him for our guide and our instructor. As of old, also, he designs to receive us; to teach and to console us by the same words with which he formerly taught or consoled them; to employ to us the same accents of grace, and set before us the

same hopes of immortality ; and to spread for us, in the wilderness of human life, that greater feast, of spirit and of mind, which may save us “from fainting on our way.” But here, also, my brethren, when these ends are accomplished, he continues “to send us away ;” he continues to send us back again to those abodes from which we have severally come ; to those several homes, where our trials lie, and where our virtues arise ; and, in the various duties of which we are all, (if guided by his lessons,) ripening equally to a nobler being, and to more extensive capacities of happiness. If, in coming to the House of God, we listen to the call of Him who “came to save us,” we are to remember, that the same voice sends us “away,” when we leave it ; that His eye followeth us into the retirement of our homes ; and that it is in the discharge of the duties which there meet us, that we offer to Him the noblest proof of our faith, and the most acceptable sacrifice of our obedience.

Whenever you return, then, my brethren, from the services of religion to the privacy of your homes, return with the sublime expression of the prophet of old upon your minds : “How sacred “is this place !” it is the dwelling of God ! “it “is no other than the gate of Heaven !” There, remember, is the post which has been assigned you, by the Ruler of the Universe ;—there, the services which you are summoned to perform, in

the cause of humanity ;—there, the theatre on which you are to act, in the sight of men and of angels, and to qualify yourselves for higher services, and a sublimer employment.

If it be to the home of Youth you return, when the eyes of friends and of parents meet you in love, remember what you owe to them, and what return you can make for the many anxious hours their hearts have known for you—remember what you owe to that world upon which you are entering, where you must either bestow happiness or sorrow, and where the final issue depends upon the principles you are now acquiring, the knowledge you are gaining, and the habits you are indulging. Remember still more what you owe to Him who called you into being ; who has infused into your minds so many noble capacities for virtue, for wisdom, and for happiness ; and who has set before you the infinity of progressive perfection, to waken them into life and activity.

If it be to the home of Manhood you return, my brethren, consider well what duties it imposes. The years of your youth and your education are past ;—the years of age and of weakness are approaching. Now, therefore, is the season of real virtue, and of strenuous duty,—the noon-day of your being, when all your powers are entire, and when the Sun of Righteousness burns above your head, to light you on your way. Beneath your own roof, every honour, and every usefulness of

your being await you,—the honours of the master, the husband, the parent, the friend, and the citizen. These are the duties to which the Father of the Universe “sends you away.” In confiding them to you, he hath made you no less than “a fellow-worker with himself,” in the diffusion of happiness to his creation; and, in calling you to their discharge, he is qualifying you for some higher service, in a condition of being where virtue is unknown to misfortune, and where death and sin prevail no more.

If it be to the house of Age you are returning, my brethren, where the storms of winter are gathering, and the sun is going low in your sky, there are yet duties which await you, though they are tempered to the failing condition of your being, and suited to the infirmity of your strength. You are come to the evening of your day;—“its heat and its labours” are passed, and you are called upon to repose in the cool shade of memory and of meditation. It is now you are to review, with unimpassioned eye, the transactions in which you have borne a part,—to instruct the young who surround you, by the long experience you have acquired; and to teach them, with the wisdom of old, that “to fear God, and to keep His commandments,” constitute the whole happiness, as well as the whole duty of man. It is now, when passion has ceased, and the illusions of the world subside, that you are called upon to renew that

innocence which life has impaired,—to repent those frailties which time may have brought,—and to rekindle, even under the shades of age, that high and holy spirit, which the inspiration of the Almighty breathed into you with the breath of moral life.—Though “the evil days may be come,” in which “you have no pleasure in them,” they are yet come in mercy, to wean you from a temporary world, to awaken higher hopes, and inspire more elevated feelings;—to call you to put your trust in Him, “who was, and is, and is to come;—in whose presence there is the fulness of eternal joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

There are, however, my brethren, other varieties in the condition of human life than those of age, and there are other lessons which we may learn from the words we have been considering. In the situations either of prosperity or of adversity, all men are to be found; and every one of us, when we return from the services of this place, are returning either to the house of joy, or to the house of mourning. If it be to the first of these you are returning, my brethren,—if the voice of health and joy meet you upon your approach,—if honour, or wealth, or power, are the distinctions of your homes,—enter them, I beseech you, with the solemn reflections which religion inspires. Your dwellings are at present in the sunshine of Heaven, and the richest blessings of present time

are given you to bestow. Think, then, how high are the obligations which your prosperity creates!—that you are the stewards of the Universal Parent; and that to you the wretched look up for relief, the injured for protection, the industrious for reward, the virtuous for praise, and the world for example. When you pass the threshold of your gates, ask your own hearts, whether, of those to whom so much is gratuitously given, much will not also be required?—and if thankfulness spring up in your hearts, on the review of your blessings, mingle with it the humble prayer, that you may be enabled to use them as becomes those who are permitted to know the will of the God who gave them.

And ye, my afflicted brethren! ye who are to return to the various scenes of the house of mourning,—to meet the struggles of poverty or misfortune,—to watch, with throbbing hearts, the bed of sickness, or to bend, in speechless sorrow, over the bed of death,—return, I beseech you, with all the consolations of this doctrine in your souls. Sad as are the homes to which you are going, remember who it is that “sends you away.” Remember that your afflictions “rise not from “the dust,” but descend from the Throne of your Father; that they are ordained for the trial of that faith which may end in joy, and that patience which may lead to glory; that above the shades of present time, there reigneth the Father of

Eternal Light ; and that the noblest virtues which blossom in eternity, are those which have sprung beneath the tears of adversity. Remember still more, that He who now sitteth on the right hand of God, was only “made perfect by suffering ;” that He has led the way before you from earth to Heaven ; and that, in calling you to be partakers of his suffering, He calls you also to be partakers of his glory.

I add, my brethren ! only one farther reflection. We read in the text, “That they who had eaten, “were about four thousand.” In the hour in which I speak, the number of those that have this day approached the same Lord, and heard the same accents of salvation, are countless millions of the family of God. While we thus see that faith advancing on earth, which is to be finally triumphant in Heaven, let us prostrate ourselves in thankfulness for those means of grace which are given to all, and for those purposes of salvation which may yet unite all into one fold, and under one shepherd. Let us pray for them, and for ourselves, that the real spirit of our faith may dwell among us ; that all of every church who retire this day from the house of God, may retire with the consciousness of his peace upon their souls ; and that, whatever be the home to which they return, they may feel it as the “dwelling of God,” and enter into it as into the “gate of Heaven.”

SERMON VII.

ON THE GENERAL FAST, OCTOBER 20, 1803.*

ST. LUKE XXI. 19.

“In your patience possess ye your souls.”

It was in these words that our Saviour consoled his disciples, while he predicted to them the final ruin and desolation of Jerusalem. The people of Judea, confident in the letter, while they were ignorant of the spirit of their religion, had long before ceased to listen to his admonitions, and it was only to the chosen few who felt his truth, and who understood his gospel, that he unveiled the mighty scenes which that desolation was to precede. Amid “the wars, and the rumours of wars,” that were to follow, he led them to see the “salvation of the world” approach. The destruction of Jerusalem was to be the dissolution of that pale which kept the Gentiles from the knowledge of the true God; and he enjoined them, amid all the dread calamities which were to come, to “pos-

* Preached when the expectation of invasion was universal, and when the volunteer corps were every where forming in the national defence.

“sess their souls” in patient expectation of that mighty day, when his name and his religion were to begin their triumphal reign.

Of the many reflections which this subject naturally excites, there is one only, my brethren, which I shall at present submit to your consideration ; it is, the difference between the patience which human wisdom teaches, and that which religion inspires. When the moralist speaks to us of hardship or danger ; when he animates us to meet those scenes of calamity which we may be doomed to undergo, he tells us of the dignity of our nature,—the magnanimity of self-denial,—and the heroism of patient suffering. He makes the world the spectator of our conduct ; and summons us, by every consideration of honour or of fame, to act our part like men, and to deserve the sympathy of those who surround us, by the firmness and magnanimity which we display.

The patience which the Gospel inspires is of a different, but of a sublimer kind. It speaks not to us of ourselves,—it speaks of that great system to which we belong, and of the ends to which we contribute in that system.—It tells us, that every suffering to which man is born, has its final purpose either in individual or in publick good ;—that to nations, as to individuals, the seasons of adversity are the seasons of their highest virtue ;—that, in every situation, the discharge of the duties which that situation brings are the simple means by which

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the mighty designs of nature are to be carried on ;— and that, above all the weakness or suffering of men, there presides one Almighty Mind, in whose extended government “all things are working together for final good,” and who can make even “the wrath of men to praise him.”

There are no considerations which seem more proper for the solemnity in which we are at present engaged. We are met together, with all the rest of our land, to humble ourselves before the God of nations ; to call to mind what are the duties demanded of us, in this hour of general alarm ; and to form those resolutions for the coming danger, which become us as citizens, as Christians, and as men.

It is, my brethren, in no common hour of peril that we are now assembled. A contest more awful than either we or our fathers have seen, is rapidly approaching ; and that sun which witnesses our meeting, has never, in his long career, beheld a time so pregnant with hope or despair to our country. It is no common war in which we are engaged, and no common enemy we are to oppose. It is a war, in which are put to the hazard of the sword, every blessing of our faith, every honour of our name, and every glory of our country. It is an enemy we are now summoned to oppose,—whose positions are kingdoms, and whose march is revolution ; before whom the sovereigns of Europe have bowed their diminished heads : and who seeks

now, on our northern shores, to extinguish the last spark of order, of freedom, and of justice, among mankind.

There is a folly in exaggerating the dangers to which we are exposed :—there is an equal folly in diminishing or under-rating them. It is the business of wisdom to see them as they are, and to animate our hearts to meet and to encounter them. In the season which seems approaching, there is not one of us that will not be called to the exercise of patience,—to the exertion of that principled magnanimity which nature applauds, and which the Gospel enjoins. It is in the solemn and sacred pause of this day, that we ought all to prepare ourselves for the scenes which are to follow ; and, ere the eventful conflict begins, to supplicate from Heaven that strength which may enable us to endure it.

I speak not now, indeed, to the young, and to the brave.*—They have taken their lofty resolution ; and, in this hour, in the same array in which they are to present themselves to the enemy, are now presenting themselves before their God. At the first tread of danger, they have risen in “legions of armed men ;” and from every rank of our country, they have started forwards in its defence, with a gallantry which realizes to us the visions of ancient patriotism, and which, I trust will, in the

* The volunteers of the Congregation were now regimented, and on this day attended the National Churches, by order of Government.

end, more than realize to us the visions of ancient valour.

Yet though they, my brethren, are to undertake the hardships and the dangers of war, there are other hardships for which we must prepare ourselves; and there is not a soul to whom I speak, whom the time does not summon to patience and to self-denial. The great and the affluent, they whom ancient possessions have dignified, or personal industry hath enriched, are now called to justify the distinction they have enjoyed;—to suspend their usual pleasures and their usual pursuits;—to sacrifice to the adversity of their country, the wealth which its prosperity has given them;—and to prepare themselves, in the spirit and in the armour of their ancestors, for the final conflict that is to decide its glory or its fall. The poor are called to submit, with the patience of their faith, to increasing privations; to exert that noblest magnanimity, which can not only act but suffer in the cause of duty; and, if the last struggle should come, to bear in their minds the lofty remembrance of what, in many an age, their fathers have done, and how, in many a field, their fathers have died.

The aged, alas! the fathers and the mothers of our people, are called to severer duties. They are called to surrender their children to their country;—to suspend the workings even of parental nature;—to silence the anxiety which years

have nourished ;—and to lend to the general welfare, every thing which has constituted their own. Even that sex, whose first honour is in the tenderness of their nature, are now called to forget or to disavow it. They are called to hide every tear, and stifle every apprehension ;—to assume that sedate and matron firmness which becomes the wives and daughters of freemen ; and by their voice (ever so powerful to the brave) to invigorate the spirit of national defence, and anticipate the hour of national glory.

Such, my brethren, are the hardships to which they are exposed, who are yet at the greatest distance from the actual scene of war ; and such the sacrifices which this eventful season demands of all of us, from the throne to the cottage. Yet, ere the awful hour of conflict begins,—while the winds of winter are ushering in that mightier storm which is to convulse or remedy mankind,—let us, in this day of meditation, look to the end of these things. Let us weigh well what may be those designs of Providence, of which we are now called to be the agents and instruments ; let us consider what it is that our patience of evil is now to defend or preserve ; and what are the motives which summon us, in the midst of peril and alarm, to have the “ firm possession of our souls.”

1. We are summoned, in the first place, to the defence of our country, to preserve the land which has given us birth, and which contains every thing

for which we live. Whatever may be the evils or sufferings of war, they have yet this fortunate effect,—that they rekindle that love of our country, which the safety of prosperity, and the habits of private pursuit, are so apt to relax or to impair. But, my brethren, if this appeal has its influence even over the savage and the slave,—in no hour in the history of social life,—in no nation which has ever risen among mankind,—did that name ever summon before man, so many dread obligations as it now does before us, in this hour, and in this country. We have to defend a land, unhabituated to shame, and hitherto unknown to conquest ;—we have to defend the honours of ancient days, and the splendour of present greatness ;—we have to defend the opulence which the industry of our fathers has gained, and the freedom which their blood has purchased ;—we have to defend that constitution which has poured the prosperities of nature over a barren land, and given to our northern isle a splendour unknown to the regions of the sun. We have to defend that faith in which our infancy was baptized, and in which we pray our dying hours may close ; which was the “ strength of our fathers, and of the old time before them,” and which has conducted the wise and the virtuous who have preceded us, to glories beyond the limits of mortality.

2. We are summoned, in the next place, my brethren, even to a nobler duty ; and, in the mighty

designs of Providence, the same valour which is called to defend our land, is the great means by which we can relieve the sufferings of the world around us. Amid that wreck which we have witnessed of social welfare—amid the dethronement of kings, and the subjugation of kingdoms,—amid the trembling neutrality of some, and the silent servility of others,—this country alone hath remained independent and undismayed,—and it is upon the valour of our arms, that Europe now reposes its last hope of returning liberty, and restored honour. Among the nations which surround us, whom either the force of the enemy has subdued, or their power intimidated, there is not one virtuous bosom that does not throb for our success,—the prayers of millions will follow our banners into the field, and the arm of the soldier will be blessed by innumerable voices, which can never reach his ear. If we fail,—if the ancient prowess and intrepidity of our people is gone,—there is then a long close to all the hopes and all the honours of humanity ; over the fairest portion of the civilized earth, the tide of military despotism will roll, and bury, in its sanguinary flood, alike the monuments of former greatness, and the promises of future glory. But,—if we prevail ; if the hearts of our people are exalted to the sublimity of the contest ; the mighty spell which has enthralled the world will be broken,—the spirit of nature and of liberty will rekindle ;—and the same blow which

prostrates the enemy of our land, will burst the fetters of nations, and set free the energies of an injured world.

The historian of future times, when he meditates on the affairs of men, will select for his fairest theme the record of our country ; and he will say, Such is the glory of nations, when it is founded on virtue ; when they scorn the vulgar “ devices of “ the human heart,” and follow only the “ counsel “ of the Lord ;” when they act from the high ambition of being the ministers of that “ Ancient of “ Days,” whose “ judgment is set” in nature, and before whom the “ books of the Universe are open.”

3. There is yet, my brethren, in such hours, a greater consideration. If there be something inexpressibly animating in seeing our country as the instrument of Heaven in the restoration of happiness to mankind ; if to us be given the sublime charge, of at once defending our own land, and guiding the destinies of human nature,—there is something also equally solemn in the remembrance of the duties which so high a commission involves. And there is an instinct which must teach us all, that of our conduct in these trying hours we are finally to render an account. It is this exalted prospect which ought ever to be present to us, in the seasons of difficulty and alarm. It is now, in the midst of wars, and the desolation of nations, that we ought to fortify our hearts at the shrine of religion. It is now that

we are to weigh the duties which are demanded of us by Heaven and earth ; and to consider whether, in that last day, we are to appear as cowards to our country and our faith, and as purchasing an inglorious safety, by the sacrifice of every duty, and every honour of man,—or as the friends of order, of liberty, and of religion, and allied to those glorious spirits who have been the servants of God, and the benefactors of mankind. Over the conflict which is to ensue, let it never be forgotten, that greater eyes than those of man will be present ; and let every man that draws the sword of defence remember, that he is not only defending the liberties of his country, but the laws of his God.

Let, then, the young and the brave of our people go forth, with hearts inaccessible to fear, and undoubting of their cause. Let them look back into time, and see the shades of their ancestors rising before them, and exhorting them to the combat. Let them look around them and see a subjugated world the witnesses of their contest, and the partners in their success. Let them look forward into futurity, and see posterity prostrated before them, and all the honours and happiness of man dependent upon the firmness of their hearts, and the vigour of their arms. Yes ! let them go forth, and pour around our isle a living barrier to injustice and ambition ; and, when that tide of anarchy which has overflowed the world rolls its

last waves to our shores, let them shew to the foe as impenetrable a front, as the rocks of our land to the storms of the ocean.

And Thou, O God of Nations, and Lord of every host, “without whom nothing is strong, and “nothing is holy,” if it is with such views that thy people of this land now assemble before Thee ; —if they are, indeed, armed in defence of Thy eternal laws, and in the cause of the everlasting gospel ;—if Thou hast called them to be the instruments of thy Providence for the future welfare of mankind, let thy spirit go forth with them, which of old went forth with the brave and the virtuous of thine own people. Awaken in their hearts that love of Thee, and of thy laws, and pour into their souls that contempt of danger and of death, which besit those whom thy Omniscient will has summoned to scenes of difficulty and alarm ; and, while thy Providence has so long watched over this favoured land, and while it now remains as the beacon to lead mankind again to happiness and truth,—grant that thy people may feel the extent of their duties ! and know, that, while they are defending the independence of their own country, they are defending the sacred cause of order, of virtue, and of religion, throughout the world.

SERMON VIII.

ON THE RELIGIOUS AND MORAL ENDS OF KNOWLEDGE.*

PROVERBS iii. 13, &c.

“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding!—She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.”

IN these beautiful words Solomon describes the effects of wisdom upon the honour and happiness of human life.—However warm or magnificent the praise which he bestows, it is not the extravagance of youthful enthusiasm. It is the sober decision of age and experience: the opinion of one who had known every pleasure which life could offer him; and who, in his grey hairs, tells the successor to his throne, that “wisdom is more “precious” than all the splendours which surround it, and “that all the things he could desire, “are not to be compared unto her.”

* Preached at the commencement of the Academical Session in Edinburgh.

I have chosen these words, my brethren, for our present consideration, because there appears something in the time not unsuitable to their application. The season has now returned, when the annual business of education again begins; when, for some months to come, the young of our congregation are to be employed in the acquisition of knowledge; and when this city itself exhibits one of its most honourable distinctions,—that of contributing to the instruction and improvement of youth. To the young themselves, it is the commencement of the most important and eventful period of their lives; and to us, my elder brethren, it is a scene which we can scarcely regard, without many feelings of interest and tenderness. It reminds us of that beautiful expression of antiquity, “that the young among the people are like “the spring amid the seasons.” It leads even the most insensible of us, to form some kind wish that the fruits of their harvest may correspond to the opening of their spring; and it leads us, too, very naturally, to the remembrance of our own youth; and, while we think what are the duties of the present young, to consider what we ourselves have been doing since that important era has passed to us. At this time, therefore, I trust I shall be forgiven, if I dedicate this discourse to the young of our congregation;—if I avail myself of the opportunity of the season, to encourage them in the pursuits which they have begun;—and if I

conclude, by pointing out to them the great ends to which all knowledge and wisdom ought finally to be applied.

I. In every period of life, the acquisition of knowledge is one of the most pleasing employments of the human mind. But in youth there are circumstances which make it productive of higher enjoyment. It is then that every thing has the charm of novelty; that curiosity and fancy are awake; and that the heart swells with the anticipations of future eminence and utility. Even in those lower branches of instruction which we call mere accomplishments, there is something always pleasing to the young in their acquisition. They seem to become every well-educated person,—they adorn, if they do not dignify humanity; and, what is far more, while they give an elegant employment to the hours of leisure and relaxation, they afford a means of contributing to the purity and innocence of domestick life. But in the acquisition of knowledge of a higher kind,—in the hours when the young gradually begin the study of the laws of nature, and of the faculties of the human mind, or of the magnificent revelations of the Gospel,—there is a pleasure of a sublimer nature. The cloud which, in their infant years, seemed to cover nature from their view, begins gradually to resolve. The world in which they are placed, opens with all its wonders upon their eye; their powers of attention and observation

seem to expand with the scene before them ; and, while they see, for the first time, the immensity of the universe of God, and mark the majestick simplicity of those laws by which its operations are conducted, they feel as if they were awakened to a higher species of being, and admitted into nearer intercourse with the Author of Nature. It is this period, of all others, accordingly, that most determines our hopes or fears of the future fate of the young. To feel no joy in such pursuits ;—to listen carelessly to the voice which brings such magnificent instruction ;—to see the veil raised which conceals the counsels of the Deity, and to shew no emotion at the discovery, are symptoms of a weak and torpid spirit,—of a mind unworthy of the advantages it possesses, and which is fitted only for the humility of sensual and ignoble pleasure. Of those, on the contrary, who distinguish themselves by the love of knowledge,—who follow with ardour the career that is opened to them, we are apt to form the most honourable presages. It is the character natural to youth, and which, therefore, promises well of their maturity. We foresee for them, at least, a life of pure and virtuous enjoyment, and we are willing to anticipate no common share of future usefulness and splendour.

In the second place, the pursuits of knowledge lead not only to happiness but to honour. “Length of days,” in the words of the text, “is in her right hand, and in her left are riches and

“honour.” It is honourable to excel even in the most trifling species of knowledge, in those which can amuse only the passing hour. It is more honourable to excel in those different branches of science which are connected with the liberal professions of life, and which tend so much to the dignity and well-being of humanity. It is the means of raising the most obscure to esteem and attention; it opens to the just ambition of youth, some of the most distinguished and respected situations in society; and it places them there, with the consoling reflection, that it is to their own industry and labour, in the providence of God, that they are alone indebted for them. But, to excel in the higher attainments of knowledge,—to be distinguished in those greater pursuits which have commanded the attention, and exhausted the abilities of the wise in every former age,—is perhaps, of all the distinctions of human understanding, the most honourable and grateful. When we look back upon the great men who have gone before us in every path of glory, we feel our eye turn from the career of war and of ambition, and involuntarily rest upon those who have displayed the great truths of religion, who have investigated the laws of social welfare, or extended the sphere of human knowledge. These are honours, we feel, which have been gained without a crime, and which can be enjoyed without remorse. They are honours also which can never die,—which can shed lustre

even upon the humblest head,—and to which the young of every succeeding age will look up, as their brightest incentives to the pursuit of virtuous fame.

II. But whatever may be the attractions of wisdom, or the rewards which the Almighty hath given to its pursuit, it is still farther to be remembered, that it is at best only a means to an end; that knowledge of every kind supposes some use to which it is to be applied; and that, in the simple language of the gospel, it is a talent, (though a talent of the noblest kind,) for which the possessor is finally to account. I would to God, my brethren, that the history of science had rendered this observation unnecessary. Yet, you all know, that there are shades which darken the history of human improvement; that there have been, and even now, alas! are, men who have employed genius and knowledge to the most fatal purposes; who have employed them to corrupt the morals of private life; to undermine the foundations of social order; and, with a still more gigantick malignity, have turned the powers which Heaven gave them against itself, and endeavoured to wrest from the family of God, that belief in his providence, and that hope in his mercy, which are necessary ingredients in our being, and which alone can animate the exertions, or console the woe of humanity. Far, O God! from us, and from the young of our people, be these fatal delusions! Yet it is wise in

you, my young friends, to confirm these natural feelings by principle, and, in preparing yourselves to employ your knowledge, to consider the great ends, which, in this employment, both God and man demand of you.

1. The first end to which all wisdom or knowledge ought to be employed, is to illustrate the wisdom or goodness of the Father of Nature. Every science that is cultivated by men leads naturally to religious thought, from the study of the plant that grows beneath our feet, to that of the Host of Heaven above us, who perform their stated revolutions in majestick silence amid the expanse of infinity. When, in the youth of Moses, “the Lord appeared to him in Horeb,” a voice was heard, saying, “draw nigh hither, and put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place where thou standest is holy ground.” It is with such a reverential awe that every great or elevated mind will approach to the study of nature, and with such feelings of adoration and gratitude, that he will receive the illumination that gradually opens upon his soul. It is not the lifeless mass of matter, he will then feel, that he is examining,—it is the mighty machine of Eternal Wisdom: the workmanship of him, “in whom every thing lives, and moves, and has its being.” Under an aspect of this kind, it is impossible to pursue knowledge without mingling with it the most elevated sentiments of devotion;—it is impossible to

perceive the laws of nature without perceiving, at the same time, the presence and the Providence of the Lawgiver:—and thus it is that, in every age, the evidences of religion have advanced with the progress of true philosophy; and that science, in erecting a monument to herself, has, at the same time, erected an altar to the Deity. The knowledge of nature, however, you know, my young brethren, is not exhausted. There are many great discoveries yet awaiting the labours of science; and with them, there are also awaiting to humanity many additional proofs of the wisdom and benevolence “of Him that made us.” To the hope of these great discoveries, few, indeed, can pretend:—yet let it ever be remembered, that he who can trace any one new fact, or can exemplify any one new instance of divine wisdom or benevolence in the system of nature, has not lived in vain; that he has added to the sum of human knowledge; and, what is far more, that he has added to the evidence of those greater truths, upon which the happiness of time and eternity depends.

2. The second great end to which all knowledge ought to be employed, is to the welfare of humanity. Every science is the foundation of some art, beneficial to men; and while the study of it leads us to see the beneficence of the laws of nature, it calls upon us also to follow the great end of the Father of Nature in their employment

and application. I need not say, my brethren, what a field is thus opened to the benevolence of knowledge : I need not tell you, that in every department of learning there is good to be done to mankind : I need not remind you, that the age in which we live has given us the noblest examples of this kind, and that science now finds its highest glory in improving the condition, or in allaying the miseries of humanity. But there is one thing of which it is proper ever to remind you, because the modesty of knowledge often leads us to forget it,—and that is, that the power of scientific benevolence is far greater than that of all others, to the welfare of society. The benevolence of the great, or the opulent, however eminent it may be, perishes with themselves. The benevolence even of sovereigns is limited to the narrow boundary of human life ; and not unfrequently is succeeded by different and discordant counsels. But the benevolence of knowledge is of a kind as extensive as the race of man, and as permanent as the existence of society. He, in whatever situation he may be, who, in the study of science, has discovered a new means of alleviating pain, or of remedying disease ; who has described a wiser method of preventing poverty, or of shielding misfortune ; who has suggested additional means of increasing or improving the beneficent productions of nature, has left a memorial of himself, which can never be forgotten ; which will commu-

nicate happiness to ages yet unborn ; and which, in the emphatick language of scripture, renders him a “fellow-worker” with God himself, in the improvement of his Creation.

3. The third great end of all knowledge is the improvement and exaltation of our own minds. It was the voice of the apostle, “What manner of men ought ye to be, to whom the truths of the Gospel have come ?” It is the voice of nature also, “What manner of men ought ye to be, to whom the treasures of wisdom are opened ?” Of all the spectacles, indeed, which life can offer us, there is none more painful, or unnatural, than that of the union of vice with knowledge. It counteracts the great designs of God in the distribution of wisdom ; and it assimilates men, not to the usual characters of human frailty, but to those dark and malignant spirits who fell from Heaven, and who excel in knowledge, only that they may employ it in malevolence. To the wise and virtuous man, on the contrary,—to him whose moral attainments have kept pace with his intellectual, and who has employed the great talent with which he is entrusted to the glory of God, and to the good of humanity,—are presented the sublimest prospects that mortality can know. “In my father’s house,” says our Saviour, “are many mansions ;”—mansions, we may dare to interpret, fitted to the different powers that life has acquired, and to the uses to which they have been

applied. Of that great scene, indeed, which awaits all, whether ignorant or wise, it becomes us to think with reverential awe. Yet we know, "that it will then be well with the good, though "it will not be well with the wicked;" and we are led, by an instinctive anticipation, to suppose that they who here have excelled in wisdom and benevolence, will be rewarded with higher objects, upon which they may be employed, and admitted into nearer prospects of the government of Eternal Wisdom. "In his light they shall see light." "They shall see Him, not as through a glass, darkly; but as he is. They shall know, even as "they themselves are known."

Such, my young brethren, are the great ends to which all wisdom and knowledge ought to be employed; and such, also, the rewards, both in time and eternity, which the Author of Wisdom hath bestowed upon the faithful of his people. It is upon this dignified and animating scene that you are now entering:—it is to these rewards that by patience and industry you may advance. I can add nothing to the magnificence of these prospects: yet there is one additional reflection which I would wish, at this time, to recall to your remembrance.

In the scene of early life which you have left, you have all, probably, left some companions of your youthful years, who cannot follow you here: some to whom, with all their talents, poverty forbids the hope of further instruction, and who must

be doomed to pass their lives in ignorance and obscurity. Is there here, then, no call upon you to justify the fortunate superiority which you possess? And, if the Providence of the Almighty hath so early distinguished you, is there no claim which He, too, has upon your labour and your industry? In looking back upon this early scene, there are, perhaps, other more interesting images that will return to your remembrance. There are friends you will see, who now anxiously wait your course;—there are relations who are eager to anticipate your honour and success;—there are parents, perhaps, who await your hands to crown their grey hairs with a crown of joy. I will not go farther. May these, and every other remembrance befitting the generosity of youth, be present with you in every hour, to animate and invigorate the resolutions of your minds!—May the blessing of Him who called the young unto Him, and blessed them, descend upon all your heads. And may you now so weigh the importance of the great journey upon which you are entering, that it may terminate “in honour, and glory, and immortality!”

SERMON IX.

CONTINUATION OF THE SAME SUBJECT, WITH REGARD TO THE
YOUNG IN THE HIGHER CONDITIONS OF LIFE.

PROVERBS iii. 13, &c.

“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding!—She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.”

IN the preceding discourse, I addressed myself to the young who are engaged in the labours of education, and who are preparing themselves to enter upon the various liberal professions of society. To them life, at present, indeed, “is full of labour;”—but of a labour to which the providence of God hath allotted high rewards:—the hopes of honour,—the promise of usefulness,—and the lofty distinction of contributing, in their day, to the glory of God, and the good of human kind. To such objects of legitimate ambition, the generous bosom of youth is always open; and there is, perhaps, no duty of the parent or the in-

structure more important, than to present perpetually to their eyes, the splendid rewards which Heaven has in store, to repay the labours of their early days.

There is one description of the young, however, to whom observations of this kind may not seem so immediately to apply ;—the young, I mean, who are born to rank or opulence, and who appear not to be called upon, by any necessity of their condition, for labour. To them, life seems to open with very different prospects than to the generality of men. No imperious duty summons them to toil, —no stern necessity compels them to provide for the wants of the passing day. It is to a scene rather of inactivity and joy that they appear to be called, where gayety invites them to enjoyment under a thousand forms ; and where, without labouring themselves, they may command the labours of the rest of the world around them. It is to the young of this description of our congregation that I now wish particularly to address myself. The same season which is opening to the rest of the young around them a new course of activity and labour, is opening to them a scene of pleasure, and, perhaps, of thoughtless dissipation.—Let me then entreat them for a moment to pause, on their entrance into life ;—to consider what is the real aspect of their advantages or condition ; and to weigh the ends for which life itself was given, and for which every noble mind would wish to live.

I. I may observe then, in the first place, that this exemption from labour and exertion, which the higher classes of society are thought to enjoy, is much more apparent than real ; and that in truth it extends itself only to the lowest wants of human nature. They are exempted, indeed, from the care of “gaining their bread by the sweat of their brow,” from the labouring day, and the scanty sleep, by which alone the poor man can provide for the wants of his family. But they are called to other labours of no less imperious a kind ; and which, from this circumstance itself, possess a higher obligation upon every generous mind, that they are more honourable and more exalted.

1. They are called, in the first place, to the cultivation of the mind,—to the acquisition of knowledge, and the improvement of the understanding. In the unbroken leisure of their youth,—in the facilities of studies and education,—in the society of whatever is respectable or distinguished among men,—they enjoy advantages which fall to the lot of few of the human race ; and the expectation of the world unites itself with the prayer of the parent, that they may enter upon active life, worthy of the discipline which has been employed to form them.

2. They are called, in the second place, to the noblest and most extensive duties which society demands. They are called to lead the arms of their country in war ;—to dispense its justice, and to preserve its tranquillity in the seasons of peace.

They are called, as possessors of property, to the most interesting office which the citizen can fill,—to improve the bounty of nature, and add to the prosperity of their nation ;—to be the friends and the fathers of all that dwell in their land,—to be the patrons of rural industry,—the rewarders of humble merit.—and, even in the most desert corners of their country, to diffuse happiness and knowledge among the habitations of men. They are called, still farther, in many cases, to a greater duty ; to enter into the senate of their country, —to share in the deliberations by which its misfortunes may be remedied,—its prosperity extended,—its honours maintained ;—to extend the firm hand, which, amidst popular commotion, can hold the balance of power and of liberty,—and to exert the intrepid mind, which can disregard all the clamours of party, while it is labouring for the good of the whole.

3. They are called, in the last place, to be the arbiters of social life, and the models of national manners. It is to this description of society, as we all know, that the rest naturally look up ; from them they borrow their fashions, their habits, and not unfrequently their principles ; and it is their conduct of this easy but important dominion, that determines, in a great measure, the character and the morality of their age. They are born the legislators of publick manners ; and it is their example, (and let me add, in a peculiar manner,

the example of the female great,) which is to impress its character upon the manners of the world around them, and to render them either pious or profligate, virtuous or vicious, dignified or base.

II. Such, then, are the duties which are demanded of the great and the opulent,—the important uses which, by the Providence of God, they serve in the societies of men; and such, accordingly, my young friends, are the solemn duties to which, in the course of time, you are to be called. It is the great business of youth, to prepare for the course which it is to follow; to acquire the knowledge, and to attain the habits which the scenes of future life may require; and above all, by anticipating the duties which God and Man are to demand, to establish that character and temper of mind which may suit the situation it is destined to fill, and render life honourable, and useful, and happy. Suffer me then, my young friends, upon this principle, to suggest to you some of those considerations which become the peculiar prospects which open upon you, and which befit those generous hours of youth which you now enjoy.

1. There is something, in the first place, very striking to every virtuous or elevated mind, in the importance of the station to which it is called, and the magnitude of the duties which are demanded of it. The great body of mankind are doomed to pass their days in still obscurity, uncheered by

the observation of the world, and unapplauded even for the greatest virtues of which their situation can admit. On their humble path, no eye of curiosity is turned,—no sympathizing interest attends;—and all the exertions of patience, of magnanimity, and of self-denial, which their condition incessantly demands, must pass without any other approbation than that of their own hearts, and that of him “who is greater than their hearts, and who “knoweth all things.”

It is not thus with those that are born to rank and opulence. They enter upon the theatre of life with every opinion and every prejudice in their favour.—Their first steps are marked by the sympathy of innumerable spectators; and their earliest dawn of talents or of virtue, is hailed by the applause and expectation of their country. The virtues, too, which life demands of them, are not those which shrink from the eye of day, and which are rewarded only by the testimony of conscience. It is not the austere, the passive, or the solitary virtues which they are called upon to exhibit; it is the prominent, the popular, and the commanding;—the intrepidity of the warrior, the uprightness of the magistrate, the independence of the statesman;—in private life, the wide beneficence which belongs to landed-property, or the innumerable generousities which await commercial wealth; and, even in the bosom of domestick life, that system of pure but dignified manners, which enno-

bles while it improves the society of men, and which every where diffuses over rank and greatness their most enviable charm. Such, my young friends, are the qualities of mind which the providence of God may one day call you to display;—qualities, surely, which accord with the noblest ambition of youth; which it is now your proudest virtue to anticipate; and for the neglect of which, in these invaluable years of education, there is nothing under Heaven which can make any compensation. You are called, like all the rest of your brethren, to labour. In the great scene of human life, you have the most important part to perform. But, in proportion to the importance of that part, are the motives and the rewards which the Providence of the Almighty hath assigned you. Whatever can warm the generous, or animate the noble mind, is displayed to your ambition;—the acquisition of personal fame, the maintenance of family honour;—the extension of national greatness, and the improvement of national manners;—and, what is still more, the power of embodying your names in the annals of your country, and descending to posterity with the admiration of the wise, and the blessings of the virtuous. These are the motives by which the Almighty summons you to labour; and cold, surely, must be that heart which beats not at a prospect so animating to all the moral or intellectual exertions of man.

2. From these general considerations, let me request you, in the second place, to look to the actual scene of life, and to the characters which it presents to your view. The history of your country records to you the memory of many illustrious great,—of many who have added virtue to rank, and genius to distinction; and the arduous days in which you live, have, I thank God, well supported whatever was great or dignified in national character. Such are the models which it becomes you to study,—the distinguished characters which rise as it were from the mass of mankind, to court you to follow them;—and if, in regarding them, your bosoms swell with admiration;—if you form the secret wish, in your day, to resemble them;—if hope whisper its anticipations of success,—suffer not, for any pleasures which life can offer you, these invaluable emotions to pass from your minds. Remember, that such also is the part which you may perform;—that such are the honours you may win,—and that, even when life is passed, and all the momentary distinctions of mortality are at an end, the same grateful tear which you now pour upon the grave of illustrious virtue, may in return fall upon yours.

Alas! my brethren, there is another prospect; and if there be examples in your condition which are fitted to animate, there are others which are fitted to chill and to alarm. You have read in the

annals of every country, the history of vicious greatness and profligate wealth. You have heard, in former days, of the arrogance of privileged orders,—of the injustice of hereditary power,—of that corruption of manners into which they may fall, who are exalted above the censure and the indignation of the world. You have seen, even in this country, rank degraded, and power abused,—riches dissipated amid every ignoble pleasure,—influence devoted only to the dissemination of base or vicious manners,—and all the fairest gifts of Heaven, converted, as by the spell of an enchanter, into the elements of more than mortal death. On such examples, it becomes you well to pause. There was a time, when the lost beings you now behold were innocent and pure,—when life opened to them with all the prospects of usefulness and honour,—and when the promises of youth afforded no presage of the baseness of their maturity, or the ignominy of their age; and it is for you well to consider, whether theirs be the career that you would wish to run, or theirs the death you would wish to die.

3. There is yet one other consideration, my young brethren, which I would wish to represent to you, and which it is of the deepest consequence you should, in the present hours, impress upon your minds. The time we live in is itself eloquent. The ages are past, in which power can constitute right, or wealth embellish corruption,—

in which authority can take the place of virtue, or the honours of distinction be maintained amid the profligacies of individual character. Whatever is the importance of the distinction of ranks to the general welfare of society;—whatever, in this great and envied country, is its importance to the preservation of our unrivalled constitution;—whatever, in private life, is its influence upon the purity and dignity of national manners,—all these now depend upon the conduct of those who possess them. The progress of national prosperity, —the searching inquiries of science,—above all, the diffusion of the spirit of the gospel, have broken the spell which formerly rendered the great invulnerable; and the eye of the patriot is now raised with silent anxiety to the contemplation of the conduct of the higher conditions of society, to know whether he is to prophesy peace or anarchy to his country.

To this mighty scene of trial and of duty you are now approaching. Let me then entreat you to look at the fall of another country,—to that mighty ruin which now covers the first of European monarchies, and which has buried every thing, that, but a few years ago, was noble or elevated, in one promiscuous grave. Alas! while you look upon this sepulchre of human greatness, is there not a voice which arises from the tomb, and which seems to tell you also to beware;—which tells you, that if the great have their rights,

they have also their duties ;—that, in the present circumstances of the world, the inheritance of wealth, and the pride of ancestry, can only be supported by personal dignity,—and that the fabrick of society itself can only be maintained by the progressive improvement of every rank in knowledge and in virtue. It is the melancholy truth of history, that the corruption of every people has begun with the great ; and, if ever that dread day shall come, when this constitution, so long the subject of our pride to men, and our gratitude to God, shall also perish, it will be when the higher orders are more corrupt than the lower ;—when, in the security of vanity, or in the baseness of vicious pleasure, they shall at once have undermined the respect of the vulgar, the confidence of the wise, and the hope of the virtuous.

Such then, my young brethren, is that arduous but animating state on which you are about to enter. It is, in truth, no state of luxury and ease, —no privileged scene of exemption from that labour, which is at once the lot and the prerogative of man. You are called by the providence of God to the first rank in the society of men ;—you are called by the same Providence to the first duties ; and the voice of nature coincides with the voice of the Gospel, in the solemn assurance, “ that of those to whom much is given, much also “ will be required.” Do you then wish, with the

natural generosity of youth, to fulfil in after years the duties to which you are called? Now is the time for this sacred preparation. It is now, in the spring of your days, that you may acquire the knowledge, and establish the habits which are to characterize your lives; and that you may elevate the temper of your minds to the important destiny to which the Father of Nature has called you. The world, with all its honours and all its temptations, is before you;—the paths of virtue and of vice are equally open to receive you;—and it is the decision of your present hours, which must determine your character in time, and your fate in eternity.

I pray God, that you may decide like Christians and like men;—that you may take, in early life, “that good part which will never be taken from you;”—and that neither the illusions of rank, nor the seductions of wealth, may lead you to forget what you owe to yourselves, to your country, and to your God.

SERMON X.

ON SUMMER.

JUDGES v. 31.

“Let them that love the Lord be as the sun, when he goeth forth in his might.”

TH**E**R**E** are principles of our constitution which lead us from the observation of the material world, to the contemplation of the mind that formed it, and which, from the spectacle of beauty, conduct us to Him “who has made every thing beautiful “in his time.” There are uses too of no mean importance to happiness, to virtue, and to piety, which meditations of this kind are fitted to serve; and there is no way in which the young can better learn the sentiments of devotion, or the old preserve them, than in cultivating those habits of thought and of observation which convert Nature into the Temple of God, and render all its different scenes expressive of the various attributes of the Almighty Mind.

Every age, in this view, has felt the analogy which subsists between the seasons of the year, and the character and duties of men. There is, in the revolutions of time, a kind of warning voice which summons us to thought and reflection; and every season, as it arises, speaks to us of the analogous character which we ought to maintain. From the first openings of the spring, to the last desolation of winter, the days of the year are emblematic of the state and of the duties of man; and, whatever may be the period of our journey, we can scarcely look up into the Heavens, and mark the path of the sun, without feeling something either to animate us upon our course, or to reprove us for our delay.

It is now the pride and glory of the year. The “winter is over and gone,”—the spring has again unlocked all the annual promises of nature,—the earth around us is every where covered with plenteousness and beauty,—and the sun is pursuing like a giant his “course through the Heavens,” and dispensing light and life over the world beneath him. Are there no reflections, my brethren, which such a spectacle inspires? Are there no classes or conditions of men, of whose character and duties this season is descriptive? And are there no moral lessons which they, who love the Lord, may gather from that “sun which now goeth forth in his might?”

1. Is it not, in the first place, emblematick to us of the maturity of human life, and of the virtues which that season ought to display? To those of that age, the spring, with all its weakness, and all its dangers, is past;—an unseen arm hath conducted them through the dawn of their infant journey, and led them on to that mighty stage, where the honours of time and of eternity are to be won. Whatever may be the station or condition in which they are placed, there is yet to all some simple and evident duty which they are called to perform,—some course which they are summoned to run; and, what is far more, however narrow may be its bounds, or obscure its situation, there is some sphere to which their influence extends, and in which, like the summer sun, they may diffuse joy and happiness around them. In such seasons, let nature be their instructor; and, while they bless the useful light which pours gladness among the dwellings of men, let them remember that they also were made to bless and to improve. Let them remember, that to them have now arisen the lengthened and the enlightened days of life, when every thing calls them to labour; that the breath of Heaven has ripened all their powers of mind and body into perfection; that there are eyes in Heaven and Earth, which look upon the course they are pursuing; and that the honours of time, and the hopes of immortality, alike depend upon the use which they make of the summer of their

days. Alas ! too, let them remember, that the seasons of man have their varieties, like the seasons of nature ; and, while they look around them and see the noon of life (as sometimes they must see it) darkened by vice, or obscured by folly, let it warn them of the dangers to which they also are exposed, and prostrate them in prayer before the Throne of God, that they may run their course like the sun in his brightness.

2. A second class of men, of whose character and duties the present season is descriptive, is that of those, whom the favour of nature, or the fortunate circumstances of education, have raised to knowledge, to wisdom, and to genius. There is no resemblance more familiar to our minds, than that which subsists between knowledge and light ; and there is none which more significantly points out the great duties which are demanded of those whom Providence has so highly distinguished. They are, in the language of the Gospel, the “lights of the world;”—in the language of the text, “the sun when he goeth forth in his might,”—the legislators of moral principle and speculative opinion ; and, while others labour at the oar, amid the tempestuous sea of life, it is theirs to sit at the helm, and guide the vessel of society through the perils of the ocean. To extend the boundaries of human knowledge, and enlarge the sphere of human power ; to give relief to pain, and consolation to wo ; to fix the foundations of present prospe-

rity, and awaken the ambition of immortal hope ; to unveil the splendours of the Almighty mind ; and to unite the world in the sublime sentiments of the love of Him, and the love of every thing that he hath made ; these are the mighty ends for which knowledge and genius were given, and to which all true wisdom ever strenuously aspires. Let then even the wise be instructed by the passing time. Let them consider the sun, which now “goeth forth in his might,” as the true emblem of their duty. Let them remember that they also may give light and joy to the moral world of men ; and let them never forget, that in this they most resemble him, when they break through the clouds of ignorance and error ;—when, with the genial rays of truth, they disperse the mists of doubt and of fear which had been gathering over the souls of men ;—and when they bring forward to their view the magnificence of nature, and the benevolence of the Eternal Mind which governs it.

3. There is yet another, and a more numerous class of men, of whose usefulness the present season is emblematick ; that of the great and the affluent : of those who enjoy the exalted conditions of society, and possess the awakening powers of wealth and influence. It is to this class of our congregation that the present season calls me in particular to address myself. The annual season of pleasure and of business is now drawing to its close, and many of those who hear me are prepar-

ing to return to the seats of their ancestors, or to those possessions, not less honourable, which their own industry and labour have acquired.

Every scene of life has its appropriate duties ; and I trust I shall therefore be forgiven, if I attempt at present to draw your attention to this subject :—To the consideration of the duties and the dispositions which become those who possess this important share in the property of their country.

If it be unfortunate for us, that we often undervalue the blessings we enjoy, it is equally unfortunate that we sometimes undervalue the usefulness we possess. There is a modesty in goodness, which sometimes leads men to estimate their importance in society too low. There is a carelessness, too, which the possession of power is apt to produce, and which renders them unconscious of the exertions which are demanded of them. It is wise in men, therefore, sometimes to remove themselves, as it were, from their own situation in life ;—to look upon their condition in the light in which the rest of the world consider it ; and thus to return to it with new impressions of the duties which it demands, and of the opportunities of virtue which it affords them.

If, in this view, my brethren, you survey the great scene of human society, you will see that the condition in it the most honourable, the most important, and the most fruitful of usefulness, is

that of the proprietor of land. Other men must struggle with the world, before they can raise themselves into distinction and influence. He, on the contrary, is born a ruler of the people, and the same laws which convey to him the title to his lands, convey to him the welfare or the wretchedness of the men who inhabit them. His opinions, in many ways, become the model of theirs;—his example is able, either to strengthen or to shake their most important principles of morality;—and his power can make itself felt, even within the walls of the lowest cottage, either in disseminating joy, or diffusing sorrow. From the agitations of the great world, the obscurity of the poor renders them happily free; and, amid the calm occupations of sequestered industry, even the influence of legislation is but distantly felt. But the influence of their landlord is felt in every day and in every occupation of their lives; and he alone, of all the various members of society, has the power of realizing the beautiful description of the Patriarch of old: “When I went out of the gate, the young men saw me, and hid themselves; and the aged arose, and stood up. When the ear heard me, then it blessed me, and when the eye saw me, it gave witness unto me. I delivered the poor and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready

“to perish came upon me, and I caused the
“widow’s heart to sing for joy.”

Such is the light in which it is ever wise in you, whom Providence has called to this important condition of society, to consider the station you fill ; and such views it is my present purpose to pursue, by suggesting to you some of the most remarkable sources of usefulness the same Providence has given you to employ.

1. The first of these is in the encouragement of learning, and in facilitating the means of instruction. It is a character of our religion, my brethren, not less distinguished than that of its being accompanied by miraculous assistance, that “the Gospel was preached unto the poor;” and it has been the effect of it to raise the minds of the lower ranks of mankind to a degree of virtue and elevation, which no former ages of the world had known. In this mighty design of Providence, you are at present the agents. In all the different ages of Christianity you review,—in every country you at present survey,—you will find, that the character and the virtue of the people is ever in proportion to the facility of their instruction ; and that it is this single cause which has raised them from savages into men,—from slaves into citizens,—and from all the grossness of sensual existence, into the dignified enjoyments of cultivated being.

If there be something pleasing in the consideration of this power of usefulness which you enjoy,

there is something also very solemn in the imagination of its neglect. You blame the parent who refuses the means of instruction to his child, you blame the legislator who provides not the elements of education for his people; and is there no blame in the sight of God and man which falls upon him, who withdraws from those whom Providence has given to his care the foundation of all their improvement,—who withholds from the darkened vale of life the radiance which alone can cheer it,—and who refuses to the children of toil and suffering, the chief compensation which Heaven has made them for all their wants and all their labours. Is there no blame, too, that would fall upon the great of this country, in particular, if they were to relax in that attention which their ancestors had paid to the education of the people; if they were to suffer those institutions to decay, which have nursed the talents that have given to our land a splendour which nature had denied it,—and for which the people have proudly paid, in every art where genius could be shewn, and in every field where glory could be won.

There is, indeed, a doctrine of another kind,—a doctrine which would teach us that the tranquillity of society is only to be maintained by the ignorance of the people,—which, for the sake of the few, would consign all the rest of mankind to barbarity and gloom—and which would purchase the gross repose of rank and affluence by the

sacrifice of all the qualities of immortal men. To such a doctrine I need not reply. It is replied to by the indignation of every heart that is akin to humanity. It is replied to, in deeper tones, by the history of the world, and by those terrific scenes which our sister island has lately presented to our view. It is in the annals of her late sanguinary story, that you will see what are the fruits of ignorance and barbarity—with what facility the demagogue and the hypocrite may act upon the minds of an untutored people,—and to what lengths of savage cruelty they can go, when they burst the only fetters that restrain them. It is there, my brethren, you will learn, that, by the eternal decree of Heaven, the perfection of society is united with the perfection of the individual; that to improve the lower ranks of men, is to give stability to the higher; and that the peace of a nation can never be so securely trusted, as in the hands of those, who share in its prosperity, and who are capable of knowing both their rights and their duties.

2. The second means of usefulness which you enjoy, is in the power of encouraging industry and improvement. In this respect, there are advantages which to you are peculiar. Amid the population of great cities, the man of benevolence feels his powers altogether inadequate to his desires. The objects of his assistance escape from him, amid the mass of society, and he often sighs

to think, that he has been encouraging vice, while he only meant to assist virtue. To such difficulties you are not exposed ;—the field of your benevolence lies all before you ;—the characters, the wants, or the interests of your people, are all familiar to you ;—and, what is still more, the demands upon your virtue can never exceed your power of exerting it, because the same circumstances which limit or extend your property, limit also or extend the demands which justice or benevolence can make upon you.

How numerous are the opportunities which such a situation affords to a noble mind for the exercise of active virtue ! Seated in the midst of an obedient and humble people, how many are the blessings which even common kindness may diffuse. If it be the young who are wandering into error or folly, it is your advice which best can restrain, and most effectually warn them. If it be talents and genius which are struggling in obscurity, it is your hand which can raise them up, and lead them into the road of honour and independence. If it be misfortune which bows down the poor man's head, and makes him look to futurity with tears, it is your pity and forbearance which can give him more than wealth, and rekindle anew the spirit of industry, and the hope of better days. If it be the grey hairs of the decayed labourer which bend before you, it is you who can give them shelter, and, in some little corner of your land, let them fall to the grave in peace.

How well, too, is this situation suited to the exercise of female humanity! and, in the scenes far from the turbulent pleasures of fashionable life, how well may female virtue exert its noblest powers! To be the patterns and the protectors of their sex,—to cherish the purity of domestick virtue,—to guide the mother's hand in the rearing of her children, and teach to them the important lessons of religious education and domestick economy,—to awaken, by kind praise, the ambition of the young, and to sooth, with lenient hand, the sorrows of the old,—these are the opportunities which such situations afford to female benevolence; the means by which they may exalt the character, and extend the virtues of their sex; and shed upon the lowly cottage of the peasant, blessings which can compensate for all its wants, and all its poverty.

Nor think, my brethren, that, in this detail of beneficence, there is little use, or that these simple virtues perish with the day that gives them birth. It is they, in fact, which have given its character to our land,—and which, knitting by insensible means the affections of the people to their masters, have maintained, in many an hour of danger, the rights and the liberties of all, and spread the riches of cultivation which distinguish our country. And even now the traveller, as he passes, can mark, both on the face of nature and on the face of man, whether it is by wisdom or folly,—by benevolence or by cruelty, that the district he sur-

veys is governed ;—and, while he sighs at the sterility which folly causes, and the misery which oppression has produced, he leaves his blessing on those fields which the wisdom of the landlord has made fertile, and on those men whom his beneficence has made happy.

3. The third means of usefulness you enjoy, is in the power of promoting religion and piety. I am speaking to Christians, to those who know the value of religion, and who have felt how little every other possession is able to give peace to the heart of man. Let me then remind you, that it is still more necessary to the lower ranks of society,—that it is religion which forms their only science,—that it is from it their deepest sense of duty springs,—and that, in the hopes which it brings, they find the sole but mighty compensation for all the toils they undergo, and all the inequalities they experience. Of this master-spring of human happiness and human virtue, you have in a great measure the command, and it is your example which must determine whether you are to preside over a pious or an abandoned people.

It is said, indeed, that in this respect there is a relaxation in the manners of the age, and that the opulent and great have become remiss in their discharge of the publick duties of religion. I hope at least that it is not so. I trust that there is neither so little wisdom, nor so little piety in those who ought to be the models of both ; for no cou-

duct that could be followed, could be more unwise, or more cruel.

It were unwise, surely, to unsettle all the foundations of duty in the minds of the people,—to remove those mighty obligations which alone can permanently reconcile them to a condition of inferiority and toil,—and to lead them to imagine that the inequalities they witness were not the design of that Providence which they revere, but the effects only of human power and human injustice.

It were cruel far more, to insinuate among them, either by language or conduct, a single doubt with respect to the foundations of their religion,—to wrest from them, even by carelessness or levity, any of those consolations on which the head of poverty and age may rest,—or to dim, to their believing eye, those hopes and expectations which irradiate that humble grave where “the weary” long “to be at rest.”

Alas ! my brethren, it were cruel also to yourselves. Life, with all its power, and all its riches, must have an end ; and there is an hour coming, when all will be forgot but the use that has been made of them. In that hour, you would dread to think, that your example had been the cause even of present sorrow to your people,—that your severity had embittered the happiness of those whom you might have blessed, or your vices contaminated the purity of their ancient manners. Alas ! is it not still more awful to think, that your example

may penetrate into eternity ;—that your levity may have raised doubts which ended in unbelief ; that your carelessness may have taught the simple to throw off the yoke of religion ;—and that, in the final ruin of those souls which the providence of God had consigned to your care, you yourselves may have been the fatal instruments.

Such then are the virtues which may be exerted, and the means of usefulness which may be employed by those whom Providence has placed in this favoured condition of society. Go, then, my brethren,—return from the fatigues of business, and the tumult of unreal pleasure, to the calm joy and the dignified occupations of rural life ! Return, but like the sun “when he goeth forth in his “might,” to give beauty to the scenes of nature, and happiness to the dwellings of men. It is your noblest character to be considered as the fathers of your people. Go then, and to the young impart the means of instruction,—and spread the light of knowledge amid the obscurities of life, and maintain the proud distinction which learning has given to your country. Go, and awaken in manhood the spirit of industry, and give to the hand of labour the hope of independence, and exert that noblest charity which is not satisfied with relieving poverty, but which prevents it. Go, still more, and be the “leaders of your people in the “way of righteousness ;” and while you employ the benevolence of men in guiding them in peace

through things temporal, employ the greater benevolence of Christians, in guiding them in hope to things eternal.

Nor ask for a reward of your labours. To be thus employed is itself happiness. It is to be fellow-workers with the Father of Nature, in the prosperity of his people. It is to give men to society,—citizens to your country,—and children to your God.

SERMON XI.

ON THE THANKSGIVING FOR THE VICTORY AT TRAFALGAR.

ST. MATTHEW xvii. 4.

“Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord! it is good for us to be here.”

WHEN our Saviour carried his disciples up into the mount, and was transfigured before them, we read, in this chapter, that St. Peter, overpowered with the vision of glory which he was permitted to see, exclaimed, in holy rapture, “Lord, it is good for us to be here!” It is good for us to be raised above the lower world, and to witness this manifestation of the majesty of Him by whom thou art sent; that we may return again into the world with deeper conviction of thy divinity, and that thou art the beloved Son, whose voice it is our duty to hear!

With such feelings of devout gratitude, I trust, we are now assembled in the House of God, and have joined in those accents of praise which on this day rise from every corner of our land. We

are assembled to commemorate one of those signal deliverances which reach to the foundation and stability of our empire.—We have seen the protracted anxiety of years, dispersed, as it were, by the breath of Heaven; and, accustomed as we are to the possession of national glory, we have seen it awaken, as if with accumulated lustre, and shed over the year which is about to close, a splendour unknown to any former age.

In such moments there is a command, superiour even to that of the sovereign or the legislature, which summons us into the temple of God, and leads us to join that multitude who, in receiving common blessings, are ardent to express their common praise. It is an instinct descriptive of our nature, and productive of sentiments that become us; it unites the concerns of earth with the laws of Heaven; it raises us from ordinary thought, to the conceptions of him in whose hand all “the nations of the earth are as the dust in the balance;”—and, amid the miseries of nations, it leads us to the anticipation of that final state, when there shall be “war and tears no more.”

If, indeed, it were only to swell the note of publick exultation, that assemblies of this kind were summoned.—if it were to cherish national vanity by the sanguinary record of achievement, or to inflame national malignity by an inhuman triumph over the chains of the captive, or the ashes of the fallen,—I know not that human impiety

could afford so dark a scene of profanation. In such assemblies no Christian spirit would breathe, and on such hearts no grace of Heaven could descend. It is for nobler ends, that, on days like these, the wise and the good follow the multitude into the House of God. It is to sanctify, with all the solemnity of religious impression, their love of their country. It is to recal to mind the blessings which the Providence of Heaven hath shed over their land. It is to weigh the obligations which these blessings create, and thus to prepare their minds for the discharge of those duties which their country may in future demand of them, whether in peace or in war.

There is a love of our country which is inherent in human nature, which is felt by the savage as well as the citizen, and which no artifice of sophistry can eradicate from the bosom of man. But, in the thoughts of a wise man, there are other circumstances to be weighed ; he will be disposed to justify to himself these original anticipations of nature, and to consider well whether the character or the conduct of his nation sanctions that instinctive love which nature has taught him. In such an inquiry there will probably be three principal subjects of his examination,—Whether the land to which he belongs be distinguished by the purity of its religious faith? Whether it has accomplished the great ends of social union? And whether it has been instrumental to the happiness and welfare of

mankind? These three inquiries fulfil the widest investigation into the conduct and character of nations; and it is with a sense of thankfulness, which language would in vain attempt to express, that I am able, even from this place, to say, "That it is good for us to be here."

1. Our first subject of thankfulness to Heaven is, that we are the inhabitants of a land, over which the genuine light of the gospel has been long diffused. Of the importance of religion to the immortal concerns of man, it is the permanent duty of this place to speak. In the present moment, it is of another consideration I wish to remind you,—of the importance of the purity of religious faith to the temporal happiness of man, and of the rank in which it stands in the enumeration of national blessings. On this great subject, I have no occasion to descend to reasoning. We stand upon an eminence from which we can descry the past and the present, and from which every aspect of mankind tells us, "that it is good for us to be here." If we look to the past, we may discover, in their various forms, those images of terror which peopled the darkness in which men dwelt, until they were "visited by the Day-spring from on high." If we look to the present, we may see the nations around us still involved in gloom, and struggling with the chains which ignorance or artifice have imposed upon the minds of men;—we may see the influence of a benevolent religion, wrested to the purposes of

temporal or spiritual ambition ;—we may see the book of life sealed from those to whom it was given,—the best charities of human life poisoned in the source from which they spring,—and the noblest powers of understanding degraded by the terrors of a dark and artful superstition. It is *here*, if any where in the history of man, that religion has best displayed its powers to bless humanity ;—it is in this land, where, uniting its mighty anticipations with the dictates of natural conscience, it has carried its influence into the common business and bosoms of men, and lent to morality the aid of its prevailing sanction. But, most of all, it is here “that the gospel has been preached unto “the poor ;” that, to the majestick multitude of the people, it has diffused its equal laws, and equal blessings ; and that the infant tongue is taught those magnificent doctrines, which give, at once, dignity to life, and hope to immortality.

2. The second subject of our thankfulness to Heaven, is, that we are the subjects of a government which has, in no common degree, accomplished the ends of social union. Upon this subject, it were in vain for me to address you.—There is, in every bosom, not only a consciousness but a pride in its truth ; and in this view, also, when we look in other lands upon the convulsions of anarchy, or the deep lethargy of despotick power, we feel, that “it is good for us to be here.” We are the citizens of a country, which has accomplished

beyond what the annals of man have hitherto exhibited, the union of publick power and private liberty ;—which has blended the might of political combination with the energy of individual exertion,—and which has awakened all the powers that contribute to national prosperity, by the freedom which it gives to their exercise.

We are the members of a constitution which is founded upon the rights of the subject ; which has marked with a firm hand the boundaries of legitimate power, and of just allegiance ; and which contains in itself that principle of amelioration, by which it can accommodate itself to the widest exigencies of national progress. Nor is this all, nor are these blessings the distributions only of climate or of chance. We are the descendants of men, who have purchased them to us with their blood ;—we are the heirs of those, who, in many a long age of glory, have combated oppression in the senate, and withstood it in the field ;—and whose wisdom and valour have left to the northern soil which gave them birth, distinctions of a nobler kind, than ever were bequeathed by eastern opulence, or by classick fame.

3. It is our last subject of thankfulness to Heaven, that we are the inhabitants of a country, which perhaps, beyond all others, has been instrumental to the progressive welfare of the human race. In the sublime designs of Providence for the progress of mankind, the various nations of

the earth have been ministering in their day to this magnificent end ; and while they seemed only to be consulting their own interests, have, unknown to themselves, been collecting for posterity the maxims of publick good, and the laws of general prosperity. It is upon this subject, also, with no common sentiments of exultation, that the inhabitants of this land can look back to the ages that are passed, and consider what their forefathers have done in every line of action or of intellectual glory. Whatever art can accomplish in the improvement of nature, or science discover in the investigation of its laws ;—whatever of national prosperity freedom can attain amid the tranquilities of peace, or of national glory bravery can earn amid the hardships of war—these are the monuments of this country's fame, and the marks which she leaves of her existence to the future ages of men. Even in the hour in which I speak, while clouds and darkness are upon the future, she yet assumes the authority of greatness, and stands in the majestick attitude of the protectress of nations. While some have bowed even their imperial heads beneath the feet of usurpation, and others shrunk into the baseness and cowardice of neutrality,—she alone has stood forward in the defence of the independence of mankind, firm in her strength, and confident in her justice : And, if the liberty of the world be yet to be regained, it is her hand which is to describe the circle

within which lawless power is to be confined, and her voice which is to say to the unhallowed torrent of victory, "hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be staid."

Such, my brethren, are the national blessings which it is the business of days like these to commemorate, and such the remembrances with which the wise and the good will join the multitude of their people, and prostrate themselves before the Throne of God. Yet, while their hearts burn, and while their thoughts are sanctified by the solemnities of worship, there is a question which will involuntarily arise, What are the obligations which these blessings create? And what are the duties which we are called upon to perform?

To these questions there is no difficult answer. To an ancient people, the past is the instructor of the future.—To a people who inherit glory, the line of their duty is prescribed. When we look forward into the darkness of coming time, the shades of our ancestors arise, and point out to us the path in which we should tread; and a voice seems to issue from their tombs, which tells us, that our duties consist in wisdom to maintain the blessings they have left us, and in bravery to defend them.

1. To the first of these I feel that it is not now my duty to call you. There was indeed a time (and the hearts of many still throb at the remembrance,) when exhortations of this kind seemed not to be

unnecessary. There was a time, when, in the passion for innovation, the experience of ages seemed to have been forgot, and when, amid the warm visions of political enthusiasm, all the sober ties which bind society together seemed likely to be dissolved. That time has passed. The meteor which arose to illuminate the world, has been extinguished in blood. The dark tragedy of another country has been performed; and, while it has left a lesson to appal the "rulers of mankind," it has been also prodigal of instruction to restrain the "madness of the people." The scenes of its tremendous progress the steady eye of this country has followed with observation; and now, concentrating its wisdom and its strength, it has taken, I doubt not, its last resolve, to suffer no unhallowed hand to touch that ark of our constitution, which contains at once the gospel of our faith, and the charter of our freedom.

2. It is still less necessary, my brethren, that I should seek to animate you to the second of those duties you owe your country, which consists in the bravery to defend it. Yet there is a cloud which sometimes arises to the eye of a thoughtful man, to darken this interesting prospect. There is something in the opulence of nations, which has hitherto been found hostile to national virtue; and, amid the long sunshine of prosperity, there is a malignant spirit of selfish interest apt to arise, which withers the proudest promises of national

greatness. It is now to be seen, whether this malignant spirit has also corrupted us.—It is to be seen, whether, like the nations that have preceded us, our heart also is cold, and our arm feeble ; and whether we also can be contented to resign the long glories which our fathers have left us, and to sink into the mass of tributary nations.—No, my brethren, I cannot fear it. I cannot fear it, from the magnanimity with which the great and the opulent of our country have resigned all the enjoyments of their rank, to marshal themselves foremost in the field of contest. I cannot fear it, from the ardour with which, every where, the young of our people have rushed to arms, and swelled the ranks of national independence. But least of all can I fear it, from the calm intrepidity with which the poor man has ranged himself beneath the banners of his country,—with which he has identified his fate with it,—and sworn to the God of his Fathers, never to surrender to the chains of a tyrant the free-born hands of his children.—Come the conflict when it may, I trust (in words never to be forgotten,) THAT EVERY MAN WILL DO HIS DUTY ; and, if once more the fleets of an invading enemy are to cover the ocean, I trust that, once more also, they will be scattered upon the deep, and perish in the waves they have insulted.

3. There is yet another duty, my brethren, to which, upon this day, we are called. While the

voice of thanksgiving resounds through our land, there is a note of sorrow which mingles with it,—and while the people speak only of glory, there are mourners, who speak of the graves of those by whom it has been won.

Of that ILLUSTRIOUS MAN, whose memory is now present to every heart, and whose loss has dimmed the eye of publick exultation, I have not the confidence either to attempt the praise or to deplore the fall. I remember that there is a silence more impressive than words ; and still more, that there is a veil drawn by the hand of Heaven, between “ the spirit that enters into the joy of his Lord,” and those feeble accents of mortal praise that follow its ascension. Called into being to decide the fate of nations, and to bear the vengeance of Heaven upon the oppressors of mankind, he has fulfilled his mighty destiny ; and he has left a name before which the generations of men will bow, when the monuments which a grateful country now meditates to his fame, shall have mouldered in their ruins.

There are other memories, my brethren, that demand your gratitude ;—there are parents whom your defence has bereaved of their children ;—there are widows, whose tears bedew the wreath of glory which the arms of their husbands have earned ;—there are orphans, whose innocent eyes are lifted to their country, and who seek in vain their fathers who have bled for it.

I cannot insult the memory of the heroick dead, by asking your charity for those who were dear to them. I will say, that it is the debt of justice and of generosity:—I will say, that there is no noble heart that will not be proud to contribute to the welfare of those who have lost every thing but honour:—I will say, that the noblest monument you can raise to their ashes, is, to shew that your generosity can equal their valour.

We are now about to part, and to return into the world to our several occupations. Yet, ere we separate, while one affection unites us, and while our hearts beat one sentiment of praise, let us pray for our country:—Let us pray, that, over the countless multitudes which are this day assembled before the 'Throne of God, the same spirit may descend which once animated his chosen people;—that the valour of the memorable day which we now commemorate, may be perpetuated to our last generation;—and that, whatever may be the coming dangers which may assail our country, there never may be wanting the heart to love, and the arm to defend it.

SERMON XII.

ON EVIL COMMUNICATION.

I CORINTHIANS XV. 33.

“ Be not deceived : evil communications corrupt good manners.”

THERE is no prospect more painful to a thoughtful mind, than that of the first commencement of vice or folly in the human character. It is pleasing to us to look upon the openings of human nature ; amid the years of infancy, to see the gradual expansion of the youthful mind in benevolence and knowledge ; and to anticipate that future state of maturity, when all these promises shall be accomplished, and the character terminate in virtue and in usefulness. How painful, on the contrary, is it, (even to the unconnected spectators,) to see all these hopes disappointed,—to see the spring of life untimely blasted by some malignant power which withers all the blossoms of virtue, and closes all the expectations we had formed of their opening being ! Even of the feeblest characters we still lament to see the degradation. If we had

formed no hopes of their fame, we at least entertained hopes of their goodness ;—if they had not been distinguished, we think, they might yet have been innocent. In the obscurity of private virtue, they might have “led the life of the righteous,” full of peace and hope, and “their latter end” might at last “have been like his.”

On this subject, I shall at present submit to you some reflections. It is a subject at all times important to the young, and even to us, my brethren, of more advanced years, there are considerations that render it interesting, and shew us how important is the share which we have in forming the character and the happiness of those that are to succeed us. There is something also in the time, not unsuited to your reflections. We have all been engaged in the most important solemnity of our religion ; and many of the young among us have visited the table of their Lord, and taken upon themselves the vows of the gospel, and entered into that communion, which I trust is to be to them all the gate of Heaven. At such a time, it is wise in us all to “call our ways to remembrance,”—in the young to remember the journey upon which they are going,—in the elder to remember the example they are affording.

1. In almost every case the young begin well. They come out of the hand of nature pure and uncorrupted ; disposed to kindness, to generosity, and to gratitude ; ardent in the acquisition of

knowledge, and anxious to deserve the love and the esteem of those who are about them. Such is the character of humanity in its earlier years, until the age of pleasure and of passion arrives.

At that eventful age, a new set of opinions and emotions begin to arise in their minds;—the wish for distinction expands;—desires of pleasure awaken;—temptations surround them on every side, while experience has not yet acquired the power of resistance,—and thus the road opens upon them which leads to folly or to vice. For all this, however, the wisdom of Him who made them hath bountifully prepared, by the timidity and modesty which he hath added to the character of youth. While they are thus tempted to enjoyment, they are, at the same time, beyond any other period of life, fearful of doing wrong; they are fearful of entering upon scenes where their consciousness of ignorance tells them they are as yet unfit to appear; they are fearful of losing the esteem and love of their early friends; and still more, if they have been virtuously brought up, they are fearful of losing the favour of God, and his protection upon their future years. By these wise and simple means, the Almighty hath provided for the weakness of the young; and, even in the hours of ignorance, hath given them a guardian in their own breasts, superiour to all the wisdom of man, to save them from the dangers of passion and inexperience.

If, accordingly, the young were left only to nature and themselves, it is reasonable to think that they might pass this important period of life without danger; and that whatever might be the strength of their passions, diffidence and conscience would be sufficient to command them. But unhappily for them, and unhappily for the world, it is at this time, that “evil communications” begin to assail them; that they are deceived by the promises of vice and folly; and that all the purity of early life is sometimes sacrificed, even at their entry upon this important world.

It is not my purpose at present, my brethren, to state the progressive steps of this melancholy history;—to show how the love of pleasure undermines the energy and dignity of the human mind;—how the society and companionship of evil gradually breaks down all the fine delicacy and timidity of youth;—and how habits of evil gradually assume a power superiour to conscience, and wind around the soul those chains of guilt which no common incident can afterwards dissolve. A voice more powerful than that of this place, the voice of experience, speaks to the young of truths like these;—it tells them of many examples of those who began life with every favourable prospect, and who have closed it in early years, under every circumstance of misery and disgrace;—it tells them, that all this, the most disastrous spectacle upon which their eyes

can open, has been the fruit of "evil communication;" and it warns them "to keep their own hearts with all diligence, for out of them must also be the issues of their future lives."

If such instances can awaken them to thought and meditation, there are some reflections which it is wise in them, at this time, to cherish. It is wise in them, in the first place, to remember the importance of that feeling of delicacy and fearfulness of doing wrong, which is the most amiable characteristic of their age. Let not the ridicule or rudeness of the world prevail upon them to abandon this first friend of their youth. It is not the language of men,—it is none other than the voice of God,—the voice of Him who made them for happiness and immortality; and who, in these early hours, speaks to them by a secret instinct, to warn them of all that is fatal or disgraceful to their nature; and, would they attend to it, would they make it the simple standard by which to determine their conduct, the most eventful years of life would pass in security and innocence, and maturity open upon them with every promise of virtue and honour.

2. It is wise in them, in the second place, to reflect for what it is that they were born, and in what consists the real happiness of mortal life. Youth, as well as age, has its seasons of meditation, and it is ever with a thoughtful and anxious eye that they look down upon the great scene upon which they are about to enter. That scene has

two principal incidents to shew them,—that of those whom evil communication has seduced to ruin and disgrace ; and that of those whom perseverance in good manners has led to honour, to distinction, and to happiness. In viewing this scene, let them never forget, that to one or other of these characters they must belong :—that time and nature are pressing them on to act upon that stage which they now only behold ;—and that every thing that is dear to them, every thing for which they would wish to live, depends upon the wise part which they now take, and which, if firmly taken, by the grace of God, will never be taken from them.

3. It is wise in them, in the last place, to look beyond the world, and to consider the final destiny of their being. Every thing tells them, that they were not born for a transitory nature, and that gospel in which they were baptized, has assured them, that “ life and immortality are brought to light,” by Him who died for them. Let them learn, then, the importance of that existence which is given them, and the magnitude of those hopes and expectations to which they are called. Do they dread, (with the natural generosity of youth,) to come short of these expectations, to forfeit all these hopes, and in the awful hour of final judgment to be excluded from the kingdom of God? Let them then remember, that it is evil conversation which is the deadliest enemy of their peace, the enemy against whom it is most their business to

prepare ; that it is this which has so often withered all the promises of youth, which opened as fair as their own ; and which has covered the remainder of life and eternity in gloom and wo.

Such, my brethren, are some of the reflections, which, upon this subject, become the young. There are others which become us—which become those who have advanced farther in life, and whose characters have assumed some degree of consistence and form. The young, as we see, are often corrupted ; but I fear it is not, in general, by the young that they are corrupted,—by those of their own age, and their own inexperience. The truth is, that to produce this mighty effect upon human nature, to break down all the barriers of modesty and timidity, to silence the dictates of conscience, and dissolve all the habits of earlier purity, requires a much more powerful influence than the young are willing to yield to their fellows. It is the example of those of a more advanced age, the influence of those who enjoy rank, and wealth, and talents, which are only adequate to the production of this fatal effect. And to us, my elder brethren, it is a reflection of no common interest,—that our folly and imprudence may thus poison the minds of the pure, and introduce guilt and wo into the innocent family of God.

1. There is, in the first place, an “evil communication” to the young, which proceeds from the abuse of rank and affluence. These are the high

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and the valued situations of life, to which all others naturally look up,—and it is their manners which necessarily give the tone and fashion to their age. Of what value therefore is it to every age, when these manners “are found in the way of righteousness ;” when power is exerted in the support of piety and virtue,—and wealth employed in designs of publick and private usefulness. Of what fatal consequence, on the contrary, is it to every generation, when the reverse is the case,—when rank and fashion are only the leaders of folly, and when riches are employed in vice and sordid dissipation ;—and, what is even worse, when the manners of the higher ranks of mankind are assimilated to all that is base or degrading in the lower. How many, alas ! of the young are the victims of these abuses of prosperity ! how many, whom the fascination of this rank has led unawares into extravagance and folly ;—who, deceived by exaggerated hopes, or seduced by fantastick manners, have forgot their condition, deserted their most important duties, and permitted the most valuable years of life to pass away in idleness and prodigality ! How many, I fear, who, from the same cause, have gone farther on in misery ; who, acquiring habits of dissipation altogether unsuited to their means, now fill up the melancholy catalogue of adventurers of every base description ; and who look back, with unavailing sorrow, upon the fatal hour which first led them from the sobriety of early life, into

the society of those who possess prosperity only to abuse it.

2. There is, in the second place, an evil communication to the young, which arises from the abuse of learning and talents. Of all the employments of human wisdom, the noblest certainly, and the most genuine is, that of the instruction of the ignorance, and the support of the innocence of youth. Yet the world shews us, that there are men who have deserted this sublimest duty,—who please themselves in spreading doubt and unbelief,—and, under the magical name of prejudice, who delight to employ their powers in withdrawing all the most sacred principles of religion and morality. I stop not at present to tell, my brethren, from what weak vanity this inhuman conduct proceeds. I stop not to point out to you the tremendous effects which such doctrines have had, and ever must have upon the minds of the young. I would only recal to your remembrance, that, in this evil, we of elder years are concerned; that for their first and deepest sentiments of religion and virtue, the young must ever look up to us; that it is not our serious, but our careless conversation, which shews them the secret of our minds; that the levity of humour or of wit, is more fatal to their hearts than all the reasonings of infidelity;—and that, if we could leave them the wealth of worlds, we never could repay them, if we leave in their

tender minds one seed or moral doubt, or one principle of religious skepticism.

3. There is, in the last place, an evil communication to the young, from the society of the aged in vice itself. The cases I have hitherto mentioned, are those in which the young are rather corrupted indirectly than directly; and where the guilty are themselves in some degree unconscious of the evil they are doing. There are, however, we know, cases of another kind; there are men, who live to seduce the innocent,—to betray the unwary,—to initiate the thoughtless into the ways of guilt,—and who can look with apathy upon that present and final ruin of the human soul, which they are preparing. I speak not, my brethren, to such men. They meet us not here,—would to God there were nowhere else they met the young! Yet, I must say to all, that to this last stage of human baseness and infamy every vice conducts,—that it is the natural malignity of sin to look for new associates,—and that he who yields himself to any known vice, is not only in the way to the ruin of his own soul, but is in the way also to become at last the agent of the enemy of mankind, in the ruin of the innocent souls who trust, and are betrayed by him.

It is thus, my brethren, that “evil communication corrupts good manners.” It is thus also, often, that this is done by those who are unconscious of the evil they produce. It is a reason to

all of us, as I said, to call our ways to remembrance,—to the young to consider the great and eventful journey upon which they are going,—to those who are more advanced in life, to consider the example they are affording.

May God grant that these reflections may dwell with us all! that they who are entering into life may remember, that to the innocent is promised the kingdom of Heaven; and that they who are advanced in it, may remember the mighty rewards which await those “who lead others into the way of righteousness.”

SERMON XIII.

ON THE FAST, FEBRUARY 27, 1806.

PSALM LXXX. 19.

“O Lord God of Hosts! shew the light of thy countenance, and we shall be whole.”

THESE words of the King of Israel contain a very striking representation of that piety, which, amid all his errors, was yet the prevailing principle of his character. In some one of those seasons of national danger, of which his reign was full, “when his people were fed with the bread of tears,—when they were made a strife unto their neighbours, and their enemies laughed them to scorn,” we see him in silence ascending into the sanctuary of God, and hear him soliciting the aid of Him “who sitteth upon the cherubims.” Amid the darkness which surrounded him, he implores, not with the usual presumption of earthly prayer, that the God of Nature should visibly descend to their relief, but with the sublimer invocation that his religion taught, that “He would shew the light of his countenance;”—that he

would shew them what was the course they ought to pursue;—that he would display to them the path which their own wisdom could not discern; and then, with the confidence of faith, he foretells, that the prosperity of his people would return,—that the dangers in which they were involved would be dispelled,—and that they at last “would be whole.”

The sentiment which is here expressed by the Psalmist, is one in which every man and every age has participated. Amid the lesser evils of life, we are apt to trust to our own wisdom, and the wisdom of man is indeed mercifully proportioned to many of the common evils which assail him. But there are evils of another kind. There are seasons of darkness and calamity to which experience bears no relation; when various passions struggle for the mastery in the divided bosoms of the people; and when the feeble eye of human wisdom sees not the ends which it is fitting to pursue. In such moments, there is an instinctive impulse which leads us to prostrate ourselves before the Throne of Him “who inhabiteth eternity.” Under a conviction, (which lies at the bottom of the human heart, but which adversity alone calls forth,) under the conviction, that there is an order in nature, and that there is a mightier Wisdom than that of man, which presides over the events of humanity, we seek to know his will;—we supplicate him to teach us what we ought

to do ; and, amid the depth of our calamities, and amid the “dark waters” that surround us, to point out the way and the path that are his. It is in such moments that the necessity of religion to human happiness is most fully felt, and its power most fully experienced. The beautiful expression of the Psalmist is then realized ;—the light of the divine countenance then rises upon us ;—a sentiment more dear than that of our own wisdom,—the grateful sentiment of duty—begins to animate us. In submitting ourselves to his laws, we feel the presence of the Eternal Lawgiver ; and, confident in the light we have acquired, we return to the dangers and the calamities that surround us, animated with the belief of a wiser government, and resolute to perform the Omniscient will.

There has never been a period, my brethren, in the history of this country, when thoughts and resolutions of this solemn kind were so imperiously called for, as by its present circumstances and situation. The darkness that for so many years has been seen at a distance, begins to thicken around us ;—the maxims of ordinary experience, and the measures of ordinary statesmen have failed ;—and no human wisdom dares now to penetrate into the abyss which lies before us, or to foretell the issue of that mighty convulsion which we are doomed to behold. If we look around us, we see almost the theatre of Nature changed ;—empires and kingdoms coeval with our own, disap-

pear almost annually from our view ;—the alliances of blood ;—the relations of interest ;—the ties of religion ;—all the charities of social life that centuries of improvement had nourished and confirmed, dissolve before our eyes, as if at the spell of enchantment : And over all the finest portions of the earth, where patriotism had erected its bulwarks, and learning its faues, and piety her temples, we see the sanguinary tide of conquest prevail, and bury in its bosom the loftiest monuments of nations.

If, in this awful prospect, it is to our own country we look, there are circumstances of mortality to appal the most sanguine patriotism. While, but a few days ago, we commemorated the glory of our arms, we lamented, at the same time, the fall of that illustrious man by whom they were directed. Since that time, (short as the interval has been,) we have seen the mighty spirit * that, by a kind of hereditary right, governed the counsels of a free people, gathered to his fathers ; and, on a distant shore, that pure and upright mind expire,† which was carrying peace and tranquillity to the millions of our Eastern dominions. New men and new counsels occupy the eyes and the expectations of the people ; and while the unprejudiced mind follows them with its prayers, it is yet doomed to restrain any romantick hope, when it remembers how little former greatness has done, and how much former wisdom has been vain.

* Mr. Pitt

† Marquis Cornwallis.

It is under such circumstances of alarm that this eventful season opens ; and it is to prepare our minds for the approaching dangers, that the command of our Sovereign now assembles us in the house of God. It is a time, indeed, for deep and solemn thought : but I trust there is not one among us to whose heart it can give fear. There is something animating to every noble mind in the approach of great dangers ; and we are met together, with all our fellow citizens, upon this day, not to bewail ourselves in useless lamentation, but to exalt our minds to meet every coming danger, and to implore that wisdom and resolution from on High, which may fit us for the scenes we are destined to encounter.

1. It is our wisdom, in the first place, to prepare ourselves, by considering well the magnitude and extent of our danger. There is a weakness incident to men, and still more to nations, in the periods of splendour and prosperity, to underrate the calamities which may befall them, and to deride every voice that speaks to them of alarm. I trust, indeed, that no such weakness prevails among us ; yet I know not that the danger is seen in all its magnitude ; and every aspect of human affairs, whether of past or present times, seems to call us to vigilance and preparation. If we look to the times that are past, it is the ruins only of mankind that meet our eye. Nations as proud, as prosperous as ours, have fallen amid all their

greatness ; and a voice seems to issue from their tombs, to tell us, that it was not the hand of nature, the earthquake, the pestilence, or the storm, which had wrought their desolation, but the weakness, the crimes, and the cowardice of man. If we look to the present times, they display to us nothing but the power and the ferocity of that enemy, whose steps approach our shores. Over the once varied scenes of Europe, the torpid level of despotism now stagnates ; and the tide which has overwhelmed the rest of the world is rolling onward its accumulated waves towards us.

The question is not now, (as in the petty controversies of usual warfare,) of provinces or of allies,—of infant colonies, or remote dependencies. It is, Whether our country itself is to exist or to perish?—Whether this mighty empire is at once to be dissolved, and to be erased from the catalogue of nations?

2. If such be our danger, it is our wisdom, in the second place, to consider well what are the means by which it can be withstood. We live not under a dispensation in which the Almighty will visibly bare his arm, as in the protection of his ancient and “chosen people,”—but we live in a world of order and of justice ; and there is a beneficent law of Providence, which every where proportions the resources of the human mind to the difficulties with which it is to contend, and which, with the trials which it brings, brings also

the means by which they may be overcome. Other nations have experienced the conflicts with which we are now assailed;—other conquerors have appeared in the history of former ages, and have been baffled by the spirit of freemen;—and the noblest record which history displays of national glory, is that of those who, under every disadvantage, have discomfited the hosts of tyranny, and thought nothing lost when they preserved their honour and their freedom. If we look farther into the subject,—if we look to the human causes of their success,—we shall find that they have every where resolved themselves into these, union, bravery, and publick spirit. The history of the past world, dark as it may appear, and loaded as it is with the vices of men, contains not a single instance, perhaps, in which those nations were overcome, who were at once free, and brave, and united; and the history of the present world, amid all its darkness, tells us in every hour, that it is not alone the might of the conqueror which has prevailed, but the baseness, the selfishness, and the divisions of the conquered. It is with a sentiment of thankfulness, and yet of dread, that I say, that amid all the dangers which surround us, the means of safety are yet in our own hands: and that the same Providence which has called us to the trial, has afforded us also the power of overcoming it. We have wealth, if we have the patriotism to employ it;—we have numbers, if

our hearts are united ;—we have arms, if we have bravery to wield them. The beneficence of Heaven has bestowed upon us all the means by which either our freedom or our honour can be maintained. The world are to be the spectators of the conflict ; and, in the solemn pause that precedes the day of struggle, it is the business of every man to prepare that armour of the soul, which may fit him for the hardships he is to endure.

3. There is yet, however, my brethren, another and a mightier preparation, and there is an advantage superiour to every other, with which we can enter upon the scene of conflict,—the advantage that our cause is just,—that it is the cause alike of our freedom, and our faith,—and that the present and the eternal interests of our people are involved in its defence. In such a cause, we need no dark oracle to direct us. Although the voice of human wisdom were silent, the voice of the Almighty speaks to us sufficiently, when it speaks to us in conscience. Deep as may be the clouds that overshadow the future, the finger of religion points securely to the path of safety, when it points to the path of duty.

It is *here*, therefore, my brethren, that, in these dark hours, we ought to be found. It is around the altar of God that we should, in these moments, assemble with all the people of our land ; and while his will is manifested by the duties he has given us to perform, that we should devote our-

selves to the cause in which we are engaged, and invoke, with uplifted hands, the "spirit from on high," to animate us in their discharge.

It is a cause in which no doubt hangs upon the soldier's heart, or weakens the soldier's arm. It is no warfare of national pride, or commercial avarice, or military ambition, that now calls him into the field. It is the simple and the sanctified defence of his country;—it is the defence, in our own land, of whatever antiquity has rendered dear, or experience valuable, or religion sacred;—it is, in a greater view, the defence of the moral constitution of human nature; the defence of truth and justice and order throughout the world. Other nations in the history of man, have been called to the defence of their own freedom; to us is now committed the sublimer duty of vindicating the freedom of social man, and re-establishing the prosperity of the civilized world.

It is a cause, in another view, in which the blessings of the wise, and the prayers of the good, follow us from the remotest habitations of man. If to act in the presence of many spectators be a motive, even to the feeblest mind, to act nobly,—how lofty are the achievements, which, in these eventful hours, are demanded of this country? The eyes of the whole European continent are fixed upon it, as upon the champion of their common cause. There is not a country where the heart of the inhabitant does not throb with hope or with fear, at the sound of our name;—there is not an

altar in the whole baptized world, from which the prayer of the pious does not silently arise for the success of our arms.

It is a cause, in a greater view, in which the unchangeable laws of the Almighty are with us. The world has seen other conquerors and other despots. It has wept before the march of temporary ambition, and bled beneath the sword of transitory conquest. But nature has reassumed her rights; and while conquerors have sunk into an execrated grave, and tyrants have perished in the zenith of their power, the race of men have raised again their dejected heads, and peace, and order, and freedom have spread themselves throughout the world. Such, my brethren, will also be the termination of the tragedy of our day, and such is the confidence which they ought ever to maintain, upon whom "the Almighty hath lifted up the light of his countenance." We are witnessing, indeed, the most tremendous spectacle which the theatre of nature has ever exhibited, of the pride and ambition of man. For years, our attention has been fixed upon that great and guilty country, which has been fertile in nothing but revolution, and from which, amid the clouds that cover it, we have seen at last that dark and shapeless form arise, which, like the vision that appalled the King of Babylon, "hath its legs of iron, and its arms of brass." We have seen it extend its terrifiick shadow over every surrounding people, and the sinews of man

to wither at its approach. We see it now collecting all its might, and thinking to change times, and laws, and speaking great words against the Most High. Yet, while our eye strains to measure its dimensions, and our ear shrinks at the threatening of its voice, let us survey it with the searching eye of the prophet, and we shall see, that its *feet* are of base and perishable clay. Amid all the terrors of its brightness, it has no foundation in the moral stability of justice. It is irradiated by no beam from Heaven,—it is blessed by no prayer of man,—it is worshipped with no gratitude of the patriot heart. It may remain for the time, or the times that are appointed it. But the awful hour is on the wing, when the universe will resound with its fall; and that sun which measures out, as with reluctance, the length of its impious reign, will one day pour his undecaying beams amid its ruins, and bring forth, from the earth which it has overshadowed, the promises of a greater spring.

There are limits in the moral as well as in the material system to the dominion of evil; there are limits to the guilt and injustice of nations, as well as of individuals. There is a time when cunning ceases to delude, and hypocrisy to deceive;—when power ceases to overawe, and oppression will no longer be borne. Even now that period seems to be approaching. It is impossible that man can become retrograde in his progress;—it is impossible that the hands of the oppressed can longer

beckon the approach of a power which comes to load them only with heavier chains ;—it is impossible that the nations of Europe, cradled in civilization, and baptized into the liberty of the children of God, can long continue to bend their free-born heads before the feet of foreign domination, or that they can suffer the stream of knowledge which so long has animated their soil, to terminate at last in the deep stagnation of military despotism. Even the country itself which has given it birth, cannot long submit to its rule ;—it bleeds in the hour that it triumphs :—it is goaded to exertions which it loaths ;—its laurels are wet with the tears of those who are bereaved of their children. 'The virtuous man shudders when he beholds the crimes and the guilt of his country ; and the heart of the pious man faileth him, when he looks forward to the "things that are coming" upon those banners which are raised against the rights of man, and which are unblessed by the voice of Heaven.

It was the high sentiment of ancient patriotism, "never to despair of the commonwealth." It is the nobler sentiment of Christian piety, never to despair of the fortunes of the human race. Privileged to enter into the Temple of the God of Hosts, to the Christian eye it is given to behold the "light of His countenance ;" and dark and dangerous as may be the wilderness through which it is doomed to pass, before it are still steadily displayed the glories of the "promised land."

If these be the high sentiments, my brethren, with which we have met this day ;—if the same Providence which has united us in devotion, has united also our hearts and our resolutions,—if one feeling of duty has animated every soul, and one prayer for assistance has breathed from every bosom, then “let not our hearts be troubled.”—Our faith, our freedom, our country, “will yet be whole.” “The might of God will arise” in our hearts, and by our arms “will his enemies be scattered.” “The earth will again bring forth her increase, and God, even our own God, will give us his blessing. God will bless us : and all the ends of the world will fear Him.”

SERMON XIV.

ON FREEDOM OF THOUGHT.

1 ST. PETER ii. 16.

“As free, and not using your liberty as a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.”

It has often been observed in the history of learning, that one of the most fertile sources of error consists in the ambiguity of words. The observation is unfortunately equally applicable to the history of morality; and they who have attended to the causes by which the understanding is misled from the imperfections of language, will not be surprised at the deeper errors into which similar causes may mislead the heart. For the general principles of human conduct, we have general appellations. But for the excess or the defect of these principles, we have no distinct or specific names; and we are all willing to shelter ourselves under the ambiguity of a word, when conscience tells us that we are guilty with regard to what it really means. It is thus that avarice calls itself prudence, and profusion, generosity;—

that presumption assumes the name of ambition, and party spirit that of patriotism ;—and that, according to the various dispositions of our character, some of the worst and most malignant vices of our nature are sheltered, in our apprehension, under the most sounding appellations of virtue.

Of this kind, there is not perhaps one in the wide circle of human weakness which has been productive of more fatal effects than the name of Freedom of Thought. It is a term, which in itself expresses much greatness and exaltation of mind ; but it is one also which covers ambiguities that have been fatal to thousands, and under which have been concealed many of the darkest and most malignant dispositions that have ever debased the character of man. If we consider it, in its first aspect, it is the great and majestick principle of all human improvement,—the source from which has sprung much of all that dignifies or adorns the society of men. It is this which, in private life, has ministered in every age to the progress of society,—which has created its opulence, and extended its comforts, and given to all the arts of life their origin and progression. It is this, in the history of science, which has dispelled the darkness of ignorance and of prejudice, which has gradually extended, with the progress of time, the limits of human knowledge, and raised, by degrees, the eye of man to the throne “of Him that inhabiteth eternity.” It is this, in the same

manner, in publick life, which has given to society itself its progress, which, disdainig the narrow institutions of antiquity, has sought for more perfect models of legislation, and which has laboured to establish the prosperity of nations, upon the unchanging principles of justice and of nature. Such have been the consequences of the freedom and independence of thought, when we consider it in its first aspect.

There is, however, another view of the subject; and we are constrained to acknowledge, that, from the same principle have arisen some of the most fatal evils with which humanity has ever been disturbed or afflicted. It is hence, in every age, that the most sacred principles of religion and of virtue have been shaken or undermined; and that the most majestick truths which the human understanding can attain, have been ranked with the prejudices of infancy:—it is hence that the history of science has been degraded, in almost every age, by the dreams and imaginations of men; and that the philosopher, instead of regarding nature as the workmanship of the Most High, has dared to approach to its investigation, only to inscribe his feeble name upon the altar where he ought to have worshipped:—It is hence, in the publick affairs of men, that those bold and unprincipled speculations have arisen, which have paused neither at the majesty of the throne, nor the sanctity of the altar; and which, under the name of liberty,

have cloaked the basest maliciousness of which the human heart is capable,—that of hazarding the peace and happiness of millions for the sake of its own poor and evanescent fame. Such have been the effects of Freedom of Thought, when we consider it under its second aspect.

What then is the distinction between principles to which the same name applies? When shall we ascertain that the one ceases to be virtuous, and that the other begins to become criminal? And still more, in what manner can we decide in our own cases, whether, in the employment of the native liberty of thought, we are acting like virtuous or like guilty men? These are questions of no mean importance. There is not one of us to whom they do not apply, either in relation to the regulation of our own thoughts, or in relation to the influence that our conversation may have on those around us. They are of still more importance to a peculiar class of those who hear me,—I mean, to the young; to those who have entered upon the magnificent career of learning; to whom education is unfolding all the powers of intellectual wisdom; and who are preparing themselves, in various ways, for the highest employment which life can offer, that of being the teachers and instructors of mankind. To them these questions are immeasurably important. They suit their age, their circumstances, and the ardent generosity of their youth; and I trust,

therefore, they will not withhold from me their attention, while I state, in a few words, the simple answer of conscience and of nature to this inquiry.

That energy, then, and independence of thought, which the Apostle describes under the name of liberty, may be considered in two views; and in one or other of these views is necessarily employed by every man who exercises it. It is either employed as a means, or as an end;—it is either employed as a means for the purposes for which the Author of Nature bestowed it, or as an end which man creates for himself, and independent of the purpose for which it was bestowed. It is in this simple distinction, I apprehend, that we shall find the answer to all our inquiries.

1. The great purpose for which the powers and the liberty of thought were bestowed, was for the discovery of Truth; for the discovery of those speculative truths which conduct us to the love of God, and of those practical truths which enable us to be the ministers of good to man; and liberty and independence of thought have been the means of conducting the progress of the generations of men, and of raising every succeeding age above the knowledge and the usefulness of that which preceded it. When, therefore, freedom of thought is employed as a means to these its destined ends; when it is devoted to the simple investigation of truth,—and looks to

nothing for reward, but to the discovery of truth, —it is then, in every case, a noble and a virtuous principle, and he who feels it is acting from some of the most respectable motives of his nature. He is acting, in the first place, in conformity to the laws of his constitution, and has the secret voice of conscience applauding him amid every difficulty of his progress. He is acting, in the second place, with the dignity that belongs to the character of man ; and, while the world around him are swayed either by the prejudices of antiquity, or by the idler prejudices of novelty, he stands as the arbiter of the contest, and as superiour to all the prejudices which influence lower minds. He is acting still farther, in the lofty language of the apostle, “as the servant of “God,” employing the mighty talents of thought and reflection to their genuine ends ; and thus fitting himself to be the minister of wisdom and of happiness, not only to his own generation, but to all the future generations of men.

2. When freedom of thought is employed, in the second manner, when it is employed as an end in itself, it is a principle which arises from very different causes, and is productive of very different effects. There is naturally much admiration due to that strength and independence of mind which can detect error, or which can discover truth ;—and there is every where, accordingly, much genuine admiration paid to it. It is in this

admiration that the danger and the snare consists. Because freedom of thought has been the great instrument of the discovery of truth, it is hastily (but not unnaturally) concluded, that all this is due to the freedom of thought itself; and the admiration which the world gives is attributed, not to the effects which are produced, but to the talents or the energy which produces them. It is hence, in every age, that the young, the vain, and the selfish, are misled, or mislead themselves;—that the young are misled by their admiration of talents, without considering the ends to which they are directed;—that the vain imagine they can give themselves reputation by novelty of opinion, without considering whither these opinions lead;—and that the selfish, looking to nothing but their own momentary fame, prostitute with willingness the noblest acquisitions of their nature, and disregard alike the admonitions of God, and the most sacred interests of human kind. What the consequences have been of these base and malignant passions, in every age of the world, and in every department of human knowledge, it would be unnecessary for me to repeat to those who hear me. It is they, as you well know, far more than the imperfections of understanding, which have retarded the progress of truth in every direction, and multiplied those vain and presumptuous speculations, which it is now the business of true philosophy to unlearn and to despise. It is they, still

more, which have most fatally mingled themselves with the business of our moral being ; which have started doubts which they wished not to resolve, and created difficulties, which, on all other subjects, they would have despised ; which have sought to withdraw the Sun of Righteousness from the firmament to which every eye in nature is turned ; and which, under the cloak of liberty, with a maliciousness of which one would have thought the human heart incapable. have deliberately perverted all the powers of understanding, which were given for the discovery of Truth, to the creation of doubt, and the dissemination of infidelity.

Such is then, my young friends, the plain answer to this important inquiry ; and such the standard by which you can yourselves determine whether you are to be the servants of God, or the servants of the maliciousness of man. If, in these happy but eventful hours of education, you feel the genuine love of truth ;—if, with the powers which are given you, you feel at the same time the mighty purpose for which they were given ;—if, in generous ardour for the extension of knowledge and of happiness, you forget yourselves and the little vanity of your hour ;—if, in short, you feel that opinions are valuable in your estimation, not because they are *free*, but because they are *true*, then go on, in the sight of God and of man, to the true honours of your moral and intellectual

being. It is in this discipline you can acquire for yourselves permanent fame ;—it is thus you can prepare yourselves to be the benefactors of mankind ;—it is thus that you can become the servants of God, and be the ministers of his benevolence to a lower world.

But if it be otherwise, my young friends, if vanity and presumption have already seized upon your minds, fitted for better things ; if, in the employment of the powers of thought, you look only to your own distinction, and care not for the ends for which they were given ; if the name of genius has more influence upon your minds than the name of truth ; if, in short, in your own bosoms you feel, that opinions are become valuable to you, not because they are *true*, but because they are *free*, pause, I beseech you, before you advance farther. You are hazarding every thing that is most dear to the mind of man ;—you are hazarding your fame, your usefulness, and your salvation ;—and you are sacrificing, for the vanity of an hour, every thing for which every generous and noble mind lives, and would wish to live.

I cannot speak to your age, my brethren, with all the language which this place would justify ; I will speak to you only on the principle of your education ; and I will request you, in the first place, to look back, from that eminence upon which you stand, to the past ages, which you can now survey with the calmness of philosophy.

Look back, then, to those names or to those works which the stream of ancient time has brought to you ; to those names which first have warmed your hearts to glory ; which are made sacred to you by the first impressions they gave you of the greatness of your nature, and of which these early impressions are confirmed by the voice of every age that has succeeded them ;—look back, I beseech you, to such names ; and ask yourselves what was their character ? you will find that it rests in this alone, that they were the followers of truth,—that they devoted all their powers to that mighty pursuit, of which conscience prescribed the end,—and that neither the neglect nor the applause of their age could seduce them from the lofty path which was presented to them. They are gone, and the grave has covered them for many hundred years ;—but they live in the memory of mankind ; they breathe, even to present times, the instructions of virtue, and the sentiments of piety ; and, with an immortality emblematick of their own, they will remain to every future age, the friends and the benefactors of the world.

Look back, I beseech you, on the other hand, to a different history ; to the history of those whose names degrade the era of their existence, whose genius has been devoted only to the corruption of private morals, or the destruction of publick virtue, and whose works remain, amid the

stream of time, as the monuments of human infamy;—and ask yourselves what also was their character? what was the imperious motive which could thus dissolve all the obligations of conscience, and all the foundations of honourable fame? you will find that it rests in simple vanity; in the wish to be distinguished by the freedom, when they could not be distinguished by the truth of their opinions; and in the dark desperation of sacrificing every thing for which the virtuous live, for the sake of a base and momentary fame. They too are gone, and the grave has sheltered them from the scorn and indignation of man. But their works remain, to diffuse poison through every future race, to entail the vice and guilt by which their authors can no longer profit, upon every succeeding generation; and to mark to mankind, to what a length and continuity of guilt the liberty of thought can go, when it ceases to be the servant of God, and becomes the slave of its own malicious vanity.

From this prospect of the past, turn your eyes, my young friends, to the prospect of the future. There is a voice at that altar, and there is a voice in the altar of your own hearts, which speaks to you of immortality. Listen then, I beseech you, to its prophetick declarations; and while you follow in dread pursuit the spirits of those who have gone before you, ask yourselves in what mansions these different characters ought now to

dwell? When you follow the path of the first, of those who have devoted here all the powers of understanding to the discovery or the support of those truths by which God is glorified, and man made wiser and better,—your imagination assumes the confidence of faith, and you see them now the companions of the just whose spirits are made perfect,—the associates of the wise and good of every age,—the friends of the angels and the archangels who bear the errands of mercy amid unnumbered worlds, and surrounding the throne of Him, whom, through the veil of mortality, they dared to seek, and whom now “they see, not darkly, but as He is.”

If you follow the path of the second, of those who have prostituted the noblest gifts of nature to the purposes of their own selfishness; and who, in raising themselves to the distinction of an hour, have trampled upon all the most sacred and genuine truths of their being,—where is it, my brethren, to which the conscience of your imagination leads, and who are the fit companions of such spirits? Your eye, perhaps, recoils from the prospect; yet, remember, my friends, that the fundamental principle of nature is justice,—that “what a man soweth, he must also reap;”—“that of those to whom much is given, much must be required;” and that learning and genius, while they carry with them the highest honours of which man is capable, carry with

them, at the same time, the deepest responsibility which his nature can either contract or pay.

On that magnificent career, my young friends, you are now entering. Science is opening to you all her stores of honour and of usefulness, and the prayers of parents and of friends are following you, when you are unconscious of them. —Pause then, I beseech you, in the calm morning of your day, and form to yourselves the high resolutions by which it may be afterwards distinguished. Look back with the eye of memory to the past, and see on what foundations all the lasting honours of men are founded ;—look forward with the eye of faith to the future ; and, while you see the different issues of moral being, ask yourselves to which of these classes of existence you wish to belong. But first, and most of all, let the dawn of your being be sanctified by the devotion which becomes those who are called to be the servants of God ; let the first fruits of your understanding be offered to the service of Him whose inspiration gave it ; and while you look forward to the final issues of your existence, let it never cease to be your prayer, that you may think and act like all the wise and good that have gone before you, that so your “latter end may be like theirs.”

SERMON XV.

ON THE GENERAL FAST, FEBRUARY 9, 1809.

ST. MATTHEW XVI. 3.

“Can ye not discern the signs of the times?”

IN these words, our Saviour replied to the national prejudices, and to the national arrogance of the Jewish people. It was with them (even under their peculiar dispensation) as it is with mankind in general. They valued themselves as being the favourite people of Heaven: they conceived that no errors or vices of their own could ever forfeit the covenant made with their fathers: and they forgot, amid the pursuits of temporary power, all the promises which their peculiar records gave of a spiritual kingdom, and of a moral dominion.

The occasion on which these memorable words were spoken, was the following:—

“The Pharisees also, with the Sadducees, came, and tempting, desired him that he would shew them a sign from Heaven.” He answered, and

“ said unto them, when it is evening ye say, it will
 “ be fair weather, for the sky is red ; and, in the
 “ morning, it will be foul weather to-day, for the
 “ sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites ! ye
 “ can discern the face of the sky, but can ye not
 “ discern the signs of the times ?”

In these words, there are two things remarkable :—

1. The first is the assertion that there are signs of the times : that, as in the natural world, there are signs established by the beneficence of Heaven, from the observation of which the business of life may be carried on ; so in the moral world, in the conduct of individuals and of nations, there are also signs, established by the same beneficence ; from which the thoughtful mind may foretel the consequences that must follow, and from the observation of which it may regulate its future conduct. It is upon this foresight, upon this interpretation of the signs that individuals or nations exhibit, that the wise and the virtuous of every age can act ; by which they are enabled to profit by the experience of others : by which they are taught what to avoid, and what to pursue ; and by which they are perpetually reminded, that there is in nature a greater administration than that of men, to which they ought to be subject, and that their loftiest wisdom consists in obeying the signs which that administration displays.

2. The words of the text seem to convey another meaning, a meaning of reproach,—of reproach to the people of that, and of every succeeding generation, for their inattention to the indications of Heaven. It was not that the Pharisees and the Sadducees of that unhappy age were incapable of discerning the signs which the times afforded them ; it was that they would not discern them. They were the *parties* of that devoted country ; they were rivals in power, in influence, in consequence ; and while Heaven threatened, and prophecy foretold, and Rome in consequence was in arms, they closed their eyes to all the signs of Heaven and of earth ; and, under the hypocrisy of religion, were ardent only for the low and momentary ends of vulgar ambition.

Whenever, my brethren, a nation is assembled before the Throne of God ;—whenever, in the midst of publick danger or calamity, the command of a sovereign unites the voices of his people in supplication for the assistance of Heaven, I know not that there is any subject of meditation more fit for so solemn an occasion, than that which is suggested by the words of the text.

It is not in obeying the ritual of a prescribed devotion,—it is not in merely following the multitude into the house of God, and joining in words which the heart neither weighs nor feels,—that the solemn duty of days like the present can be performed. It is in raising our thoughts to the ad-

ministration of the universe;—in contemplating the laws which the Almighty has given to the social world;—in marking, amid the calamities of nations, the operations of His justice, and His wisdom; and, by thus observing the signs of His will, in learning the path of our duty. From the distractions and the miseries of the world, religion calls us into the Temple of God; and the voice of our Saviour there meets us to say, that, amid all the desolations around us, there are signs of the care and the providence of Heaven, and that they are exhibited for our instruction.

If ever there was a period when the signs of the times were solemn and portentous to mankind in general, and to the inhabitants of this country in particular, it is doubtless the present. We are spectators of the greatest and most awful events upon which the eye of man has ever gazed. We have been witnessing for years the progress of that mighty stream of conquest and of desolation, which has been spreading over the fairest portions of the civilized world. Year after year, we have seen it rolling forward its sanguinary tide, unchecked, and unexhausted; and burying in its progressive wave, the riches of nature, the landmarks of nations, and all the most venerable institutions of human policy. In the last season we have seen it pause indeed—but pause only for a moment; and, while our hearts were throbbing with the hope that a barrier was at last opposed to

its fury, we have been doomed to see it return with accumulated force ; and soon (I fear) in spite of all the profusion of British generosity,—in spite of all the energy of British valour,—in spite of the sacrifice of the noblest blood which British heroism can shed,—to see it overwhelm that country, which we have in vain endeavoured to protect, in the stream of general desolation. Amid the wreck of the nations of Europe, this country stands now insulated and alone. But we see the torrent gathering around us ;—and it is fit that, on such solemnities as this, we should raise our eyes to Heaven, and implore the direction and the assistance of Him who alone can say, “hitherto shalt thou come, “and no farther ;” and who yet may make us the instruments of his power, “in stilling the noise of “the waves, and the madness of the people.”

It were to be ignorant or inattentive to the signs which the times present to us, to say that they were the consequences of military prowess, and military numbers alone. The world, in its history, has seen many conquerors, but it has seen them, too, checked in their career, and driven back into the regions which nursed them. There is hardly a nation upon earth, which has not (at least in the annals of its earlier story) its tale to tell, of national prowess and independence ;—which has not to number the hosts that were brought in array against it ; and which does not point, with exultation, to that illustrious page of its history, which

contains the narrative of their defeat and disgrace. There is, in truth, so deep and so active a love of country in the bosom of mankind ;—there are so many cords of affection by which it is wound round the heart of man ;—there is so much energy in freedom, so much elevation in publick virtue, and, even at the last, so much fortitude in despair, that we may take for granted, whenever nations fall prostrate before the sword of an invader, that the origin of their fall is not so much in external violence, as in internal decay ;—and that there must have been some previous and overpowering causes in the nature of government itself, which alone could reconcile the hearts of men to the wretchedness of ignominy and submission.

What have been the civil or political causes which have led to the general ruin in which we see all the nations of Europe involved ;—what were the seeds which have been sown, and which have now sprung up into legions of armed men, it is the business of the historian and the philosopher to investigate. It is the duty of this place, my brethren, it is the duty of all of us in days like the present, to direct our attention to a greater inquiry. It is our duty to look to the moral causes which have been operating ; to discern the national sins, which are now visited by so much national suffering ; and, when we see the mighty tragedy concluded, to learn the moral which it is destined to convey to us, and to every future people.

In such an inquiry, I fear, we shall be at no loss in discerning the signs of the evils that have arrived : nor is there any one of us, perhaps, so regardless of the times in which we have lived, as not to have felt some prophetick fears of what was coming upon the earth.

We shall discern them, in the first place, in the corruptions of religion ; in the sins of that proud but servile hierarchy, which poisoned, at its source, the spring of more than mortal life ;— which cherished superstition only that it might ensure obedience ;—and which bound the noblest faculties of the human soul in chains, that it might make them the instruments of its own temporal and impious power.

We shall discern them, in the second place, in the sins of statesmen ; in those maxims of political conduct which sacrificed justice to experience ; which gave to cunning and deceit the names of wisdom and of policy ; and which never hesitated to waste the blood and the treasures of nations, to gratify either the rivalship of kings, or the ambition of their ministers.

We shall find them, in the third place, in the injustice of internal government ; in the exclusion of the great body of the people from all share in the administration of their country ;—in the haughty neglect of their rights, their interests, and their feelings ;—and in the subjugation of the whole social system to the will of certain individuals, or certain hereditary orders of men.

We shall find them, in another view, in every country we contemplate, in the personal vices of the great and the powerful ; in that licentiousness of manners, which never fails to be the consequence of superiority to laws and to publick opinion ;—which offends the minds of men, at the same time that it corrupts them ;—and which, by a fatal contagion, reaches not only into the business, but into the bosoms of all who are below them.

We shall find them, in the last place, in the guilt of genius and of talents ; in that base prostitution, by which they who were destined by Heaven to be the instructors of mankind, have lent themselves either to be the slaves of power, the panders of courtly vice, or the apostles of sedition ; and, for the sake of a guilty celebrity, have trembled not at dissolving, at one time, all the ties of private virtue, and, at another, all the obligations of social duty.

Such have been the signs of the times in which we have lived ; the signs, in some degree or other, in every country of the continent, of those coming calamities which we are now doomed to behold ; and which, though they were derided by the Pharisees and the Sadducees of their day, were significant to every religious and every thoughtful mind, of the dissolution of the nations which presented them. They signified, that whenever vice, and injustice, and oppression reign, the period of

society has arrived:—they signified, that Heaven visits the sins of those who govern mankind, by alienating the hearts of the governed;—and that, whatever may be the instinctive love of country, there is a limit of duty, beyond which the heart of the citizen is cold, and his hand is feeble:—they signified, that when once the vital principle of society is gone, its natural termination is approaching;—and that, although it may retain the form and semblance of strength, it is yet destined to dissolve at the first touch of the steel of the invader.

—“When thy judgments are in the earth,” saith the prophet, “the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.”—It is in these words, my brethren, that the great moral of the tragedy of nations is to be found. It is in them we are reminded, that there is a throne of justice in nature;—that there are laws of righteousness prescribed to nations as well as to individuals;—that whenever the happiness of the whole is sacrificed to the power or the interests of the few, the seeds of dissolution are sown;—that the means by which the Almighty visits the sins of society, is not by the visitation of the earthquake or the pestilence, but by the silent operation of the principles of human nature itself;—and that the same instincts which first assemble men into society, are destined to separate them again, whenever the ends of society are not fulfilled.

It is upon this awful and prophetick spectacle, that you, my brethren, and the people of this country, now look. Years have been passing, and in every one of them you have seen the same signs accomplished. What impression it is to make upon your minds, I presume not to say; I will repeat only the awful words of the Saviour of the world, that these are the signs of the Providence of Heaven, and that they are given that ye may discern them.

Were it the inhabitants of any other country whom it was now my duty to address, I know not that I could add to these words any accents of political comfort: But in this country, I thank God that I can, and that I ought to add words, not only of comfort, but of animation. I dare not say, indeed, that we partake not in the infirmity or in the guilt of human nature. I dare not say, that there is no where injustice in our rule, nor oppression in our government. I dare not say, that, in looking at the annals of our day, the eye of science will find every thing wise, or the eye of piety find every thing virtuous. But in the great and gigantick sins of other nations, I do trust I may say that we have little participation. I trust that there is among us a living spirit of religion, of patriotism, and of private virtue. I trust, that the peculiar blessings with which Providence has visited us; that that reformation which purified our religion, and that revolution which fixed our

constitution, have given to the people of this land a corresponding character of religious principle, and of civil energy, which neither prosperity can corrupt, nor adversity subdue. I trust, that the breath of freedom, which the lowest among us inhales with his birth, while it has poured prosperity through every vein and artery of the state, has poured along with it the spirit of loyalty, the vigour of patriotism, and the energy of independence. Amid the waves of the ocean, I trust we shall still present to mankind the beacon which may enlighten and direct them : and that, among the millions of our population, there is not one heart so base, or one arm so coward, as to shrink from sacrificing life itself, in defence of the majestick fabrick of our laws, and the grey hairs of our anointed Sovereign.

Yet,—whatever may be our hopes, and whatever may be our prayers, let it never be forgotten what are our dangers. They are not the dangers of a day, or of a season. The clouds which so long have hung around us, seem now to be gathering into the final storm. From one end almost of Europe to the other, we see the various nations which inhabit it marshalled against us. We see their mingled forces wielded by that powerful arm which victory has strung with new vigour ; and their march directed by that penetrating eye, which marks, with cool decision, wherever nature, or policy, or vice, has made us vulnerable, and which permits no slumber of peace to quench its malignant ambition.

If such be the signs of the times, they are to us the summons to duty. Amid the sunshine of prosperity, there is a character of national gayety and levity, which suits, in some degree, with the character of the times, and which may be forgiven at least, if it is not approved. But the hours of danger demand another character ; and the voice of Heaven calls then for loftier purposes, and sublimer energies. In such hours, it calls upon vice to pause, and folly to think, and party to be silent. It calls upon the citizen of every rank to prepare his mind for the scenes that may follow ; to remember what are the blessings which are included in the name of his *country* ; and to supplicate from Heaven that strength which may enable him, in its hour of peril, to defend and to save it. It calls upon the great and the affluent to lay their wealth at the feet of their country ; to vindicate their distinction, by the distinction of their patriotism ; and to scorn every calculation of private interest, when the interest of their native land is in danger. It calls upon the poor man to harden his mind against the conflict in which he must act or suffer ; to brave those additions to penury, which the struggle for national existence must produce ; and to prepare himself, in the last rank, to defend the humble cottage, which is yet the abode of liberty and of religion.

But chiefly you, my young friends ! It is you, chiefly, whom the voice of religion now summons to duty. You are entering upon the stage of time !

and upon that stage great interests are depending, and great events are to be transacted. In your day, the fate of your country will, to all human appearance, be determined: and whether it is to exist or to fall, will depend upon the wisdom of your councils, and the vigour of your arms. It is a time, therefore, for you to encourage in your bosoms all the native generosity of youth; to scorn every vice that can debase, and every folly that can enervate; to train your minds for scenes of firm enterprise and high achievement; to clothe yourselves in the armour of that faith in which you were baptized; and, with the lofty devotion of freemen, to swear to Heaven and to mankind, never to surrender to a tyrant the inheritance you have received from your fathers.

Do you want motives, my brethren, to animate you to duty? They are around you,—they are in every scene of that country, which is now “like the garden of Eden before you,” and which the sword of a conqueror would convert into a “desolate wilderness.” The names you bear are the names of patriots and of heroes; the ground on which you tread has been often wet with the blood of the invader; the mountains of your country rise around you, to remind you that on their summits no hostile banner was ever reared; and that from them the eye of your ancestors saw the tide even of Roman invasion roll back.

Do you want examples, my young friends! to direct your patriotism? Go not to the records of other countries or of other climes. Go to the annals of your own country; to the examples which every page of them presents to you, and which teach you how the patriot can live, and how the freeman can die.—Go to that recent page which is yet wet with your tears; to the example of that illustrious man,* whose *unconfined* remains repose, alas, far from the sepulchre of his fathers; but whose ascending Spirit now lets fall the mantle of its glory, to cover the land which gave him birth; and who has left to mankind a name at the sound of which, in every succeeding age, the heart of the patriot will throb,—when tyrants shall have ceased to reign, and when the world shall have awakened to truth, to victory, and to freedom.

* Sir John Moore.

SERMON XVI.

ON AUTUMN.

GENESIS xxiv. 63.

“And Isaac went out to meditate in the field, at the even-tide.”

HOWEVER much the necessities and the duties of life call upon us for activity, there are other principles of our being which lead us to meditation. The same divine inspiration which hath given us understanding, hath provided also the scenes in which it ought to be employed ; and the perfection of our nature consists, not in the separation, but in the union of contemplation and of action. “To “every thing,” says the wise man, “there is a “season ;” and, if there are times when the Day-spring summons us to activity,—there are times also, when, like the patriarch in the text, we are invited to “meditate in the field, at the even-tide.”

In the generality of men, however, there is some secret unwillingness to be employed in the labour of meditation ;—there is a kind of gloom that is

very early associated with it in the minds of the young; and when manhood arrives, the prosperous are too gay, and the active too busy, to listen to the voice that suggests it. It is thus, that, even in good minds, some of the most beneficial propensities of their nature are insensibly obliterated;—that all the inviting and propitious seasons of thought and of solitude are neglected;—and that their attention turns unconsciously from the very scenes where the benevolence of nature has provided for them the amplest sources of tranquillity and of repose.

I wish, at present, to present some views in opposition to this prevailing weakness;—to shew you, that if there are seasons when the inspiration of the Almighty calls us to meditation, it is to lead us to wisdom and to happiness;—that there is an established train of thought, which such seasons necessarily awaken;—and that in the even-tide, as well as in the sunshine of life, the same great ends are pursued, by which He that made us wisheth that we should not only be wise here, but become wise unto salvation.

1. There is an even-tide in the day,—an hour when the sun retires, and the shadows fall, and when nature assumes the appearances of soberness and silence. It is an hour from which every where the thoughtless fly, as peopled only in their imagination with images of gloom;—it is the hour, on the other hand, which, in every age, the wise

have loved, as bringing with it sentiments and affections more valuable than all the splendours of the day.

Its first impression is to still all the turbulence of thought or passion which the day may have brought forth. We follow, with our eye, the descending sun,—we listen to the decaying sounds of labour and of toil,—and, when all the fields are silent around us, we feel a kindred stillness to breathe upon our souls, and to calm them from the agitations of society. From this first impression, there is a second which naturally follows it;—in the day we are living with men,—in the even-tide we begin to live with nature;—we see the world withdrawn from us,—the shades of night darken over the habitations of men, and we feel ourselves alone. It is an hour, fitted, as it would seem, by Him who made us, to still, but with gentle hand, the throb of every unruly passion, and the ardour of every impure desire; and, while it veils for a time the world that misleads us, to awaken in our hearts those legitimate affections which the heat of the day may have dissolved. There is yet a farther scene it presents to us:—While the world withdraws from us, and while the shades of the evening darken upon our dwellings, the splendours of the firmament come forward to our view. In the moments when earth is overshadowed, Heaven opens to our eyes the radiance of a sublimer being; our hearts follow

the successive splendours of the scene ; and while we forget, for a time, the obscurity of earthly concerns, we feel that there are “ yet greater things than these,” and that we “ have a Father who dwelleth in the heavens, and who yet deigneth to consider the things that are upon earth.”

Such is the train of thought which the eventide of the day is fitted to excite ;—thoughts serious, doubtless, but inviting ;—which lead us daily, as it were, to the noblest conceptions of our being ;—and which seem destined to return us to the world with understandings elevated, and with hearts made better.

2. There is, in the second place, an “ eventide” in the year,—a season, as we now witness, when the sun withdraws his propitious light,—when the winds arise, and the leaves fall, and nature around us seems to sink into decay. It is said, in general, to be the season of melancholy ; and if, by this word, be meant that it is the time of solemn and of serious thought, it is undoubtedly the season of melancholy ;—yet, it is a melancholy so soothing, so gentle in its approach, and so prophetick in its influence, that they who have known it feel, as instinctively, that it is the doing of God, and that the heart of man is not thus finely touched, but to fine issues.

1. It is a season, in the first place, which tends to wean us from the passions of the world. Every

passion, however base or unworthy, is yet eloquent. It speaks to us of present enjoyment ;— it tells us of what men have done and what men may do, and it supports us every where by the example of many around us. When we go out into the fields in the evening of the year, a different voice approaches us. We regard, even in spite of ourselves, the still but steady advances of time. A few days ago, and the summer of the year was grateful, and every element was filled with life, and the sun of Heaven seemed to glory in his ascendant. He is now enfeebled in his power ; the desert no more “ blossoms like the rose ;” the song of joy is no more heard among the branches ; and the earth is strewed with that foliage which once bespoke the magnificence of summer. Whatever may be the passions which society has awakened, we pause amid this apparent desolation of nature. We sit down in the lodge “ of the way-faring man in the wilderness,” and we feel that all we witness is the emblem of our own fate. Such also, in a few years, will be our own condition. The blossoms of our spring,—the pride of our summer will also fade into decay ;— and the pulse that now beats high with virtuous or with vicious desire, will gradually sink, and then must stop for ever. We rise from our meditations with hearts softened and subdued, and we return into life as into a shadowy scene, where we have “ disquieted ourselves in vain.” Such

is the first impression which the present scene of nature is fitted to make upon us. It is this first impression which intimidates the thoughtless and the gay; and, indeed, if there were no other reflections that followed, I know not that it would be the business of wisdom to recommend such meditations. It is the consequences, however, of such previous thoughts, which are chiefly valuable; and among these there are two which may well deserve our consideration.

2. It is the peculiar character of the melancholy which such seasons excite, that it is general. It is not an individual remonstrance;—it is not the harsh language of human wisdom, which too often insults, while it instructs us. When the winds of autumn sigh around us, their voice speaks not to us only, but to our kind; and the lesson they teach us is not that we alone decay, but that such also is the fate of all the generations of man.—“They are the green leaves of the tree of the desert, which perish and are renewed.” In such a sentiment there is a kind of sublimity mingled with its melancholy;—our tears fall, but they fall not for ourselves;—and, although the train of our thoughts may have begun with the selfishness of our own concerns, we feel that, by the ministry of some mysterious power, they end in awakening our concern for every being that lives.—Yet a few years, we think, and all that now bless, or all that now convulse humanity

will also have perished. The mightiest pageantry of life will pass,—the loudest notes of triumph or of conquest will be silent in the grave;—the wicked, wherever active, “will cease from troubling,” and the weary, wherever suffering, “will be at rest.” Under an impression so profound, we feel our own hearts better. The cares, the animosities, the hatreds which society may have engendered, sink unperceived from our bosoms. In the general desolation of nature, we feel the littleness of our own passions;—we look forward to that kindred evening which time must bring to all;—we anticipate the graves of those we hate, as of those we love. Every unkind passion falls, with the leaves that fall around us; and we return slowly to our homes, and to the society which surrounds us, with the wish only to enlighten or to bless them.

3. If there were no other effects, my brethren, of such appearances of nature upon our minds, they would still be valuable,—they would teach us humility,—and with it they would teach us charity. In the same hour in which they taught us our own fragility, they would teach us commiseration for the whole family of man.—But there is a farther sentiment which such scenes inspire, more valuable than all; and we know little the designs of Providence, when we do not yield ourselves in such hours to the beneficent instincts of our imagination.

It is the unvarying character of nature, amid all its scenes, to lead us at last to its author; and it is for this final end that all its varieties have such dominion upon our minds. We are led by the appearances of spring to see His bounty;—we are led by the splendours of summer to see His greatness. In the present hours, we are led to a higher sentiment; and, what is most remarkable, the very circumstances of melancholy are these which guide us most securely to put our trust in Him. We are witnessing the decay of the year;—we go back in imagination, and find that such in every generation has been the fate of man;—we look forward, and we see that to such ends all must come at last;—we lift our desponding eyes in search of comfort, and we see above us, One, “who is ever the same, and “to whose years there is no end.” Amid the vicissitudes of nature, we discover that central majesty “in whom there is no variableness nor “shadow of turning.” We *feel* that there is a God; and, from the tempestuous sea of life, we hail that polar star of nature, to which a sacred instinct had directed our eyes, and which burns with undecaying ray to lighten us among all the darkness of the deep.

From this great conviction, there is another sentiment which succeeds. Nature, indeed, yearly perishes; but it is yearly renewed. Amid all its changes, the immortal spirit of Him that made it remains; and the same sun which now marks

with his receding ray the autumn of the year, will again arise in his brightness, and bring along with him the promise of the spring and all the magnificence of summer. Under such convictions, hope dawns upon the sadness of the heart. The melancholy of decay becomes the very herald of renewal ;—the magnificent circle of nature opens upon our view ;—we anticipate the analogous resurrection of our being ;—we see beyond the grave a greater spring, and we people it with those who have given joy to that which is passed. With such final impressions, we submit ourselves gladly to the destiny of our being. While the sun of mortality sinks, we hail the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, and, in the hours that all the honours of nature are perishing around us, we prostrate ourselves in deeper adoration before Him who “sitteth upon its throne.”

Such, my brethren, are the sentiments to which the scenes of nature we now witness insensibly lead us, and such the final conclusion of that train of thought which they naturally occasion ;—sentiments solemn indeed, (as I have said) but sublime, which remove us for a time from life, only to make us anticipate something greater ;—and which lead us, as if by some mysterious charm, from the bosom of melancholy, to the highest hopes and consolations of our being. If, then, “day unto day uttereth speech, and year unto year teacheth knowledge,” let not the follies or the gayeties of life withdraw us from these kind and salutary ad-

monitions. Whatever may be our age or condition, nature, in these hours, has its lessons to us all ;—lessons which all may read, and all can feel ;—and which come to us with that gentle and unrepublishing voice, which delights while it instructs us, and which marks the fine education of Him who is the Father of our spirits.

Let then the young go out, in these hours, under the descending sun of the year, into the fields of nature. Their hearts are now ardent with hope,—with the hopes of fame, of honour, or of happiness ; and in the long perspective which is before them, their imagination creates a world where all may be enjoyed. Let the scenes which they now may witness, moderate, but not extinguish their ambition :—while they see the yearly desolation of nature, let them see it as the emblem of mortal hope ;—while they feel the disproportion between the powers they possess, and the time they are to be employed, let them carry their ambitious eye beyond the world ;—and while, in these sacred solitudes, a voice in their own bosom corresponds to the voice of decaying nature, let them take that high decision which becomes those who feel themselves the inhabitants of a greater world, and who look to a being incapable of decay.

Let the busy and the active go out, and pause for a time amid the scenes which surround them, and learn the high lesson which nature teaches in the hours of its fall. They are now ardent with all the desires of mortality ;—and fame, and inter-

est, and pleasure, are displaying to them their shadowy promises ;—and, in the vulgar race of life, many weak and many worthless passions are too naturally engendered. Let them withdraw themselves for a time from the agitations of the world ;—let them mark the desolation of summer, and listen to the winds of winter, which begin to murmur above their heads. It is a scene which, with all its power, has yet no reproach ;—it tells them, that such is also the fate to which they must come ;—that the pulse of passion must one day beat low ;—that the illusions of time must pass ;—and “ that the spirit must return to Him who gave “ it.” It reminds them, with gentle voice, of that innocence in which life was begun, and for which no prosperity of vice can make any compensation ;—and that angel who is one day to stand upon the earth, and to “ swear that time shall be no “ more,” seems now to whisper to them, amid the hollow winds of the year, what manner of men ought they to be, who must meet that decisive hour.

There is yet another description among those who hear me ;—there is an even-tide in human life, a season when the eye becomes dim, and the strength decays, and when the winter of age begins to shed upon the human head its prophetick snow. It is the season of life to which the present is most analogous ; and much it becomes, and much it would profit you, my elder brethren, to mark the instructions which the season brings. The spring and the summer of your days are gone, and with

them, not only the joys they knew, but many of the friends who gave them. You have entered upon the autumn of your being, and whatever may have been the profusion of your spring, or the warm intemperance of your summer, there is yet a season of stillness and of solitude which the beneficence of Heaven affords you, in which you may meditate upon the past and the future, and prepare yourselves for the mighty change which you are soon to undergo.

If it be thus, my elder brethren, you have the wisdom to use the decaying season of nature, it brings with it consolations more valuable than all the enjoyments of former days. In the long retrospect of your journey, you have seen every day the shades of the evening fall, and every year the clouds of winter gather. But you have seen also, every succeeding day, the morning arise in its brightness, and in every succeeding year, the spring return to renovate the winter of nature. It is now you may understand the magnificent language of Heaven,—it mingles its voice with that of revelation,—it summons you, in these hours when the leaves fall, and the winter is gathering, to that evening study which the mercy of Heaven has provided in the book of salvation: And, while the shadowy valley opens which leads to the abode of death, it speaks of that hand which can comfort and can save, and which can conduct to those “green pastures, and those still waters,” where there is an eternal spring for the children of God.

SERMON XVII.

ON THE JUBILEE, APPOINTED FOR THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF
THE KING'S ACCESSION, OCTOBER 25, 1809.

GENESIS xliii. 27, 28.

“ And Joseph asked them of their welfare, and said, Is your father well? The old man of whom ye spake, is he yet alive? And they answered, Our father is yet alive. And they bowed down their heads, and made obeisance.”

THESE were the words of the patriarch Joseph, one of the most distinguished personages whom we meet with in the early history of the world, and from whose pathetick story the infant mind receives its first impressions of genuine greatness. In the preceding part of the narrative, we feel all the interests which arise from adventure and success. We rejoice in that event by which the inhumanity of his brethren is leading to the punishment it deserves; and while we contemplate, with satisfaction, the hand of Providence which is conducting this interesting story, we yet tremble as we proceed, lest the conceptions we had formed of the character of Joseph, may be lost in

his accomplishment of the dread revenge which was then placed in his power. It is the simple, but pathetick question of the text, which resolves all our doubts. The words, “is your father yet alive?” let us at once into his heart. We see a mind which neither injury could harden nor prosperity corrupt; which looks back with undiminished affection to its first and its purest attachments;—which hails with thankfulness the intelligence, that that father now lives, who, amid all his distance, and all his greatness, has never been forgotten; and in these workings of nature in his uncorrupted bosom, we readily anticipate all the exquisite virtue which he is afterwards to display.

It is with a sentiment similar, I trust, to the grateful joy of the patriarch, that we, my brethren, and all the people of this land are now assembled. The beneficence of Heaven has permitted us to witness an event which it is rarely given to the brevity of human life to see; and it has been met with feelings which exalt patriotism into devotion.—Amid the calamities of war, and the sufferings of nations, the majestick multitude of the British people are, in this moment, prostrated in thankfulness before that God, by “whom Kings reign, and Princes minister justice;” and while coeval thrones are deserted of their possessors, or are trembling to their fall, the grateful spirit of this country approaches with firm step the throne of its

sovereign, and places upon his grey hairs the crown of patriot glory.

Twice only, and that in the dark and distant ages of our history, has the eye of the citizen opened upon a spectacle so sublime ; and ere it can again return, the eye of every one that lives will long have been closed in the grave. In a moment of such deep and various sensibility, I feel that it becomes me to limit myself to a few simple observations,—happy only in being permitted to unite my humble voice with that of my country, and in being able “to bow my head in obeisance before “the King of Kings,” while I say, with the affectionate gratitude of the children of Israel, “our *father* is yet alive.”

It is in general, I fear, a very rude and unthinking estimate that men form of the character of sovereigns ; and there are prejudices very common in the world, which induce it to demand, from those who govern mankind, qualities altogether incompatible with the welfare or the liberty of those who are governed.—The imagination of youth and of ignorance is dazzled with the splendours of the legislator and the hero ;—the vanity of nations is gratified by the glory of conquest, and with the tale of extended dominion ;—and the world, in general, judging from this high and romantick standard, are apt to conceive that no characters become a throne, but those which display these lofty or sanguinary features. They forget,

meanwhile, that such qualities are applicable only to scenes of turbulence or barbarity ;—they forget, that nature bleeds while the hero triumphs, and that the energies of the legislator involve also the powers of the despot ;—they forget, that while the individual thus raises himself in their estimation, he rises upon the degradation of every other rank in society ; that virtue is not hereditary like the throne ; and that the same unlimited powers which form at times the patriot and the hero, form, in far greater profusion, the oppressors and the tyrants of the world.

But whatever, in the infancy of nations, be the glory of the legislative mind which gives society its first foundation, or whatever, in subsequent times, be the dark utilities of the conqueror, whose exterminating sword is the instrument of divine justice in avenging its crimes, it is the lofty and unshared privilege of this country to say, that such is not the legitimate character of its sovereigns ; and the citizen of Britain has little known to estimate the character that is worthy of its throne, when he assimilates it to any situation either of ancient or of modern greatness. Inheriting a constitutional throne, to which its former agitations have now lent almost the stability of nature, and wielding a sceptre which has been given, and not wrested from his people, the sovereign of this country is invested, not with the vulgar terrors of power, but with the majesty and sanctity of law ;

and the character of his greatness, like that which reigns in the government of the universe, is to be discerned in the silence of order, and in the steadiness of regulated wisdom. Enthroned amid the waves of the ocean, and at a distance from the insults of every enemy, it is his prerogative to rest unmoved amid all the conflicts that may assail him ;—to delegate to the brave of his people the powers which he must not descend to employ himself ;—and to make the winds and the waves the messengers of his justice or of his mercy to mankind.

The attitude, therefore, which becomes him, is not that of the legislator, or the hero, but that of the FATHER OF HIS PEOPLE ;—the virtues which suit the majesty of his situation are not those which dazzle, but those which bless mankind ;—and the radiance which ought to surround his throne, is not that of personal and dangerous greatness, but that of legitimate power, and paternal authority.

Such is the character which belongs to the sovereign of this country ;—such were the sentiments which dwelt in the mind of our present sovereign, when, in the first hours of his reign, he made it his proud boast that he was born a Briton, and when he took that solemn oath to his people, which has given the firm consistency of principle to his reign ;—and such, in this hour, after the long trial of fifty years, are the virtues which it is the privilege of his people to know, and their pride to acknowledge. Amid all the agitations of that extended period ;—

amid the years of a reign more arduous and more eventful than any that has occurred in the history of mankind ; when society has been assuming a new form, and when causes have begun to operate, which may change, in many respects, all the social institutions of men,—his path has been ever the simple but majestick path of duty. Firm to the obligations which he first contracted to his people,—he has identified his own glory with the glory of their constitution, and leaving, with the lofty spirit of a king of England, less fortunate nations to redress their wrongs, or to remedy their sufferings,—he has sought only to maintain inviolate the mighty system which he was born to rule, and which he had sworn to maintain. While he has thus sought to deserve the affection of his people, it is his singular fortune to have gained it,—to have reigned over men of kindred honour, and kindred honesty ; —to have found, amid all the turbulence of faction, and all the profligacies of party, that the affections of his subjects were still with him ;—to have seen his country ascend, amid all its difficulties, to an eminence in wealth, in dignity, and in consequence, which no eye of his ancestors had witnessed ;—and, even in the present hour of danger and of alarm, to see it display a magnitude of power, and assume an attitude of greatness, which, at the commencement of his reign, the enthusiasm of patriotism itself durst not have ventured to foretell.

The duties of the throne, however, demand other virtues; and he who is destined to reign over a free people, is called by Heaven, not only to be their sovereign, but their model,—to go before them in the road of piety and virtue, and to give to the morals and manners of his age, the stamp of his prevailing example. How these duties have been accomplished,—what have been the private virtues that adorn the throne,—and what has been the tenour of that example, through the long period of half a century, the pious gratitude of the people of this country leaves it not to the fidelity of the historian to tell, but seizes this day to acknowledge.

It acknowledges that elevated piety, which is not now only the ornament of his hoary head, but which gave grace to the majesty of his youthful throne, and which was the pledge to his people of the high sentiments by which his future reign and his future life were to be governed. It acknowledges that purity of domestick manners, which has not only been the model, but still more the reproach of his subjects; which has given to the usual splendours of the court the virtuous simplicity of the cottage; and which has taken from rank and affluence all the vulgar apologies of vice, by shewing that to noble minds the greatest situations are the most innocent.—It acknowledges that patriot zeal, which has never ceased to glow for the improvement of his country, which, selecting from the

varieties of occupation that fundamental art which gives their power and independence to nations, has collected the rays of royal favour upon the simple labours of the husbandman; and which, passing the limits of his own empire, has sought to carry to new and barbarous shores, the blessings of cultivated life, and the light of revealed religion;—it acknowledges yet farther, that purity of taste, which has given even to his hours of leisure and of amusement the character of royalty,—which has disdained every ignoble pleasure by which the character of sovereigns has been so often degraded,—and which has reserved its patronage for those finer arts alone which elevate, without corrupting the human heart, and which ally themselves either to the sublimity of religious, or the dignity of moral sentiment.

These are the virtues which this day acknowledges;—the virtues characteristick of a sovereign of this country; which make him indeed the father of his people; and which, in this hour, are marked by Heaven, not so much by the splendours of the court which surrounds his throne, or by the throng and acclaim of the thousand cities which people his realm, as by the humble tears of the aged peasant in the cottage, who numbers his years by his reign,—who blesses Heaven that his lot has fallen in his days,—and who, when he teaches his children the course of a virtuous life, points with exulting hand to the example of their sovereign upon the throne.

It is the usual infirmity, however, of our nature, to undervalue what we have long possessed ; and the eye of the citizen, which, whenever it has been raised to the throne, has met the same venerable form, may come at last to regard it with the same carelessness and insensibility, with which he regards the regular beneficence of Providence.

If so unmanly a weakness should chill for a moment the gratitude of this day ;—if, in the bosom of one British subject, there can dwell ignorance or indifference to the glory of his country, let him turn his wayward eye from that prosperity which has satiated it, and mark among the nations which surround us, what has been the character of their thrones. Let him mark the aspects under which, to them, this long period of British greatness commenced, and those under which it now has closed ;—let him mark what has been the condition of the people, where superstition governed, where ambition triumphed, or where profligacy reigned ;—let him mark what have been the effects which the corruption of courts, the dissolution of publick manners, the pride of privileged orders have produced, in levelling to the dust the most venerable institutions of time ;—let him mark that fiery furnace, yet intensely burning, in which all the proudest honours of ancestry, and rank, and royalty, have been dissolved, and from the dross of which are now issuing vulgar crowns and temporary diadems.

From this tremendous spectacle let him recal his eye to his native land, green with the dew of Heaven, and rejoicing beneath the labour of men ;—let him listen to the cheerful activity of its cities, and the careless song of its fields ;—let him follow the sails of its commerce as they brighten beneath every wind of Heaven, and the thunder of its arms as they roll wherever the waters of the ocean flow ;—let him mark the senate-house of his country, still rearing its majestick head amid all the other destructions of time, and the sceptre of its dominion yet firm in that paternal hand, which first received the offering of his infant loyalty ;—and then let him say, whether, on this memorable day, it is not a good, as well as a pleasant thing to be thankful ?—whether the eye, which is permitted to see this scene of prosperity, ought not to be raised to that Heaven which bestows it ?—whether there be any principle of patriotism so steadfast or so sublime as that which is sanctified by religion ?—whether there be any blessing, for which a virtuous people ought so humbly to bow their heads in obeisance to Heaven, as for the lengthened days of a patriot king ?—and whether there be any means so powerful to create or to continue the virtues which become a British throne, as the willing gratitude of a British people ?

And the children of Israel answered, “ Our father is yet alive.” There is joy, my brethren, there is thankfulness in the words,—but is there

not something in them also which is pathetick? Is there not something which reminds us of the feeble tenure by which all our affections are held, and which points, with but too intelligible a hand, to that future and inevitable day, when other tears than those of joy and gratulation are to flow.

It is, indeed, the melancholy condition of our nature; but let it never be forgotten, that it is this melancholy condition itself which gives origin to some of our purest virtues;—it is this consciousness,—it is these trembling anticipations—which teach us all the tenderness of duty; which multiply our cares as nature seems to withdraw the object of them from our arms; and which prompt us to strain only more ardently to our embrace, the fading form that so soon must leave it.

And Joseph said, “Haste you, and go up unto
“my father; and say unto him, come down unto
“me and tarry not; and thou shalt dwell in the
“land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me,
“thou, and thy children, and thy children’s chil-
“dren, and thy flocks and thy herds, and all that
“thou hast; and there will I nourish thee, thou,
“and thy children, and thy household, lest ever
“thou shouldst come to want.”

These were the grateful resolutions of Joseph: and such are, my brethren, on this day, and in this place, the resolutions that become the people of this land.

Born, (as the greater part of us have been) beneath his paternal reign; sharing in the honours which the virtues of a sovereign ever throw over his age, and in the blessings which Heaven sheds upon the throne that is “established by righteousness;” carried (in every year of this long period) as we and all our interests have been in his bosom, and remembered in every day in every prayer which he has offered to Heaven, ours is now the grateful duty to nourish his grey hairs with the tenderness of children;—to guard, with jealous love, the throne which he fills, alike from foreign injury, and from internal insult;—to press, with more affectionate loyalty, to our bosom that aged head, over which adversity has shed other sorrows than those of time;—to smooth with fond hands, that inevitable path, which conducts virtue as well as glory to the grave;—and to ask, with fervent prayer, that his remaining course may be like that of the summer sun, when he sets at last, slowly and serenely in the west, amid the blessings of a grateful world.

These are the resolutions which befit this place and this hour,—the resolutions which befit a great people, who, while they know their rights, acknowledge also their duties;—the resolutions which give the sensibilities of love to the energies of loyalty;—which proclaim to the successors of the throne, the path of genuine glory;—and which, amid all the guilt and all the miseries of society,

testify to Heaven and Earth, that there is yet one throne which is founded in justice, and one people who can honour virtue.

You have now, my friends and fellow-citizens, performed the solemn duty of this day ;—you have obeyed it as men, by presenting the offering of your united thanksgiving upon the altar of the “ King of Kings ;”—you have hallowed it, I trust, as Christians, by making the wretched partakers of your joy,—by visiting the prisoners in their affliction,—by “undoing the heavy burdens, and “letting the oppressed go free.”

You are now to return into a happy world,—to meet the multitude of your brethren and fellow-citizens,—and to partake in the diffusion of the general joy. Go then, with these high remembrances in your bosom, and open your hearts to the sublimity of that sentiment which unites the feelings of a free people, and add your voices to that prevailing song, which never wakens without bidding the British heart beat high with thoughts of patriotism and triumph ;—go, ere yet the day closes its proud festivity, and assemble your children about you, and, while the voice of thankfulness is yet loud and long around them, seize the auspicious moment to impress upon their glowing hearts the love of their country. Tell them, that *these* are the honours due to a patriot sovereign ;—tell them, that the purest breath which

Heaven lends to awaken the virtues of the throne, is the gratitude of the people;—tell them, that while the adulation of slaves is vice, the loyalty of free-born men is virtue;—and while you raise their youthful hands in thankfulness to God, that their inheritance is given them in a free country, teach them, in that sacred moment, to pledge their youthful hearts to love, and their youthful arms to defend it.

SERMON XVIII.

ON THE CONSOLATIONS WHICH THE GOSPEL AFFORDS UNDER
THE NATURAL EVILS OF LIFE.

ST. JOHN ix. 1.

“And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth ;—And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind ?—Jesus answered, neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents : but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.”

AMONG the questions which were proposed to our Saviour by his disciples, there is scarcely any one of a deeper or more interesting nature, than that which is related in the words of the text. Wherever we pass through life, we see scenes of melancholy, of misfortune, and of wretchedness ; and the great question of every human heart, is What is the end or purpose of these afflictions of our nature ; and upon what principle are we to account for them, in the administration of a benevolent God ? It is a question which has been asked in every age, and which has received various solutions, according to the knowledge and capacity of those who examined it.

But it is in the power of the Son of God alone to give the satisfactory solution ; and it is one of the greatest privileges of his followers to know the reply.

All the evils or calamities with which human nature is afflicted, are reducible to two great classes, or divisions ; and in one or other of them, every suffering or sorrow may be included.

The first and the greatest of these is, that which arises from ourselves ;—the sufferings which arise from error, or from sin. To this important class of human miseries, the answer of our Saviour in the text does not apply ; and with regard to such evils, there are two very important observations to be made both with regard to their origin, and their end.

Such evils, be they of what extent or of what magnitude they may, are not the appointments of God,—they are the productions of our own will,—they are the consequences of our own conduct ;—and so far are they from arising from his will, that they all arise from opposition to it, and from neglect or disobedience of those great moral laws, which he has given as the fundamental principles of our being, and of our happiness. The second observation which applies to this class of miseries is, that, while they derive their origin from our own infirmity or guilt, their final purpose is to restore us, by repentance, to the innocence and the happiness we had lost. It is

for this great end, that every vice and every folly has its own appropriate and proportioned suffering;—it is for this purpose, that the bosom of the guilty is filled with so many dark and instinctive fears;—it is for this purpose, that evil, in so many awful and conspicuous shapes, is made to pursue sin, that even the spectators of the scene may be made wise by the sufferings of others, and return from the deepest tragedy of their nature with hearts made wiser and better. With regard to this first class, then, of human miseries, it is obvious, that it derives its origin from man alone, and that, even amid all its prevalence or intensity, the spirit of God is ever operating “to overcome evil with final good.”

The second class of human sufferings are those which arise, not from ourselves, but from the laws to which our nature is subject;—the evils which the ignorant every where ascribe to chance and to time, and which the wise and the pious ascribe to the will and providence of God. Of such evils, the world affords us many examples;—of such, our own hearts are ever forming many fears;—and with regard to such, it is of deep consequence that we should listen, not to the voice of our own despondent hearts, but to the blest revelations of religion. When, either in ourselves or in others, we see it is guilt that is punished;—we feel the justice, and we perceive the end. But when innocence suffers;—when it is upon the head of the

pious and the good that afflictions fall, we are not so easily satisfied ; and it is often the most cruel aggravation of calamity itself, that the innocent sufferers are apt to doubt the mercy of Heaven ; to fear, like the disciples in the text, “ that they “ or their parents had sinned,” and that the misfortunes they endure are rather punishment than trial.—It is this class of evils, peculiarly, to which the ever memorable answer of our Saviour has respect. It was an innocent sufferer whose misfortunes he then commiserated and cured ; and it is to such, in every future age, that the mighty and consoling language of his reply is addressed. The subject, therefore, my brethren, is one which has its interest to every human heart ; and what this incident contains for our comfort and instruction, I shall now endeavour very briefly to explain to you.

1. You will observe then, in the first place, the situation and condition of the poor sufferer in the text. It is not easy to conceive any being belonging to the race of man more obscure or depressed. He is a blind man ;—he is left by his parents (as we learn in the sequel of the story,) to the compassion of the world ;—he sits by the wayside to implore it ; and it is accident alone which seems to bring him within the notice of our Saviour and his disciples. No situation of human nature can be conceived more lost, more insignificant, or more forgotten than this which first presents itself in the

picture ; and yet, when we learn the whole, when we see the conclusion of the story, over this deserted and hopeless being we see the eye of Providence immediately impending,—we see, even before his birth, the important destiny determined, which his calamity was to fulfil ;—we see, that in him, the “works of God were to be made manifest ;” and that the cure of an individual, so neglected and obscure that we know neither his history nor name, was yet to be the source of instruction and of comfort to many millions of mankind, in every succeeding age of the Gospel. There is nothing in language, or in all the powers of reasoning, which can so powerfully evince to us the great truth of the Providence and perpetual care of God, as this simple and unadorned fact. It tells us, at once, that to his eye all hearts are open, all sorrows known, and that no secret suffering is hid from him ; that wherever the creation of God extends, the works of God will be performed ; and that wherever, in his system, there are mourners, in the same system there are the means of consolation.

2. You will observe, in the second place, my brethren, the nature of the calamity which is represented to us in the words of the text. It is that, of all human sufferings or misfortunes, which is at once the most hopeless and the most irremediable ; in which no exertion of the sufferer himself can avail, and in which no benevolent labour

of others can hope for remedy. The poor man upon the wayside was not only blind, but was born blind. It is in this very circumstance; in the hopeless nature of the calamity, that the great and consoling lesson of the story consists; and it was purposely to one whom no human power could relieve, that the Son of God arrives, to shew his disciples then, and for ever, that there are greater powers in existence than those of man; that the power of God is limited by nothing but his will;—that the things which are impossible unto man, are possible unto Him;—and that He who in one mighty hour said “Let there be light, and there was light,” can, in every hour, cause his light to arise over the most hopeless and most benighted condition of the human soul.

3. You will observe, in the third place, my brethren, the character of the person who becomes, in so conspicuous a manner, the object of the divine mercy. The circumstances transmitted to us, with regard to him, are few; but they are of a nature to afford us full instruction. “Neither this man nor his parents had sinned.” The affliction with which he was visited was not the result of his own folly or guilt, but the appointment of Him who made him; and in his conduct under it we discern all the marks of resignation and genuine devotion. He complains not;—he importunes not;—he sits humbly by the wayside to receive the charity of the passengers, without

demanding it ; and, as we read in the sequel of the story, seems to fill up the vacant hours of a benighted life, with the consolations of a yet imperfect faith, and with confidence in the God of his fathers. It is the character, of all others, which the gospel loves, and which it loves to form ; the character of humble patience and submissive piety ;—the character of silent and unostentatious goodness ;—the character of that simple but sublime devotion which humbles itself in all situations before the throne of wisdom, and which carries with it the promise of being yet exalted. To such a character, the world, indeed, pays little attention. But it is precious in the eyes of Him “who seeth in secret.” It is to such sufferers who sit by the wayside of life, and whose heads are loaded with affliction, that the Saviour of the world still comes ;—and it is to the eyes which are blinded with tears, that he opens the prospect of that mightier time, “when the works of God “ shall be made manifest.”

Such are the instructions which seem to arise from the memorable incident recorded in the text. They are instructions adapted in mercy to all, in the condition of our present being ; to the inhabitants of a world, where changes and chances seem to reign ; where the prosperous and the happy are yet conscious that they have no abiding-place ;—and where happiness is ever embittered by the remembrance of the facility with which it

may be lost. Amid this shadowy and unsubstantial scene, they teach us, that there reigns One eternal and parental Mind; that no condition which it contains is too low for his love, or too great for his power; that life, with all its varieties, is only a preparatory scene in which faith may be exercised, and hope cultivated, and charity expanded; and that the only immoveable foundation of human happiness is in obedience to His laws, and in resignation to His will.

But to you, my afflicted brethren, to you, whoever you may be, who come from the house of mourning or of affliction, the words of the text have a still nearer application. It was for you that this miracle was performed.—It is your eyes that are opened in the person of the poor sufferer in the Gospel; and it is to raise your minds from the doubts and the despondencies which ever mingle themselves with affliction, that the memorable observations of our Saviour himself were made.

Do you then doubt, in the first place, with the natural despondency of sorrow, whether you can be the objects of the care of Heaven? and whether your condition can attract the observation of the God of Infinity? Go back, my afflicted brethren, to the poor sufferer in the text, and reflect on the circumstances in which you find him;—remember, that over him and over his deserted fate, the eye of Providence was yet watchful;—that, ere his birth, the circumstances of his suffering;

and his reward were designed;—and that, from this obscure and nameless being, the providence of God hath brought instruction and comfort to every age and generation of mankind. Whatever, then, be the abode to which you return, go, my brethren, with the belief, that there the same God is present;—that no event has happened there, without his permission and appointment;—that to you, the same Saviour is sent who was sent unto him;—that, to the eye of faith, his gospel presents more glorious prospects than those which opened upon the eyes of the blind;—and that, for the same purpose he comes to you, as he came to him, that, in the restoration of your afflicted souls, the love and the power of your Saviour may be made manifest.

Do you tremble, in the second place, (with a fear but too closely allied to affliction,) that for your sorrows there is no remedy?—that hope arises no more for you, and that there is no power in nature which can give you again what you have lost. Come, my desponding brethren, to the recollection of the memorable event we are considering. Nothing that you can experience is so lost, so hopeless, so apparently impossible, as the bestowing of sight upon “one that was born blind,” and yet all this was done. There is, then, a power in nature, which can relieve all the sufferings of the human soul;—there is a Father in nature, who permits the afflictions of the innocent, only that he may relieve them by greater joy. These are the lessons which this important

incident teaches ; and there is no calamity of suffering nature to which they do not apply. Is it under the loss of health or of strength that you labour, my brethren, and are age and disease coming upon you “like an armed man?” There is, in the universe of God, another state of being ; a being where pain, and age, and death, are unknown ; and to this state you are permitted to aspire.—Is it under the loss of fortune that you grieve, my brethren, under the neglect and forgetfulness of an idle world, and under all the secret sorrows with which poverty loads misfortune ? The hand which opened the eyes of the blind, points out to you a state of a different kind ; a state where there are other eyes than the careless eyes of man ;—where there are treasures which admit of no corruption ;—where the virtues which have been nourished in secret, will be rewarded openly ;—and where the noblest distinction will be that of those who have “continued patiently in doing well.” Is it the loss of friends, my brethren, that you lament ; of those whom nature and virtue has made dear, and who have wound themselves around your souls by all the ties of habit and of love ? It is a case where tears are due ;—it is the case over which, and which alone, the tears of the Son of God himself fell, and the sorrow is sacred which he has authorized. Yet, my brethren, let it never be forgotten, that it is he who wept who himself provides the remedy for your

tears. It is for you that he opens the eyes of him who was born blind,—to shew you, that every thing that appears impossible to you is possible unto him ; it is for you that he himself passes before your eyes, through the valley and shadow of death, that he may shew you that it leads only into the sanctuary of God ;—and it is for you, and your consolation, that he returns again among those whom he had loved, to shew you, that death will not separate you for ever from those you have lost ;—that the affections of virtuous love are as immortal as the being that feels them ;—and that where he and they are, you may hope, in one great hour, to be, and to be for ever reunited with them.

Do you fear, in the last place, my brethren, with a timidity inseparable from affliction, that you are unworthy of these hopes ;—that your days of obedience and exertion are gone, and that you have nothing now to offer to heaven, but the ruins of a frail and of an useless being ? Come again, my brethren, and look upon the situation of the poor sufferer in this story. Nothing surely in human form was ever more sunk or more useless for all the usual purposes of life, and yet it is in these very circumstances that the greatness and the usefulness of his mind is found. It was that secret piety which the eye of the world could not see, which distinguished him in the eye of the Almighty ;—it was that fervent

confidence in the God of Israel, which brought the Saviour of the world to his relief ;—it was the humility of his sublime submission, which has made him of more usefulness to mankind, than all who ever yet filled the thrones, or awakened the admiration of a lower world. Whatever then, may be the homes to which you return, carry with you, my afflicted brethren, the remembrance of his virtues. If it be not in the light and sunshine of life that you are now to act, believe that there are virtues belonging to solitude and to shade ; and that, wherever virtue can be exerted, there honour can be won. Believe, that in the “sight of him who seeth in secret,” the tear of submission is sacred, and the prayer for assistance is heard ;—that there is a blessedness which belongs to those that mourn ;—and that the sorrows of the innocent lead “to that purity of heart which shall see God ;”—believe, still more, that (while you are unconscious of it) there is yet an angel present in the “troubled waters” of your soul ; that from your humble and pious resignation, the world around you will receive more profound instruction, than from all the activity of your prosperous years ; and that, even in the depth of your closet, your prayers may bring down a blessing upon your children, and lead them and your household unto salvation.

Return, then, my brethren of affliction, to the dwellings which your father has assigned you,

with all the consolations of your Saviour upon your souls. Wherever you return, there are duties that yet await you; and wherever, in his family, there are duties to be performed, there is happiness to be gained. Return with that faith which is able not only to overcome the world, but to overcome all its woes;—with the belief, that no being that God hath made is absent from his care, or indifferent to his love;—with the belief, that there are no wounds which he cannot heal,—no sorrows which he cannot cure,—no friends whom he cannot restore. Return still more, my brethren, with the high belief, that, to your eyes, the great veil of nature is rent in twain; that to you is opened a new Heaven and a new Earth; a scene where the pilgrimage of time is to close, where all the kind affections of domestick and of social love will be restored; where from every pious eye the hand of God will wipe away every tear that it has shed, and where, in the great conclusion of existence, “the works of God will be made manifest in the reign of wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.”

And may the God of all consolation go along with you to all your abodes;—may the Spirit that proceedeth from him, confirm your faith, and strengthen your hope, and settle your submission!—and, when the years of your trial and your darkness are past, may your eyes open upon the Saviour you have loved, and upon the friends you have lost!

SERMON XXI.

ON THE FAST, FEBRUARY, 1811.

ROMANS xii. 21.

“Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good.”

AGAIN, my brethren, we are assembled by the command of the Throne, in one of the most solemn of our religious duties; to humble ourselves before the God of the universe, and, in the midst of national calamity, to implore His blessing upon our councils and our arms. Year follows year, but none of them brings with it any promise of peace, or any pause from the miseries of war; and the wings of time, heavily as they pass by us, are still wet with human tears, and still drop with human blood.

There are yet more striking circumstances, which the hours in which we meet bring almost involuntarily into our remembrance.

The whole Christian world are, at this season, united in the common service of penitence and meditation;—the gates of every church are open

to the contrite and the sorrowful ;—from a thousand languages, one uniform voice of prayer and of repentance reaches the ear of Heaven ;—and it is in this sacred season that ambition is preparing its plans, and war meditating its progress :—and that, to gratify the insatiable avidities of conquest, every guilt and every wo is to be let loose upon the unoffending race of man, and “ the earth again “ to be covered with violence and blood.” It is at this season, too, that the spring of nature is returning ; that the sun is rising in his strength ; and that the breath of Heaven is blowing to awaken, over the universe, all the various family of its love ;—and it is at this beneficent season, that man is advancing to the work of desolation ;—that no sympathy with Heaven softens his ruthless heart ;—that the march of armies is to tread upon all the prodigality of Providence ;—and that the dark atrocity of ambition relents not (while it calculates its numbers) at the thousands of human souls whom it is to send, ere the season expires, to their final and their unprepared account.

If, of such miseries, we, my brethren, were the authors ;—if it was our ambition or injustice which created this dark catalogue of crime ;—if it were the dread lusts of power, or of wealth, which now unsheathed the sword of this country, whatever might be the triumphs that the vulgar tongue might tell, or the vulgar ear receive, the language of this place at least, must ever have been of a different

kind. The voice of the Gospel mingles with hesitation with the voice of war, and when the avarice or ambition of nations sends forth, amid a peaceful world, “the flame of the sword, and the lightning of the spear,” the only language in which religion can express itself, is the plaintive, but awful language of the prophet. “Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly. Gather the people: sanctify the congregation; assemble the elders, and the children, and they that suck the breast: and let the priests, and the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thy heritage to reproach;” and even, while the world was resounding with the shouts of victory and of triumph, the only prayer which religion could pronounce, would be the melancholy one of contrition and of sorrow. “Turn thou us, O God of goodness, and we shall be turned. Be yet favourable to thy people, who turn to thee in weeping, and fasting, and prayer.—Turn us, O God of hosts, from all the evil of our ways; shew the light of thy countenance, and we shall yet be whole.”

It is, however, I trust, my brethren, under very different circumstances that we are now assembled; and that it is with a less trembling voice, that we may now present our prayers unto Heaven. Whatever was the occasional origin of that war in which we have so long been engaged;—whatever

were the views of statesmen or of legislators ;— whatever even may have been the errors or the guilt of its conduct, I yet trust I may say, that, upon our part, upon the part of the *people* of this country, it has never had any other object or end than that of justice and of necessity. It has been a war which we sought not, and which we were unable to avoid ; a war, in which we had nothing to acquire, but every thing to preserve ;—a war, in which we have combated not for wealth, or fame, or dominion, but for independence, for liberty, and for existence ;—it has been a war, (in a higher view) in which we have combated, not only for ourselves, but for the injured and the oppressed of every people ; in which we have forgot every national animosity when the cry of their misery approached us ; and in which we have not hesitated to pour the best blood of our country, that we might loose the bands of wickedness, and “undo the heavy burdens, and bid the oppressed “go free,” and break the iron yoke which the arm of conquest has so long imposed upon a prostrate world.—It has been a war (in its highest view) of moral principle against immoral power ; —in which we have combated for all the laws of nature and of humanity ;—in which we have gone forth as the champions of the human race ; and shrunk not from the sacrifice of our treasure or our blood, that we might stem the torrent of iniquitous ambition, and restore the reign of freedom

and of happiness to mankind. These, and these alone, have been the objects of the people of this country. Amid the darkest hours which the modern world has seen, they have felt what was due to themselves, and to the situation in which the Providence of Heaven has placed them ;—they have felt that to them, and to them only, was committed the sacred fire of truth and liberty ;—they have held it yet (I thank God) with a firm and unwavering hand ; and they will still hold it (I trust in his Providence) until its radiance shall break through all the clouds that involve it, and restore the light and life of moral day to a dark and to a suffering world.

In such circumstances, my brethren, and in such a contest, the language of this place ought not to be that of despondence or of fear. The appropriate language is that of the apostle ; “ be not overcome of evil ; but overcome evil with good.” Be satisfied, that, amid the sufferings and the calamities of nature, the same guardian Providence reigns, as amid its prosperities and its peace ;—be assured, that it is in the midst of suffering and of trial, that every thing that is good, and every thing that is great in the human mind, is awakened, and brought forth ;—be confident that, in the lofty designs of Heaven, evil shall ever be overcome with good, and that, in the spirit of religious faith, there is a “ might which can overcome the world,” and make the

mind of man superiour to every evil that can assail him. Such was the high language which the apostle used to the early Christians, in the disastrous and hopeless days of their weakness and persecution. The doctrine was believed, and the prophecy was fulfilled. They met the evils of their days with the faith and the obedience that became them ;—their meek but majestick spirit overcame the world that persecuted them ;—and, ere long, the cross of their Master was raised, upon every spot where the martyr had perished in the flame.

It is in such principles, my brethren, and in such an example, that we best can learn the instruction which this day both requires and affords. However different may be the sufferings or the calamities to which we are exposed, nature, and the God of nature, are the same ; and if we have the magnanimity not to suffer ourselves “to be overcome with evil,” we may trust in the same Providence, that He is able “to overcome every evil with good.”

1. Are you then overcome, my brethren, (in hours of calamity like the present) with the dread, that the affairs of men are left to chance and time ?—and that, in the hours of national distress, no guardian providence is present ? I ask you not to raise your eye to the universe which surrounds you, to mark that silent but unceasing order, “in which not a sparrow falleth to the

“ground, without the knowledge” of him that made it;—I ask you not to recal to yourselves the history of revelation, and to see, from the cradle of the infant world, the care of a paternal Deity unfolding itself with increasing and progressive radiance;—I ask you only to lay your hands upon your own hearts,—to ask yourselves, whether there be any situation of difficulty or of calamity that can happen to man, which has not its assigned and correspondent duty?—whether there be any exigency of private or of publick life, where conscience doth not follow us?—and whether there be any scene of time so deserted and so dark, where the inspiration of the Almighty doth not tell us, what HE demands, and what man expects of us? If this be the great fact of our nature, there is then no dominion of chance;—there is no possible situation of suffering which is not foreseen and provided for. In the presence of conscience, we live in the presence of Heaven:—and the voice which speaks to man, in “the still small voice” of his own heart, is the same which speaks to the angel and the archangel, from amid the sapphire blaze of the eternal throne.

2. Are you overcome, my brethren, in another view, in the usual effeminacies of prosperity, with the fear that adversity has no compensations; and that, in the hours of hardship and of trial, there is nothing but wretchedness and wo? Rise

for a moment, I beseech you, from the couch of ignoble pleasure, and look with the eye of men upon the world that passes, and the world that has passed you. It has many scenes to shew you of greatness and of glory ;—scenes where your heart throbs when you contemplate the capacities and the energies of your nature ;—and where you feel that man is “indeed but a little lower than “the angels,” and that his nature is “made for “glory and for honour.” What then are those scenes ?—and where is it that your eye finds with transport the examples it has wished ? Is it not in the situations of suffering and of hardship ? —amid the scenes where every base and selfish interest was forgot, and the generous bosom knew no motives but those of private or of public beneficence ;—amid the scenes where even higher motives reigned,—and where the saint and the martyr disdained the cross and the flame, to execute the lofty commission which Heaven had assigned them. Where is it, in the same manner, that your regards rest, when you peruse the annals of mankind ? Oh ! not upon the scenes of affluence and prosperity ;—not upon the sunshine scenes where every virtue withers, and every energy is dissolved ;—but upon the dark and stormy scenes, where freedom sprung, and patriotism glowed, and every energy of nature was called forth, and all the noblest passions of the human bosom were awakened ; and where, in

the midst of hardship and of suffering, a deeper happiness was enjoyed, than ever yet fell to the lot of ease and of security. It is thus that evil is only the minister of good;—it is thus that, even in its darkest aspect, the chastisements of Heaven are only the chastisements of a father; and that, amid the tears and the sufferings of his children, they are hardened only to the vigour and to the majesty of manhood.

3. Are you overcome, in the last view, my brethren, with the fear that evil has attained its dominion? that the present calamities of time are incapable of remedy; and that the world is sinking into age and degeneracy? Look, my brethren of little faith, at the material world around you, and say, has its order, and the beneficence of its order failed?—have storms or tempests quenched the light of day?—have seed-time and harvest forgot to return?—and has the sun of Heaven become wearied in his path, and ceased to pour life and light upon a grateful world? Look to the history of the moral world, from its first feeble and barbarous cradle, to the hour in which it now resounds with the tread of hostile men, and say, has evil alone had the dominion there?—has nothing but the guilt of the tyrant and the conqueror been successful?—has no progress been made in this long period, in knowledge, in arts, or in arms?—has the cause of truth, of virtue, and of freedom never been victorious?—and has the historian of the hu-

man race only to record the progressive decay of its powers, its knowledge, and its welfare?—No, my brethren, in the whole of this review, you see, on the contrary, that there is a power in nature, by which evil of every kind is controlled; and that, under its Almighty guidance, amid all the apparent calamities of time, the march of the human mind has been steady and progressive, to “wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.” You see the occasional visitations of war and of calamity operating upon the moral world, like the occasional visitations of the storm and the tempest upon the material world; and ending in purifying the moral atmosphere, and invigorating the powers of moral vegetation. From amid all the temporary depressions of the human race, you see them permanently emerging into firmer power, and more enlightened splendour;—the harvest of the husbandman waving over the field which conquest had wet with the blood of his fathers; the hand of the freeman pointing with exultation to the mouldering tomb where the race of his tyrants and his oppressors repose;—and the voice of the Gospel carrying glad tidings to many a people who had “long sat in darkness, and beneath the shadow of death.” “There have been many devices in the heart of man; but the counsel of God hath stood, and will stand for ever.”

If such, my brethren, be the magnificent system in which we live; if there be a moral power in na-

ture, which makes evil only the minister of his will, and which is able to “overcome every evil with good,” it is in elevating ourselves to confidence in this mighty system, that we best can discharge the duties of this day.

We have long enjoyed all the blessings of national prosperity; and it has been “in secure habitations, and amid quiet resting places,” that the Providence of Heaven has given us, for a long time, our repose. We are now summoned to severer duties, and are to meet with darker scenes. The Sovereign of the universe hath called us to the noblest office which he accords to the ministration of men, to be the guardians of human nature, and of human welfare. To our care he hath committed the present fortunes of the moral world; and whether they are to expire beneath the grasp of ambition, or to waken again to life and liberty, seems now to depend upon the wisdom of our councils, and the valour of our arms.

There is something, my brethren, ever animating to the human heart in the approach of great duties; but there is something still more animating in the approach of those loftier duties to which we are summoned by the voice of Heaven; when we are called to march beneath the banners of Providence; and when we feel ourselves acting as the ministers of its will in the improvement or renovation of the world. It is in the belief of this lofty commission, that the inhabitants of this country

should on this day be assembled.—It is in the prayer for assistance to execute it, that the hours of this day should be employed ; and, heavy as the darkness may be which hangs upon the future, it is in firm reliance upon the wisdom and benevolence of Him who leads us, that we should rise from our knees, and advance undaunted into the darkness and the dangers that may await us. Even if we perish in such a cause, we shall at least perish with glory, and in the field of our duty. The sound of our fall will waken from their slumber the prostrate nations that surround us ; and from our ashes the breath of Heaven will kindle, in some future day, that avenging flame, which is destined to penetrate, and to purify the world.

If such then be the auspices under which we advance,—if such be the ends we pursue,—let not the heart of this country shrink from the dangers to which it is still exposed, or from the hardships it may be yet doomed to endure. Every thing that is animating,—every thing that is commanding in nature, are with us. The Providence of Heaven calls us, not only “not to be overcome with evil, “but to overcome it with good.” The shades of our ancestors beckon us to follow them in the path of freedom and of honour ;—the uplifted hands of nations implore us to free them from their chains, and to restore them to the liberty and the dignity of man. In so high a contest, be the struggles or the hardships that are to await us what they may, there

is yet glory in encountering them ; and I trust, that, even at this hour, there is not one British heart that would exchange the perilous but majestic attitude in which his country stands, for the hollow security of any insidious peace, or the base tranquillity of ignominious submission.

Nor is it to be forgotten, my brethren, in our calculations of the future, that there is an advantage which vice itself ever gives to the virtue which opposes it ; and that the efforts of guilt to defend itself, are ever destined, by the benevolent laws of our nature, to add to its crimes and its dangers. In the history of the dark and tremendous power that opposes us, who is there that has not read this awful progress ? The mask of hypocrisy has long fallen ;—the features, the well-known features, of tyranny are descried even by the slaves who serve it ;—and the weight of military despotism sinks every hour with heavier pressure upon the people themselves that created it. Year after year, in that great but wretched country, either takes something from the happiness of private life, or adds something to publick suffering. All that once distinguished it is gone ;—the gay and harmless intercourse of social life is forbidden ;—the voice of publick information or instruction is silenced ;—the spy and the informer glide into the sacred privacies of domestick confidence ;—and from the arms of the mother, the children of her love or of her widowhood are torn, that they may swell the

ranks of armies, whose banners she dare not follow with her prayers. Within these few months, my brethren, a new and more gigantick step has been made. The commerce of the world is to be suspended:—the progress of every nation to wealth and to independence is to be stopt;—the projects of insane ambition are to be pursued, not by the bravery with which its armies can act, but by the tameness with which its subjects can suffer:—and the world around is to return to a wilderness, that *one* impious throne may be established upon the ruins of all the former honours of humanity.*

There is a limit, my brethren, to human suffering, and there is an hour in oppression, when resolution springs from despair. To that hour, to that avenging hour, time and nature are approaching. “The cup of bitterness is full, and “there is a drop which will make it overflow.” Unmarked as it may be, amid the blaze of military glory, the dread hand is yet “writing on the “wall” the sentence of its doom; and however late may be its arrival, the hour is yet steadily approaching, when “evil will be overcome with “good;”—and when the life blood of an injured world will collect at the heart, and, by one convulsive effort, throw off the load that has oppressed it.

* The “Continental System” was now in force.

While these are the dark and ominous scenes that are passing around us, there is, to the people of this country, in the present hour, a spectacle presented by the beneficence of Heaven, of a very different kind. The clouds that so long have hung around the throne have dissolved;—the prayers of a loyal people have been heard;—and our aged sovereign again comes forward from behind the veil of misfortune, to ascend his ancient throne, and to meet that glad acclaim, which but lately placed the crown of patriot glory upon his grey hairs, and which the ear of the tyrant and the despot is never destined to know.

May it be the omen of better days! With him may the reign of order, of justice, and of freedom return among mankind! May the last years of his reign experience again all the glory and prosperity in which it began: And may his paternal eyes not close for ever, until he sees that his people CANNOT be overcome; but that, in the spirit of their country and their faith, they are able to “overcome evil with good.”

SERMON XX.

ON WINTER, AS THE SEASON OF SOCIAL AMUSEMENT.

PSALM LXXXIV. 5, 6.

“Blessed are the men, who going through the vale of misery, use it for a well; and the pools are filled with water.”

THE words of the text contain, in their moral view, one of the most beautiful allusions which is to be found even in the sacred poetry of the Psalmist. They allude to that similitude, so natural to an eastern imagination, of the course of human life to a journey through the sandy desert;—and they represent the scenes of joy and amusement with which life is interspersed, “as the green vales of the desert, in which water springs,” and where the weary traveller may find a temporary repose. But they represent still more beautifully, in their moral view, what is the duty of that traveller;—not to linger around these fountains of ease and joy, but to use them only as for a well, to revive his exhausted strength,—to invigorate his pur-

posed resolutions,—and to send him forward “renewed in his mind,” on his great journey to the promised land.

I am led, my brethren, to this application of the beautiful allusion in the text, by the circumstances of the time in which we meet.—While the annual season of education and business has begun, there has, at the same time, still more lately, begun among us the annual season of pleasure and amusement. The young, the gay, and the opulent, are now preparing to enliven the winter of our year with artificial joys, and are looking forward to days of social mirth, and innocent festivity. It is a moment which a benevolent mind cannot look to without a kind of melancholy interest. Even in the midst of his sympathy with the mirth of the innocent and the young, his heart will be sad with the memory of former days;—when he remembers those, now lost to fame, to honour, and to happiness, who once entered life with hearts as gay, and minds as innocent;—and when he thinks, that, in the bright circle of those he sees, there will, too surely, be some, whom this season of gayety will lead to error and to folly, and who will live one day to curse their fatal entrance upon that scene which now they think prodigal only of joy and happiness. It is under this impression that I now wish to submit to the young of our congregation, some very simple observations; and ere they advance upon the road even of innocent

amusement, to lay before them some of the dangers which await the inordinate love of it.

1. It were unjust and ungrateful to conceive that the amusements of life are altogether forbid by its beneficent Author. They serve, on the contrary, important purposes in the economy of human life, and are destined to produce important effects, both upon our happiness and character. They are, in the first place, in the language of the Psalmist, "the wells of the desert;" the kind resting-places in which toil may relax, in which the weary spirit may recover its tone, and where the desponding mind may reassume its strength and its hopes.—They are, in another view, of some importance to the dignity of individual character. In every thing we call amusement, there is generally some display of taste and of imagination,—some elevation of the mind from mere animal indulgence, or the baseness of sensual desire. Even in the scenes of relaxation, therefore, they have a tendency to preserve the dignity of human character, and to fill up the vacant and unguarded hours of life with occupations innocent at least, if not virtuous. But their principal effect, perhaps, is upon the social character of man. Whenever amusement is sought, it is in the society of our brethren; and whenever it is found, it is in our sympathy with the happiness of those around us. It bespeaks the disposition of benevolence, and it creates it. When men assemble, accordingly, for

the purpose of general happiness or joy, they exhibit to the thoughtful eye, one of the most pleasing appearances of their original character. They leave behind them, for a time, the faults of their station and the asperities of their temper;—they forget the secret views, and the selfish purposes of their ordinary life, and mingle with the crowd around them with no other view than to receive and to communicate happiness. It is a spectacle which it is impossible to observe without emotion; and, while the virtuous man rejoices at that evidence which it affords of the benevolent constitution of his nature, the pious man is apt to bless the benevolence of that God, who thus makes the wilderness and the solitary place be glad, and whose wisdom renders even the hours of amusement subservient to the cause of virtue.

2. It is not, therefore, my brethren, the use of the innocent amusements of life which is dangerous, but the abuse of them;—it is not when they are occasionally, but when they are constantly pursued; when the love of amusement degenerates into a passion, and when, from being an occasional indulgence, it becomes a habitual desire. What the consequences of this inordinate love of amusement are, I shall now endeavour very briefly to shew you.

When we look, in a moral view, to the consequences of human pursuits, we are not to stop at the precise and immediate effects which they may

seem to have upon character. It is chiefly by the general frame of mind they produce, and the habitual dispositions they create, that we are to determine whether their influence is fortunate or unfortunate on those who are engaged in them. In every pursuit, whatever gives strength and energy to the mind of man, experience teaches to be favourable to the interests of piety, of knowledge, and virtue;—in every pursuit, on the contrary, whatever enfeebles or limits the powers of mind, the same experience every where shews to be hostile to the best interests of human nature.

If it is in this view we consider the effects of the habitual love even of the most innocent amusement, we shall find that it produces necessarily, for the hour in which it is indulged, an enfeebled and dependent frame of mind; that in such scenes energy resolves, and resolution fades;—that in the enjoyment of the present hour, the past and the future are alike forgotten; and that the heart learns to be satisfied with passive emotion, and momentary pleasure.

It is to this single observation, my young friends, that I wish at present to direct your attention; and to entreat you to consider what may be expected to be the effects of such a character of mind, at your age, upon the honour and happiness of future life.

1. It tends to degrade all the powers of the understanding. It is the eternal law of nature that

truth and wisdom are the offspring of labour, of vigour, and perseverance in every worthy object of pursuit. The eminent stations of fame, accordingly, and the distinguished honours of knowledge have, in every age, been the reward only of such early attainments, of that cherished elevation of mind which pursues only magnificent ends, and of that heroick fortitude which, whether in action or in speculation, pursues them by the means of undeviating exertion. For the production of such a character, no discipline can be so unfit as that of the habitual love of amusement. It kindles not the eye of ambition;—it bids the heart beat with no throb of generous admiration;—it lets the soul be calm, while all the rest of our fellows are passing us in the road of virtue or of science. Satisfied with humble and momentary enjoyment, it aspires to no honour, no praise, no pre-eminence, and, contented with the idle gratification of the present hour, forgets alike what man has done, and what man was born to do.

If such be the character of the youthful mind, if it be with such aims and such ambition that its natural elevation can be satisfied, am I to ask you, my brethren, what must be the appearances of riper years?—what the effect of such habits of thought upon the understanding of manhood? Alas! a greater instructor, the mighty instructor, experience, may shew you in every rank of life what these effects are.—It will shew you men born

with every capacity, and whose first years glow-
ed with every honourable ambition, whom no
vice even now degrades, and to whom no actual
guilt is affixed, who yet live in the eye of the
world only as the objects of pity or of scorn,—
who, in the idle career of habitual amusement,
have dissipated all their powers, and lost all their
ambition,—and who exist now for no purpose, but
to be the sad memorials of ignoble taste and de-
graded understanding.

2. The inordinate love of pleasure is, in the
second place, equally hostile to the moral character.
If the feeble and passive disposition of mind which
it produces be unfavourable to the exertions of the
understanding, it is, in the same measure as un-
favourable to the best employments of the heart.
The great duties of life, the duties for which every
man and woman is born, demand, in all situations,
the mind of labour and perseverance. From the
first hour of existence to the last,—from the cradle
of the infant, beside which the mother watches
with unslumbering eye, to the grave of the aged,
where the son pours his last tears upon the bier
of his father,—in all that intermediate time, every
day calls for exertion and activity, and the moral
honours of our being can only be won by the stead-
fast magnanimity of pious duty. If such be the
laborious but animating destiny of man, is it, my
brethren, in the enervating school of habitual
amusement, that the young are to fit themselves

for its high discharge? Is it from hence that the legislator is to learn those lengthened toils which decide the happiness of nations; or the warrior, that undaunted spirit, which can scorn both danger and death in the defence of his country? Or is it here, my young friends, that experience tells you, you can best learn to perform the common duties of your coming days; those sacred duties of domestick life which every one is called to discharge, from which neither riches nor poverty are free, and which, far more than all others, open to you the solemn prospect of either being the blessings or the curses of society. Alas! experience has here also decided; it tells you, that the mind which exists only for pleasure, cannot exist for duty;—it tells you, that the feeble and selfish spirit of amusement gradually corrodes all the benevolent emotions of the heart, and withers the most sacred ties of domestick affection;—and it points its awful finger to the examples of those, alas! of both sexes, whom the unrestrained love of idle pleasure first led to error and folly, and whom, with sure but fatal progress, it has since conducted to be the objects of secret shame, and publick infamy.

3. In the last place, this unmanly disposition is equally fatal to happiness as to virtue. It is this which is so beautifully expressed in the concluding words of the text. “Blessed are they, who, going through the vale of misery, use it for

“ a well ; and the pools are filled with water.” It means obviously, that to the wise and virtuous, to those who use the pleasures of life only as a temporary relaxation, as a resting-place to animate them on the great journey on which they are travelling, the hours of amusement bring real pleasure ; that to them the well of joy is ever full, while to those who linger by its side, its waters are soon dried and exhausted. It is an observation, the truth of which every one must perceive and feel. I speak not now of those bitter waters which must mingle themselves with the well of unhallowed pleasure,—of the secret reproaches of accusing conscience,—of the sad sense of shame and dishonour,—and of that degraded spirit, which must bend itself beneath the scorn of the world ;—I speak only of the simple and natural effect of unwise indulgence ;—that it renders the mind callous to enjoyment ;—and that, even though the “ fountain were full of water,” the feverish lip is incapable of satiating its thirst. Alas ! here too, my brethren, we may see the examples of human folly ;—we may see around us every where the fatal effects of unrestrained pleasure,—the young sickening in the midst of every pure and genuine enjoyment ;—the mature hastening, with hopeless step, to fill up the hours of a vitiated being ;—and, what is still more wretched, the hoary head wandering in the way of folly, and, with an unhallowed dotage, returning again to the trifles and the amusements of childhood.

Such then, my young friends, are the natural and experienced consequences of the inordinate love even of innocent amusement, and such the intellectual and moral degradation to which the paths of pleasure conduct. On that path you are now entering,—the season opens to you many various sources of enjoyment,—and many a siren voice is prepared to invite you to indulgence and joy. At such a time, let me entreat you to pause, ere you begin your course; ere those habits are acquired which may never again be subdued;—and ere ye permit the charms of pleasure to wind around your soul their fascinating powers.

Think, with the elevation and generosity of your age, whether this is the course that leads to honour or to fame;—whether it was in this discipline that they were exercised, who, in every age, have blessed, or have enlightened the world,—whose shades are present to your midnight thoughts,—and whose names you cannot pronounce without the tear of gratitude or admiration.

Think, still more, whether it was to the ends of unmanly pleasure that you were dedicated, when the solemn service of religion first enrolled you in the number of the faithful, and when the ardent tears of your parents mingled with the waters of your baptism. If they live, is it in such paths that their anxious eyes delight to see you tread?—If they are no more, is it on such scenes that they can bend their venerated heads from Heaven, and rejoice in the course of their children?

But, far more than all, think, my young friends, on your entrance upon time's eventful journey, whether it was to pursue the course of an idle, a selfish, and an inglorious life, that you were created "in the image of God,"—and that the inspiration of the Almighty himself gave you understanding?—whether this was the course which the Saviour of the world pursued, and on which he hath called you "to follow him?"—and whether this is the character of those "spirits made perfect," who, after having finished the journey upon which you are now entering, "stand before the throne of that God for ever?"

SERMON XXI.

ON WINTER, AS THE SEASON OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT.

PSALM LXXIV. 17.

“Thou hast made summer and winter.”

UPON a former occasion, I addressed myself to the young of our congregation, in reference to that season of amusement which winter generally brings; and I endeavoured to explain to them some of those dangers to which the unrestrained love even of innocent amusement naturally leads, and what are the melancholy effects which it too frequently has, both upon their future conduct and happiness.

There are many others, however, to whom winter arrives, beside the young and the gay;—there are other sentiments than those of joy, with which the hearts of many meet its approach; and there are higher instructions which it is fitted to give, than those which youth alone can derive from it. It is to this description of our congregation, to the serious, the thoughtful, and the mature, that I now

wish, for a few moments, to address myself; to shew them what are the lessons which they may draw from the appearances they witness, and to suggest to them some of those reflections which the season naturally awakens, and which it would be wise in us all to render familiar to our minds.

I have before had occasion to observe, that, while the great end of the variation of seasons is the support and maintenance of the material world to which we belong, it has yet also an indirect effect in the moral and religious instruction of man; and that, by this silent means, “day unto day uttereth unto him speech, and night unto night teacheth him knowledge.” There are emotions which every where characterize the different seasons of the year. In its progress, the savage is led, as well as the sage, to see the varying attributes of the Divine Mind;—and, in its magnificent circle, it is fitted to awaken in succession, the loftiest sentiments of piety which the heart can feel. When spring appears,—when the earth is covered with its tender green, and the song of happiness is heard in every shade, it is a call to us to religious Hope and Joy. Over the infant year, the breath of Heaven seems to blow with paternal softness, and the heart of man willingly participates in the joyfulness of awakened nature. When summer reigns, and every element is filled with life, and the sun like a giant pursues his course through the firmament above, it is the

season of solemn Adoration ;—we see then, as it were, the majesty of the present God ;—and wherever we direct our eye, “the glory of the Lord seems to cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea.” When autumn comes, and the annual miracle of nature is completed ;—“when all things that exist have waited upon the God which made them, and he hath given them food in due season,” it is the appropriate season of Thankfulness and Praise. The heart bends with instinctive gratitude before him whose beneficence “neither slumbers nor sleeps,” and who, from the throne of glory, “yet remembereth the things that are in Heaven and Earth.”

The season of Winter has also similar instructions ;—to the thoughtful and the feeling mind it comes not without a blessing upon its wings ;—and perhaps the noblest lessons of religion are to be learnt amid its clouds and storms.

1. It is, in the first place, a season of solemnity, and the aspect of every thing around us is fitted to call the mind to deep and serious thought. The gay variety of nature is no more ;—the sounds of joy have ceased, and the flowers which opened to the ray of summer are all now returned to dust. The sun himself seems to withdraw his light, or to become enfeebled in his power ; and while night usurps her dark and silent reign, the hosts of Heaven burst with new radiance upon our view, and pursue through unfathomable space their bright

career. It is the season when we best learn the Greatness of Him that made us. The appearances of other seasons confine our regards chiefly to the world we inhabit. It is in the darkness of winter that we raise our eyes to “those Heavens which declare his power, and to that firmament which sheweth his handy work.” The mind expands while it loses itself amid the infinity of being; and from the gloom of this lower world, imagination anticipates the splendours of “those new Heavens and that new earth,” which are to be the final seats of the children of God.

But there is still a greater reflection which the season is destined to inspire. While we contemplate the decaying sun,—while we weep over the bier of nature, and hear the winds of winter desolating the earth,—what is it that this annual revolution teaches even to the infant mind? Is it, that the powers of nature have failed, that the world waxeth old, and that the night of existence is approaching? No! It is, that this reign of gloom and desolation will pass;—it is, that spring will again return, and that nature will reassume its robe of beauty. In the multitude of years that have gone before us, this mighty resurrection has annually been accomplished. To our fathers, and the old time before them, the yearly beneficence of Heaven has been renewed; and, while the night of winter has sunk in heaviness, joy hath as uniformly attended the morning of the spring.

There is no language which can speak more intelligibly to the thoughtful mind than this language of nature; and it is repeated to us, as it were, every year, to teach us trust and confidence in God. It tells us, that the power which first created existence is weakened by no time, and subject to no decay;—it tells us, that, in the majesty of His reign, “a thousand years are but as one day,” while, in the beneficence of it, “one day is as a thousand years;”—it tells us, still farther, that, in the magnificent system of his government, there exists no evil; that the appearances, which to our limited and temporary view seem pregnant with destruction, are, in the mighty extent of his Providence, the sources of returning good; and that, in the very hours when we might conceive nature to be deserted and forlorn, the spirit of the Almighty is operating with unceasing force, and preparing in silence the renovation of the world.

Such, my brethren, are the first instructions which this season is fitted to bring.—Amid the solemn thoughts which it awakens, it leads us to the contemplation of that boundless Wisdom which governs the revolutions of nature;—amid the apparent decay of being, it reminds us of that Almighty Power by which all is renewed; and, by the very contrasts which it presents, it tells us of the unceasing Goodness of Him “whom both summer and winter obey.”

2. There is another view of the subject.

The seasons of the year, while they all testify, though with various voice, the attributes of the Almighty, have also analogies to the condition of man; and every language is full of those similitudes which arise from the progress of the year, and the progress of human life. Let me at present suggest to you some of the most obvious of those reflections which the present season inspires, and some of the consolations which the appearances of winter dictate to those whose condition may resemble it.

Its first and most obvious analogy is to that of old age; to the darkened eye, and the decaying frame, and the hoary head upon which the snows of time have fallen. You have arrived, my brethren, like the year, at the winter of your days, but, as in the annual revolutions of time, He that formed you has not decayed. The same power which first called you into being, and spread the blossoms of your spring, is now, in his great system, conducting you to the termination of your days, and resolving your material frame into the dust from which it sprung. It is indeed a season of solemnity, but let it not be to you a season of gloom;—it is the same goodness which first led you into life, which is now withdrawing you from it;—it is the same unwearied care which presided over the hour of your birth that will finally preside over the hour of your dissolution. Amid the desolations of winter, the voice of nature tells you.

that spring will return, and the earth will be again covered with the glory of the Lord:—Amid the weakness and weariness of age, the voice of Revelation tells you, that another spring shall visit the grave; “that the dead shall rise, and they shall be changed;” and that, in the great destiny of the virtuous soul, the frailty of man shall put on “incorruption;” and the infirmities of age shall put on “immortality.”

The second great relation which the season of winter has to the condition of man, is to that of those who mourn;—those who, in this imperfect and unfinished state of being, are suffering under the apparent influences of chance and time. How many are there, in every congregation, to whom this similitude may apply!—they who labour under the pressure of unmerited disease,—or struggle with the hardships of hopeless poverty,—or weep over the many unforeseen miseries of domestick life;—they who have once known better days, and are now consigned, by the cruelty of the world, to obscurity and neglect;—and they, far more, who bend over the ashes of those whom they loved, and, bereaved of all they held dear, refuse the voice of comfort. To such mourners, to those who in the state of trial are innocently suffering, the great language of consolation is doubtless that of the Gospel. It is such tears which faith alone can dry;—and it is upon such secret chambers of resigned distress, “that the

“spirit of God descends, with healing upon his wings.” Yet let me also remind you, my brethren, that nature too has its voice of consolation ;—and that the same God who made summer the emblem of the duties of prosperity, has made winter also the emblem of the graces of adversity. You have arrived, then, at the moral winter of your being,—the night of sorrow is closing over your heads,—and the sun which brightened your former days seems to be withdrawing from your view. It is the kindred spectacle which nature now presents to your eyes.—Yet the sun, you know, will again return unto his place in the heavens ;—the clouds that shroud the face of the earth will disappear, and the voice of joy will be heard amid the promises of another season. Think not, my brethren, that the Providence which thus watcheth over material nature is regardless of the moral happiness of man ;—think rather, that he thus opens to you the laws of his government, and that he makes the year of nature the emblem of your immortal year ;—think, far more, that, in his moral system, there is no evil to the virtuous ; and that it is not the momentary state, but the final issue which is to disclose his eternal design. While, therefore, you see the storms of winter preparing the earth for the blossoms of another spring, let them be the sign to you of those kind severities by which he prepares your souls for greater joys ;—by which he purifies your desires, and strengthens

your faith, and weans you from the love of a temporary being;—and while, during the long night, ye behold the splendours of the distant Heavens, let them point out to your prophetick eye, that region of final bliss, “those green pastures, and “those still waters,” where, after the wilderness of life is past, there is “rest for the children of “God.”

I would to God, my brethren, that all of us, whether young or old, whether sorrowful or happy, could raise our minds to these high meditations; and that, while we listened, in the hours of solitude, to the instructions of Revelation, we would listen also, in our common hours, to the kindred instructions of Nature. It is such habits of thought that best incorporate religion with our souls;—that make us see the Deity in every scene we visit, and every appearance we behold;—and convert the world, in which the ignorant and the thoughtless perceive only the reign of chance and time, into the temple of the living and the present God.

Of the innumerable eyes that open upon nature, none but those of man see its author and its end. There is something very solemn in this mighty privilege. It is the privilege of a being not made to perish with Time, and formed, in some greater hour, to know him who inhabiteth Eternity. It is the privilege, still more, of that being, whom, amid the clouds and darkness of this

lower world, the Son of God came in mercy to seek and to save.

Let then, my brethren, the storms of winter blow, and the rains of Heaven descend. While every inferiour nature shrinks from their approach, let us meet them as the signs of the same goodness, which brings forth the promises of spring, and fulfils the hopes of the harvest ;—let us see them, as the evidence of that wisdom, which makes momentary evil the source of final good, and which can make the tears which mortality sheds, in a greater state, to be reapt in joy. Whatever may be the natural or moral appearances which we behold, let us never forget that the same Almighty mind reigns amid them all ;—that to the wise and the virtuous “all things are “working together for good ;” and that, amid the winter of our moral nature, that mind is formed, and those dispositions are nursed, which are to re-awaken, under the influence of a greater spring ; and to exist when the revolutions of nature are past, and when time itself shall be no more.

SERMON XXII.

ON THE GENERAL THANKSGIVING, JANUARY 13, 1814.

ST. MATTHEW xvii. 4.

“ Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here : if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.”

THESE words were spoken in a moment of deep astonishment and gratitude. Our Saviour, as we read, had carried up his three disciples, without any previous preparation for the mighty scene that was to follow, “ into an high mountain, apart by themselves, and was then transfigured before them. And his face did shine as the sun : and his raiment was as white as light : And behold there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with Him.” It was then that Peter broke out into those words, that so faithfully express the tumult of his astonished but grateful mind : “ Lord, it is good for us to be here ; and, if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.”

It is with some such mingled sentiments of astonishment and of thankfulness, that the people of this country must assemble in the service of this grateful day. After long years of doubt and of darkness, after hopes long deferred, and prayers long unanswered, the dawn of brighter years seems rising upon the world. The waves of the deluge are retiring;—the green hills appear;—the dove of peace seems approaching us with the olive branch upon her wings;—and the radiant sign of mercy from above is glowing in the clouds of Heaven. In such moments of wonder and of joy, I feel that the duties of this place cannot be performed. I bow my head before the throne of God in deep, (and I could wish in silent) thankfulness. And I dare only present to you a few hasty and disturbed reflections, which your own meditation must improve.

What the blessings are, for which we are now assembled in thankfulness before God, the most careless eye must see, and the simplest tongue can tell. The departed year rose upon us in the midst of calamity and gloom. While the great contest was as yet doubtful, upon which the fate of the social world depended, the miseries of want and of war were settling every day more deeply over our own land. The usual channels of its industry were obstructed;—the sounds of labour and of joy began to cease in our streets;—the character even of our people began to change;—

and, amid the gloom that gathered around the poor man's heart, new and unheard of crimes arose, and the peaceful habitations of men began to be filled with violence and with blood.

How different are the scenes with which this auspicious year begins!—The great conflict of the social world is over:—The mighty are fallen; and the weapons of war have perished.—The cry of freedom bursts from the unfettered earth; and the banners of victory wave in all the winds of heaven. Again, in every corner of our own land, the voice of joy and of gladness is heard. The cheerful sounds of labour rise again from our streets, and the dark ocean begins again to brighten with our sails. Over this busy scene of human joy, the genial influences of Heaven have descended. The unclouded sun of summer has ripened for us all the riches of the harvest. The God of nature hath crowned the year with his goodness, and all things living are filled with plenteousness. Who is there that has not felt the blessings of the year? Even the infant, while he partakes, unconsciously, of the general joy, lifts his innocent hands to that Heaven from which he sees come all the hopes of man; and the aged man, when he remembers the sufferings of former years, is apt to say with the good old Simeon in the gospel, “Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

But there are other, and more general subjects of thankfulness, my brethren, which ought now to occupy our minds. In this solemn hour we seem to be conducted by the hand of Heaven, like the disciples of old, unto an high mountain, from which we may look down upon the darkened world we have left, and upwards to those scenes where Heaven is displaying its glory. The images of the past, and of the future, are thronging around us; and, wherever we turn, there are new subjects of gratitude that arise before us.

1. Our first subject of thankfulness on this day, is for our Country; that she has survived all the dangers which threatened her;—that she has fulfilled the lofty duty to which the will of the Almighty has called her. Dear even to the savage heart is the land of his fathers;—dear to the citizen of civilized ages are the institutions of national wisdom, and the monuments of national glory;—but upon no human heart did the claims of his country ever fall so deep and so irresistible, as they now do upon the citizen of this country. Other nations have preceded her in the road of arts and arms;—other nations have wreathed around their brows the laurels of science, and the palms of victory: But the high destiny to which she has of late been called, no other nation has ever shared with her; and all the glories of former times fade before the moral splendour which now encircles her. She has been called to guard the for-

tunes of the human race ; to preserve, amid her waves, the sacred flame that was to relume the world ; and, like the cherubim that watched the gates of paradise, to turn every way her flaming sword against the foes of God and man. These were her duties, and nobly has she fulfilled them. Through every dark, and every disastrous year ;—while nation after nation sunk around her ;—while monarchs bent their imperial heads beneath the yoke, and the pulse of moral nature seemed to stand still in ignominious terrour,—She alone hath stood, insensible to fear, and incapable of submission. It is her hand, that, amid the darkness of the storm, hath still steadfastly pointed the road to liberty ; it is her treasures which have clothed every trembling people with armour for the combat ;—it is her sons, (her gallant sons!) who have rushed into the van of battle, and first broke the spell that paralyzed the world ; and, in these recent days, it is her commanding voice that has wakened the slumbering nations of mankind, and sent them on their glorious march, conquering and to conquer.—And now, my brethren, in the hour of her triumph,—now, when all that is brave or generous in the human race bow before her,—where is she to be found ? And what is the attitude in which she presents herself to her children ?—Oh,—not in the attitude of human pride, or human arrogance ;—not with the laurels of victory upon her brow, or with troops of captives fol-

lowing her chariot wheels :—It is in the attitude of pious thankfulness ; with hands uplifted in praise, and eyes downcast in gratitude ;—it is before the **Eternal Throne** that she bows her victorious head, and casts her crown of glory upon the ground, and calls her children to kneel along with her, and to praise the **Father of Nature** that he hath selected her to be the instrument of his mercy to mankind. These are triumphs to which the history of the world has no parallel. In the long line of her splendour, what hour is to be compared with this ? Which of us does not feel somewhat of her glory to be reflected upon our own heads ? And what **British heart** is there which does not pray that such may be ever her name, and her character among mankind ?

2. From your own country, my brethren, turn your eyes, in the second place, to the world around you ; observe the prospects that are now opening upon the human race ; and say, whether there be not here a new subject of thankfulness to **Heaven**.

The years which we have seen have been years of no common apprehension or despondence. It was not with the usual features of publick distress they were marked,—by riches dissipated, or provinces lost, or armies defeated ;—it was by features of a deeper hue, and of a more terrific form. Through the whole social system a spirit of moral disorder had gone forth, which seemed to threaten the dissolution of society itself. Be-

fore the gigantick march of violence and of ambition, the human head seemed every where to bow, and the human heart to lose its energy. Kings sunk from their thrones, and nations surrendered their liberties. The occupations of industry ceased ;—the intercourse of nations was arrested ;—and men seemed quietly to resign themselves to poverty and to suffering, that one arrogant nation might rule, and one impious mind triumph. It seemed, to our desponding eye, as if the old age of the human race had come,—as if the Sun of Righteousness was about to set amid the shadows of evening, and one long night overspread the moral world. These days, and these terrours, are past. The spirit of God hath again moved upon the face of the deep, and the order and the harmony of creation is again beginning to appear. The dread career of guilt and of ambition hath been run ; their temporary triumphs fade ; and the Eternal hand hath marked the line whither they shall come, and no farther, and where their proud waves shall be staid. From every corner of the baptized world ; “ from the east and from the west ; from the south and from the north,” the warriors of justice and of freedom come. Their sovereigns even lead the way, and place the helmet upon their imperial brows, and march with their people into glorious battle. Beneath their victorious banners kings re-ascend their thrones, and nations recover their

liberties. The fetters fall from the hands of industry ; the ocean echoes anew to the song of the mariner ; liberty and joy re-enter the poor man's dwelling ; and the voice of the mother is no longer weeping for the children, that have been torn from her arms to swell the hosts of a tyrant. Who is there among us, my brethren, that is admitted to witness this moral transfiguration, who doth not hear also the voice of God ? and where is the country from which, in these blest days, the song of triumph does not rise, “ The hosts of the guilty
“ are scattered, and the Lord God Omnipotent
“ reigneth ? ”

3. There is yet, however, my brethren, another subject of thankfulness upon this day. It is for the religious prospects that are opening upon mankind, and for that renewed light with which the Day Spring from on high is now rising upon the Christian world.

Deep as hath been the gloom which so long has settled upon the societies of men, its most appalling feature hath been its impiety ; and when you trace the late miseries of mankind to their source, you will find them all to originate in that cold and cheerless spirit of Infidelity, which arose in the centre of European civilization ;—which dried up, as it spread, all the fountains of greatness, or of generosity in the human soul ;—and which, dissolving all the obligations, and all the charities of life, ceased not till it had extinguished both the

majesty of the throne and the sanctity of the altar. It was from this dense and pestilential vapour that that terrific form arose, upon which, like the vision which appeared unto the prophet, the world for so many years has gazed with astonishment and with alarm. It was from hence that those impious hosts have issued, whose crimes and whose impieties have still more appalled mankind than their arms; who warred not with the common guilt of men, against the wealth or the liberties of nations, but against all that man holds dear, or nations think holy;—who struck the dagger of their enmity, not into the bosoms but into the souls of the conquered;—and who thought their infernal triumph incomplete, until they had overthrown every altar at which human misery wept, and was comforted.

These days, too, are over. “He hath blown
“with his wind, and they are scattered.” The cross is again triumphant in the sky, and in its sign the faithful have conquered. The might of the gospel hath infused itself into the soldier’s arm; and, while the foe is prostrate upon the ground, the mild, but thrilling voice, seems again to be heard from Heaven, “I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest.”

--The days, indeed, are past, but their memory, my brethren, will never pass. They will remain to the last posterity to record the dread effects of infidelity upon human happiness, and upon human

character. The eyes of the most distant generations will look back upon them and tremble ; and the parent of every future age, when he wishes to instruct his children in the importance of religion to human welfare, will point to this darkest page in the history of man, and they will weep, and be instructed.

While these dread scenes are withdrawing from our view, how beautiful, on the other hand, and how welcome to every Christian heart, are the prospects that are now unfolding themselves ! The prospects of reviving Faith, and awakened Hope, and unfettered Charity. We seem to hear again, in our eventful days, the song that broke the silence of the night, to announce “glory to God, and on earth peace, and good will to mankind.” The high visions of Christian promise seem to open in long perspective before us. The years draw nigh “when all nations shall rest in secure habitations, and in quiet resting-places, and when there shall be wars no more.” We bend in thankfulness before the promises of our faith ; the events of time mingle with the prophecies of religion ; and we say, with new emotion, to the God who gave them, “Thy kingdom come ! Thy will be done in earth as it is in Heaven !”

Yes ! my brethren, *it is good for us to be here.* It is good for us, while all these blessings have descended upon our own land, to bow ourselves on this day, with all its inhabitants, before the God of

our fathers. It is good for us, while all these prospects are opening upon the nations of the Christian world, to offer our praise as the first-fruits of human gratitude ; and, as we have led them into the field of combat with the injustice of man, to lead them now into the temple of praise before the throne of Heaven.

Yet of so great a day, who would not wish some monuments to remain !—some memorials of thought and of emotion which might survive the hour that awakens them !—If these be our sentiments, my brethren, let us, in these moments, imitate the grateful feeling of the disciple. Let us, too, raise here three tabernacles in our bosoms : three altars, on which we may place the offerings of our gratitude, and to which, whatever may be the aspect of future days, we may return to feel again the lofty sentiments of this.

Let the first be raised to our Faith, to that faith “ in which our fathers trusted and were holpen ; “ which is able to overcome the world : ” and in the might of which, men and nations are secure of immortal triumph.

Let the next be raised to our Country ; to that country which so long has stood the landmark of the human race, and against which “ the winds “ and the waves have beat in vain.” Let our praise ascend to the statesmen who have guided her councils :—to the warriors who have wielded her arms ;—and to that majestick People, who,

for so many years, have borne every thing, that they might preserve the liberty which their fathers bequeathed them : And, though one saddening reflection must dim the splendour of the day, though the Father of his People can no longer hear the voice of their praise, let not our gratitude yield to misfortune, but let the blessings of his assembled people fall this day upon his grey head, and precede the rewards of a greater world.

Let the last be raised, my brethren, to Those who have Fallen in this mighty contest, to the memory of the young and the brave who have purchased, with their blood, the freedom of their country, and of mankind.—While the bones of that impious host, that defied the living God, lie scattered over every foreign land, and whiten, unheeded, in the winds of winter, let *their* ashes be gathered with pious care, let their monuments rise among every people whom they have saved, and their names dignify the annals of their country for ever. Over the hallowed page which records their valour, and their fall, let the aged of our people, in every future year, pour the tears that are due to the memories of the departed brave ; and thence let the young of our latest generations learn, what are the energies of British Freedom, and what the genuine path of British Glory.

And Thou, “ O God of our fathers ; Thou, “ who hast been their refuge in every former generation, and who around us hast spread thine

“everlasting arms,” do Thou in mercy accept this our humble “sacrifice of praise and of thanksgiving!” It is “thy judgments that are now in the world,” but, for the mighty end, “that all the inhabitants thereof may learn righteousness.”—May thy paternal “Will be done!” may thy “Kingdom come,” and end the miseries of a guilty world! From the throne of thy mercy may peace at last descend upon all the habitations of men! and may they, while they raise their wondering eyes to Heaven, behold there the face of “thy beloved Son;”—and may they bless Thee, “and hear Him!”

THE END.







