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Alison

James C. Wright

SERMONS,

BY

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PREBENDARY OF SARUM,) RECTOR OF RODINGTON, VICAR OF HIGH
PERCAL, AND SENIOR MINISTER OF THE EPISCOPAL
CHAPEL, COWGATE, EDINBURGH.

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TO

THE YOUNG

OF THE

CONGREGATION OF THE COWGATE CHAPEL, EDINBURGH,

THESE

SERMONS

ARE INSCRIBED, WITH EVERY WISH FOR THEIR PRESENT, AND EVERY
PRAYER FOR THEIR FINAL HAPPINESS.

Edinburgh, 12th November 1815.

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SERMON I.

ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

ST. MARK X. 14.

“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not.”*

THE season has again returned, my brethren, when we are to commemorate the arrival of our Saviour; and I believe there are few thoughtful men who do not meet its return with some sentiments of solemn joy. Whatever may be the interests or the attractions of the world, there is something in them which does not fill all the capacity of the human heart; and there is a kind of sublime delight in leaving the changeable scenes of time, to fix our thoughts upon the unchangeable subjects of religion. It is grateful too, in such seasons, to feel, that all our Christian brethren throughout the world are united with us in the same sentiments and the same services; that

* Preached in Advent.

every Christian heart is now beating with the same emotion of gratitude; and every Christian tongue is repeating the same hymn of adoration and praise. But most of all, perhaps, it is affecting to us to feel the sacred influence which *time* has thrown over these services of religion;—to remember through how many ages of the human race this season has been welcomed with holy joy;—to think, that the same sentiments which now animate our hearts, have animated the hearts of successive generations which are long cold in the grave; and that the service, to which the voice of religion at this time summons us, is that which has conducted the pious and the good of all those former generations, “into the fulness of their master’s joy.” In such high and holy meditations, the littleness of present time and present interests disappear. The past and the future rise before us in all the solemn grandeur of religion; and the heart finds at last, objects that can fill all its capacity, and satiate all its desires.

Among the many duties to which seasons of this kind so solemnly invite us, there is one which is, perhaps, above all others, natural and important. It is that of the Instruction of the Young in the principles of their religion. While we are preparing ourselves for these solemnities, “the

„little children” every where surround us, looking with eager eye to the services in which we are employed, and anxious that we should “suffer them” to share with us in these exercises of devotion, which a secret instinct has already taught them to be the highest duty as well as privilege of their being. It is a call to us “to forbid them not”—to seize the sacred moments when nature longs for instruction; and (in such hours particularly as the present,) when they see the whole Christian world preparing to commemorate the advent of that Saviour in whose name they were baptized, to teach them the high purposes for which he came, and the mighty blessings which he has bequeathed to them.

Of this important education, it is very little, you must all perceive, that can be done in this place. The publick education of the church can teach, indeed, a “form of sound words,” but it can teach them as a form only. It can furnish the minds of the young with general principles of belief; but it is incapable of furnishing those continued and particular illustrations which alone can bring them home to their imagination and their hearts; and what, I fear, is its worst consequence, it is apt to familiarize the minds of the young too early to conceptions of which their nature is

then incapable; and to give to the great truths upon which the happiness of time and of eternity depend, no higher solemnity than that which belongs to a common lesson. It is not here, in truth, my brethren, that the great task of religious education can be fully accomplished. It is under your own roofs, under your own eyes, and in the sacred retirement of your own homes. It is You alone who can know the various characters of your "little children,"—and follow the progressive opening of their minds, and adapt all your instructions to their wants and their capacities. It is you alone who are "with them always," who can seize the happy moments when instruction will best be received, and avail yourselves of all the little incidents of life from which wisdom may be gathered; and, above all, it is you alone who can convey to them instruction in that tone of parental tenderness which no other human voice can imitate, and to which God hath opened every fountain of the infant heart.

Under the deep impression of this time, and of these duties, I wish, my brethren, to offer to you, in the course of the season, some observations on the conduct of religious education; on its conduct, more particularly, in the early ages of children, from that infant period when they first hear the name into which they were bap-

tized, until that greater hour, when you are to present them at the altar of their Lord, to take upon themselves the vows of that baptism. Upon so great a subject, I can dare to promise you only a few imperfect reflections; but it is a subject, I know, to which every parental ear will listen; and there is an Almighty Spirit around us, “which can make even the weakness of man to praise him.”—There is something, undoubtedly, very solemn in the task of religious education. The subjects to be taught are so great, and the consequences of error appear so infinite, that many a conscientious parent trembles at the difficulty; and I know not if it be not chiefly to this cause, that we are to attribute that neglect of this great duty, which is unhappily so apparent in the higher ranks of life, and which has produced that unnatural system, by which they attempt to compensate this neglect, by devolving it upon those assistants whom wealth is ever able to purchase. In answer, then, both to this difficulty and this neglect, I am to entreat you, in the *first* place, to remember, that to Christian parents this difficulty is removed; that they in fact are not left to their own wisdom; and that a system of instruction is provided for them by Heaven itself, in which they are only called to be the instruments of a greater wisdom. To them,

the book of salvation is given; a book not composed by mortal wisdom, but given by "the inspiration of the Almighty," by which they are enabled to teach even their "little children," the doings of God to man; and in which, in the moment almost they leave the cradle, they may learn all that the Son of God hath said, and done, and suffered for their sakes. To such an advantage, no other religion that ever existed can pretend. It makes the humblest parent the instrument of communicating instruction from God himself. It replies unanswerably to all the fears which modesty can feel, and all the excuses which neglect can offer; and while, like the radiance of the sun, it shines with equal ray upon the cottage and the palace, it summons the inhabitants of both "to suffer their little children to come unto their Saviour, and to forbid them not."

While the mercy of Heaven has thus afforded to you, my brethren, these means of instruction, let me remind you, in the *second* place, how exquisitely these means are accommodated to the feelings and the character of the young. There is no book (as you all must have observed) so acceptable even to "the little children," as that which records the history of Jesus Christ, and the incidents of his life. The plainness of the language,—the familiarity of the events,—the progressive interest

of the story,—and the simplicity of the principal personages, are all adapted to the character of their minds; and lead them on to truth, in a way so artless and unpretending, that they are unconscious of any thing else but interest in the narration. It is still more remarkable, that there is no character so intelligible or so affecting to the infant mind, as that of their Saviour. Into the character of those whom the world calls great, they do not and cannot enter. But the character of the Saviour of the world is one which they understand, I believe, much better than the world itself. Its simplicity accords with what they feel within themselves; its goodness with what they as yet believe of the world around them. In his wisdom there is so little pretension,—in his actions there is so little effort,—that they approach him with affection like one of themselves; and though they read the story of his sufferings with tears, they are tears that are mingled with admiration, and which dry up in exultation, when they witness his triumph over death, and over all the powers of his enemies. “Suffer the little children to come unto me,” it is never to be forgotten, are his own pathetick and paternal words. They signify, that “the little children” are dear to him, and that He is acceptable to them. They signify, that while the waters of baptism

are poured even upon the cradle of humanity, the moment they leave it, the arms of a friend and of a Saviour are prepared to receive them.—They signify, but too prophetically, that times would come when the folly and the presumption of man would find out other and artificial modes of education, when the young would not be “suffered,” but “forbid to come to Him;” and they seem even to supplicate the Christian parents of every future age, to “suffer their little children to come to “him,” with the earnestness of a dying father, who fears that his children may fall into weaker and unwiser hands.

With regard, therefore, to the first period of education, my brethren, to the method of educating your “little children,” the great and the only advice I have to offer you is, that which his direction has sanctified,—“suffer them to come to Him.” Spread before their infant eyes the Gospels of their Lord; read to them these sacred books, as they advance, with those tones of solemnity and interest which parental love every where assumes; and when they are able themselves to read, let them be the constant and regular study of their earliest years, in all the hours that are dedicated to domestick piety. In such a method of education, there is nothing difficult or laborious. It is a duty which the poorest man can execute, and

from which the greatest is not exempt ; and while it can illuminate the desponding gloom of the cottage, it is able also in mercy to dim all the dangerous lustre of the palace.

In what manner the early acquaintance of " little children " with the gospels of our Lord has these important advantages, you will permit me in a few words to attempt to remind you.

1. It is its first advantage, that it presents to their infant eyes the example of the highest excellence of which their nature is capable, and by this means wakens them to a sense of all the dignity of their own being. When they follow the life and history of their Saviour, they are not learning cold and abstract maxims of morality, which they can repeat without interest or understanding, and which must be forgot the moment they leave the school. They are following the footsteps of one they love, and in whose fate their hearts are interested ; they attend him into solitude as well as into society, and are made acquainted with every sentiment of his mind, as well as every motive of his conduct. They are following, still more, the footsteps of a perfect model ; of one whose thoughts were ever great, and whose actions were ever good ; in whose sentiments towards God, Devotion assumes all its sublimity, and in whose sentiments towards men, Be-

nevolence appears in all its beauty;—and yet in whose astonishing character all these divine qualities are “so veiled in humility,” that the infant eye can look upon them with love, and recognize the perfection which itself is formed to pursue. Who is there that can remain insensible to the incalculable advantage of such a model being presented to the minds of the young? In what work of human wisdom shall we find any thing that can thus waken all that is great or good in the infant bosom? And where is the parent whose heart does not throb with thankfulness when his “little children” are “thus suffered” to come unto their Lord, and when “he puts his hands upon them and blesses them.”

2. It is a second advantage of this early acquaintance with the gospels of their Saviour, that it affords the best preparation to the infant mind for all the possible scenes of future life. You must have all observed, my brethren, to what a moral extent the example of our Saviour reaches, and how much every station and condition of men may find in Him their model and pattern.

Is it into the scenes of power or greatness that your children are destined to go? Has education given them wisdom, or has heaven lent them genius and talents? It is in His example they will find how all these blessings should be employed. It is there they will see not only power, but Omnipot-

tent Power itself, devoted only to "do good;" and the wisdom "which is from above," consecrated to the instruction of ignorance; and talents, to which every thing that is human must bow, pursuing their unambitious way, in blessing and enlightening an ungrateful world.

Is it into different paths that the providence of God seems to lead your children? Are they born to obscurity and toil? and do you foresee for them a life of suffering and of hardship? It is in his example, again, they will find the model of all the virtues which heaven has called them to employ; of that meekness which no injuries can disturb, and of that patience which no calamities can subdue; of that magnanimity which rises above all the injustice and cruelty of men; and of that resignation which looks in the darkest hour from earth to heaven, and rejoices "in doing the will" of the God who reigns there. These are the studies by which every thing that is great or good in the infant mind may be awakened and brought into activity. They give to the young imagination a lofty pattern, and to the opening heart generous desires; and, whatever may be the condition of life which the young are afterwards to fill, they send them into them with an example before them which can never be forgot, and a sense of excellence which nothing else can supply.

3. These are advantages of no slight importance. But there is another advantage of these early studies, which is peculiar to the history of our Lord, and to which nothing in the wisdom of man has any parallel. It is that which arises from the history of his death. At this point all human history ceases, and all beyond, however ardently pursued by the infant eye, is "clouds and darkness." In following Him to the grave, on the contrary, the veil is raised which falls so deep before every created being. Their delighted eye finds him rising again into life and love,—and ascending into that heaven which is his proper home,—and to which he calls all the wise and good of his people, of every future age, to follow him. If there were no other advantages of the resurrection of our Lord than the influence which the narration of it has upon the minds of "the little children," I should ever consider the value of it as incalculable. It brings not only the belief, but the conception of immortality, home even to their infant minds, and familiarizes it to their earliest imaginations. Before they enter the world, it carries their hopes and their affections beyond it; and ere the waters of baptism are dry upon their heads, it makes them feel that they are not the children of the dust alone, but the heirs of immortality.

Such, my brethren, is the simple instruction which I have at present to offer you with regard to the education of your "little children." Teach them, first, and before all things, the life of their Saviour. Teach it them regularly and diligently, until they love him,—and the great object of your wish is accomplished. It will not indeed make them learned in words which they do not comprehend, nor in doctrines which they cannot understand; but it will furnish their minds with high thoughts and lofty sentiments. It will afford them the genuine model of all that is great or good in time, and open to their undoubting faith all that is blessed or glorious in eternity.

To all of you, my brethren, whether high or low, to whom the sacred name of parent belongs, the duty equally extends;—to all of you, the same means of performing it are given: And, upon all of you that are engaged in this tender office of "feeding the infant flock of Christ," may his blessing descend!—Whenever you are met together with your little ones in his name, may his protecting and paternal spirit be in the midst of you! and so enable you to perform it, that "the rest of their lives" may correspond to this beginning," and your reward meet you, not only in time, but in immortality.

SERMON II.

ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

MATTHEW xxii. 37, 38, 39, 40.

“ And Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

WHEN we were last assembled, my brethren, I felt it my duty to offer you some imperfect observations on one of the great duties which this season involves, that of the religious instruction of the young. The period of life to which I then alluded, was that of infancy; that earliest season of human nature, when reason and reflection are not awakened, but when the heart and the imagination are open to their first and most indelible impressions.

In the performance of this great and sacred duty, I entreated you to observe, that you are not left to the feebleness of your own wisdom;—that heaven itself has deigned to illuminate and to direct you;—that the “Book of Salvation” is put into your

hands;—and that almost the moment your “little children” leave their cradle, the Gospels of their Lord are awaiting them, by the study of which you may be able to lead them to the wisdom, not only of time but of eternity. I reminded you, my brethren, with what exquisite wisdom these compositions were adapted to the minds of the young; and, in illustrating some of the advantages which arose from early and habitually acquainting them with the history of their Lord, I attempted to explain what was implied by himself in these tender and paternal words,—“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not.”

The earliest powers that awaken in the infant mind, are those of Affection;—the love of parents,—of kinsmen,—of benefactors; and gradually the love of whatever is good or great in the characters or in the history of their species. It is by the presentation of such examples to their infant eyes, that the various capacities of their nature are gradually unfolded;—that their tastes and their ambition are formed; and that the character of their future being is perhaps chiefly determined. It is on this account, that the knowledge and the study of the Gospels is of so deep importance in the earliest stage of education, by presenting to the minds of the young, while they are yet susceptible of every noble impres-

sion, a model of perfect greatness as well as goodness, in the history of the life of their Saviour, and of his death ; and in the narrative of his resurrection from the grave, by exemplifying to them the magnificent truth of their own immortality, and familiarizing it even to their earliest conceptions.

As life advances, however, other powers beside those of affection or imagination are unfolded. The faculties of Reason and Reflection awaken in the minds of the young. Their observation of nature and of life expands ; and, while they look around them with all the keen interest which novelty inspires, a principle that deserves a higher name than curiosity impels them to some new and anxious investigations. They feel themselves just called into being, and something within them tells them, that it was for some great purpose that life was given. They feel themselves the members of a mighty system, in which they are called to co-operate ; and they recognize above them some Almighty Power, upon whom they feel themselves dependent, and to whom, the rising voice of conscience tells them, they are accountable. Whoever has attended with care to the progress of the young, must have observed the arrival of this important period in the progress of their minds ; and whoever has listened to their inquiries, must have found, that the

great desire which is then struggling in their bosoms, is to discover the nature and character of that great Being whom their hearts recognize ; and the nature of those duties which He requires of them. It is the answer which the parent is able to give to these early and anxious inquiries, that must determine the religious and moral character of their future being. And it is here again, my Christian brethren, that you must feel anew the blessedness of that "light" in which we dwell. The same divine voice which formerly called your "little children" unto him, and besought you to "forbid them not," still follows them as they advance upon their road ; and, while he entrusts to your hands the book of salvation, he makes you the instrument of leading them to all those truths which can either give happiness to life, or hope to immortality.

I. To the first and greatest question which agitates the minds of the young,—What is the nature and character of that God whom instinct teaches them to recognize?—the best and wisest of us, I believe, would tremble to answer, if we were left solely to our own wisdom. The answer, however, is to be found in the words of the text: "And Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all

“thy mind. This is the first and great “commandment.” These words, my elder brethren, prescribe to us, not only our own first duty as men, but our first duty as parents. They imply, that if the religion of the gospel rests upon the love of God, the education of the gospel must consist in representing him as the Object of love. They imply, that the religious affections which are to form the great distinction of maturity, must be awakened and exercised in youth; and they signify to us, that, to guide the youthful mind to the early love of God, is the great end to which all the labours, and cares, and illustrations of education, ought to be steadily and uniformly directed.

If such be the sublime direction of our Saviour for the general end of education, how beautifully is the volume of Scripture adapted to afford you the means of accomplishing this end;—and, while the hand of Heaven withdraws for you the veil that covers the sanctuary, how great, but how simple are the truths which it unfolds, that you “may teach your children!”

1. Teach them then, my brethren, in the first place, that the Lord their God is One Lord; and that, in the progressive infinity of existence which is opening upon their eyes, there is but one Throne of goodness and of power. Teach them, “that he that “sitteth thereon,” is like the sun in this

lower firmament;—that from him every thing arose, and to him every thing returns ; —that creation, in all its immensity, and in all its forms, sprung at first from his love, and is, in every moment, maintained by his power ; and that all the boundless happiness it contains, flows incessantly from him, —from the joy of the insect that sports for its hour in the ray of the sun, to the rapture of the angel and the archangel that burn for ever before the eternal throne. To his perfection, teach them there is no limit ; that to his power, space has no bounds, and to his goodness, time no decay ; that “ he is the Lord, and chan-
“ geth not ; that every good and every per-
“ fect gift descends from him ;” and that to his beneficence “ there is no variableness
“ nor shadow of turning.”

2. Teach them, in the second place, that this God, all great and glorious as he is, is yet the Father of the race of man ; that, in “ forming them in his own image,” He has contracted the affections of a parent for them ; and that, during all their eventful progress, He has watched over them with the care with which a father watches over the progress of his infant children, and with the anxiety he feels, that they may come to the maturity of their being. It is this which is the great and distinguishing discovery of Revelation ; the mighty

discovery which leads the Christian into the moral sanctuary of nature, and enables him to worship there "in spirit and in truth." This, then, my brethren, is the second great truth which you have to teach your children; and every page of the Scripture, from its first to its last, affords you proofs and illustrations by which it is verified.

After the general enunciation of this great doctrine, you are then enabled to display to them, in detail, those magnificent scenes of the Divine administration which the ancient Scriptures unfold. Shew them then the first origin and cradle of their race, the melancholy fall from that purity in which they were created, and the watchful presence of that paternal Spirit, which, in its visitations of wrath, as well as of mercy, was uniformly leading them on to some distant maturity and regeneration of their nature. As time advances, shew them the selection of that "peculiar people," who were separated from the rudeness of the surrounding world that they might preserve, for happier ages, the name and the worship of the living God; and that long line of prophets and of wise men, who follow each other in bright succession, commissioned by heaven to maintain the lofty truths with which they were entrusted, and to announce the arrival of one

greater Being, "in whom all the nations
"of the earth were finally to be blessed."

Mighty as these discoveries are, they are yet simple and intelligible to the young. They assimilate the government of the Almighty to the well-known resemblance of a father in his family; and dark and disastrous as may occasionally be the appearances of the world, they give them still the grateful assurance, that there is "One
"that careth for them; and that, as a father
"pitieth his own children, even so He
"pitieth those that he hath made."

3. When the book of the Old Testament is closed, open to them the book of the New Testament, and shew them, in the third place, that these long prophecies have been accomplished; that the promised Saviour came; and that "herein is the love of God
"manifested, in that He hath given his Son
"to be the Redeemer of the world." Teach them, that it is here the full and final demonstration of the paternal goodness of God is given. In the successive missions of wise men and of prophets, they read the unwearied and progressive providence of heaven. But, in the mission of the Son of God, there is something more;—there is an elevation of the race of man to some higher and nearer relation to the Almighty;—there is an "adoption" of it, as it were, into some greater rank of being,

and there is a sacrifice involved, which demonstrates (in a manner which human language will never be able adequately to express) how dear the children of men are to the God who made them, when He spared not his only and beloved Son for their sakes.

4. Teach them, in the last place, my brethren, what is the end for which all this revelation is given, and all this progressive love employed;—that it is to train and prepare them for some more exalted state of being;—to fit them for some nearer approach to the great Fountain of Life and of love. Teach them that, in that greater state, the same compassionate Saviour who once called them, when “little children,” unto him, and “blessed them,” now reigns as their mediator and advocate; that death hath not dissolved his affection for them; that to their ascending step his hand hath opened the gates of immortality; and that his pathetick voice ceases not to call upon them to follow him into the great moral home of nature,—“to come unto his Father and their Father, unto his God and their God.”—Such are the answers which you are enabled to give to the first great question of the young,—the mighty truths which revelation empowers you to unfold; which are adapted to awaken in the youthful bosom every sentiment and affection of re-

ligion, and to send them upon the great journey of life with the sublime preparation of the gospel, “that of loving the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their mind.”

II. The second question which agitates the minds of the young, is, What are the duties which this God requires of them? To this question the answer is implied in the concluding words of our Saviour in the text: “And the second is like unto it; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

How simple, my brethren, but how irresistible is the connexion between these two commandments! How “like” are they in their origin and in their ends; and how easily, if you have first taught the young “to love the Lord their God,” will they feel the obligation of loving their neighbour.

If they have approached with joy the throne of the universal Father, teach them then, my brethren, in the first place, that it is their first duty to love every thing that He hath made; that every form which bears “the image of God,” is their brother, and that every being that is dear to Him, ought also to be dear unto them.—If they have looked with adoration at that perpetual care by which the universe is maintain-

ed, "and in which every thing lives and moves, and has its being;" tell them that they also are members of this mighty system; that on them too some beings depend for happiness or joy; and that the noblest career they can run is that of being "fellow workers with Him" in the welfare of his creation.—If their hearts throb with gratitude for all the blessings which His bounteous hand has shed upon them, tell them, that there are blessings also given them to bestow; that life has every where tears which their hands may wipe away; and that the path of man, on which Heaven looks down with most approving joy, is that of those "who are merciful as God is merciful."

If, in another view, they follow with glowing hearts the history of their Lord, remind them, that it was not in scenes of splendour or of indulgence that his life was passed; that it was not "to be ministered unto" that he came, "but to minister;"—to heal the sick,—to relieve the poor,—to comfort the afflicted,—to instruct the ignorant,—to suffer for the wretched. Tell them, that it is through such scenes their lives also must pass; and that, go where they will, they will find the sick to heal, the poor to relieve, the afflicted to comfort, the ignorant to instruct, and the wretched to console. Tell them, that for this also

He came, "that he might leave them an example, that they should follow his steps;" and that the purest prayer, which they can offer in the morning of life to Heaven, is, "that the same mind may be in them, which was in Christ Jesus."

If you have taught their ardent eyes to look beyond the world; if they have risen in holy imagination with their Saviour from the grave; if, in the innocence of their souls, they feel their relation to some greater system of existence,—tell them, my brethren, that there is yet the "wilderness to pass," before they reach the "promised land;" that life has dangers which they must meet, and temptations which they must resist, and passions which they must overcome; that "it is the pure in heart," alone, "who shall finally see God;" and that the same divine voice which called them unto Him, when "little children," and blessed them, still says unto them, "that of such alone is the kingdom of Heaven."

—How beautiful, my brethren, is the scene of Christian education, when the parent has such things to teach, and the young have such things to learn!—when the fountain of life is opened in the midst of them, and the young are suffered to come and quench their thirst! How well, in such simple and sacred scenes, are all the

best affections of youthful nature awakened, and its loftiest sentiments kindled, and its noblest ambition called forth! And how salutary to the old, to return thus back again, as it were, to the years of innocence and purity,—to inhale afresh the grateful joy and the undoubting faith of their youth,—and to renew again the happy hours, when they first received the kingdom of God, “as a little child.”

In such duties, and in such meditations, may those sacred hours be employed, in which we are now preparing ourselves to commemorate the arrival of the Son of God!—Retiring for a while from that world in which are all our dangers and all our enemies, may we raise our thoughts to that loftier region from which the “Day-star” of heaven is advancing to rise upon us, and to dispel the clouds and the phantoms of time! May we arise to meet Him, not with the earthly offerings “of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh,” but with the nobler offerings of pious faith, and lowly penitence, and resolved obedience!—May the departing year carry with it upon its wings, all our doubts, our sorrows, and our sins; and may we meet the year that is approaching, with minds so purified at the altar of our Lord, that, “under his pure and perfect light,” we may all advance “unto the perfect day!”

SERMON III.

ON THE LORD'S PRAYER.

ST. LUKE xi. 2.

“ And he said unto them, When ye pray, say thus :—”

IN these words, which are in answer to a request of his disciples, our Saviour introduces that celebrated form of prayer which is generally termed the Lord's Prayer, and which, in every age, has been considered as the most perfect model for the devotion of his people.

Of the request of his disciples, “ Lord teach us to pray ?” I believe there are few serious or thoughtful men who have not felt the importance. There is something so solemn in the thought of presenting ourselves before the living God ; the best of us are so unfit to appear in the presence of him who “ is too pure to behold iniquity ;” and the wisest of us are so unable to determine what is proper for them to ask, or right in him to bestow, that in no part of religious duty are we so much in need of assistance : and no where is that assistance so important as in the direction

of our prayers. It is grateful, accordingly, to observe how much every age and church of Christianity has felt the value of that model which our Saviour here gives us. It enters frequently into the liturgy of every church. It is the first form of pious words which the infant tongue is taught to repeat; and in every language almost upon earth, the Deity is daily addressed by numbers unknown to each other, in the same simple but sublime terms which, so many centuries ago, were prescribed by his blessed Son.

In the great body of mankind, however, this familiarity, like every other, is apt to have its inconveniences. Of a form so sacred, the spirit may be forgotten; the lips of the Christian may move in approaching to God, while his heart is far from him,—and the words which infancy has acquired may never afterwards be examined by maturer thought, or understood in the fulness of their sense.

I trust, therefore, that it may be neither useless nor unacceptable to the young around me, if I attempt, at present, to enter into some examination of this ever-memorable prayer of our Lord;—to point out to them the views it affords of the nature and government of the great Being to whom all prayer is addressed; and from thence to illustrate those feelings and dispositions of

mind which ought ever to accompany us in that solemn act of devotion, when we are permitted not only to approach the Throne of God, but to address him in the very words which have been prescribed by his Son.

1. Let me entreat you, then, my young brethren, to observe, in the first place, the majesty and solemnity with which it opens. It is short, and it is enjoined us as our daily prayer; and yet the first words of it involve the greatest and most exalted views of Divine Providence, which human language has hitherto expressed. While we pronounce them (if we pronounce them with thought and understanding,) we feel as it were the whole universe annihilated around us,—we see nothing but God,—we see nature prostrated at his footstool with ourselves,—and we think only of “Him in whom every thing lives, and “moves, and has its being,” and who alone inhabiteth both space and eternity.

It is not, my brethren, for light reasons that we are thus instructed to pray. There is a carelessness which habit is apt to produce even in the best of us, when we address our supplications to Heaven; and there are few who can make a sudden transition from the affairs of the world to that solemn and exalted tone of mind which prayer so justly demands. It is on this ac-

count, probably, that the opening of this prayer is made so solemn and majestick; and to remind us whom we are addressing, that all the mightiest evidences of his providence are brought forward to our imagination. It is to remind us, that, when we kneel before God, we are engaged in the highest and holiest service of our nature; that in his presence all lower desires and emotions should cease; and that the only sentiments which then become us, are veneration for his unbounded greatness, and thankfulness that He permits the children of the dust to draw near unto him.

2. If such are the feelings which become us when we address our prayers unto God, let me entreat you to observe, in the second place, what is the light in which he deigns to invite us to approach him.—Is it as the Sovereign of nature, by whom we are summoned to pay our homage before his throne? Is it even as the Master of his people, whom he calls, like the Jews of old, to listen to the commandments he enjoined;—“while the mountain burned with fire, and all the people fell with their faces on the ground?” No, my brethren! it is as the Father of existence, that he here invites his children to come unto him. It is as the great Parent of being, that he calls the souls which he has made, to come and unveil their hopes and their fears before him,

and “to put their trust under the shadow
“of his wings.”

It is impossible not to see for what end this beautiful opening of our daily prayer is intended. The distance between man and his Creator is so immense, and there is something so awful in approaching voluntarily into his presence, that nothing but the most exalted views, or the most sinless purity, can seem to embolden natural man, to hold regular communion with “Him that inhabiteth eternity.” Opinions of this fearful kind, however, would have a tendency to destroy or to corrupt all the principles of religion in the human mind. They would tend either to excuse us, in our own opinion, from the service of God, and thus gradually lead us “to live altogether without Him in the world;” or they would dispose us to approach him with the indistinct terrour of slaves,—to mingle the gloom of superstition with our religious service, and to worship him, “not in spirit and in truth,” but with the dark and ceremonial rites of a constrained homage.

The model which is here given us of Christian prayer is very different. It banishes at once from our imaginations, all the fears so natural to mortality. It is our Father to whom it teaches us to speak;—it is that name, so dear and venerable, which it brings forward with all its associations to

our minds,—the name which all men have known, and in which all have been taught to trust,—and which cannot be pronounced without awakening in every heart the feelings of confidence, and hope, and love. It is the Father, and not the Lord of Nature, who is here revealed to our view;—that Father “who careth for us, who knoweth “whereof we are made,” and who “remembereth that we are but dust;”—that Father “who seeth in secret;” to whom all hearts are open, and all desires known; and before whom all distinctions are vain, but that “of doing justly, and loving mercy, and walking humbly with him.” I pause not at present on the many reflections which this subject is fitted to excite. I entreat you only to consider within yourselves, how magnificent is the privilege which this word, Father, has conferred upon our fallen nature;—what exaltation of thought and spirit it is fitted to raise, and what immeasurable happiness it has given in every age of the Gospel, to those who “were weary and heavy laden,” with the doubts, the sorrows, or the miseries of the world.

3. While it is thus that “a new and “living way” is opened to every individual of mankind to approach the throne of the living God, in which they may pour forth their tears and supplications before Him,

let me, in the third place, remind you of the form in which these supplications are to be addressed. While we are emboldened to approach him as “a father,” let it be remembered, that it is as “*our* Father;” —not as the father only of the individual petitioner, but as the Father of the race of man;—not as the father of any particular sect or communion in religion, but as the great Parent of Life and Happiness throughout the universe.

It is the first law of our faith, that we should love the Lord our God, with all our heart and all our soul. It is the second, that we should love our neighbours as ourselves. Let me entreat you to observe, my brethren, how beautifully both these precepts are illustrated in the form of the words we are considering, and how powerfully they blend in the same moment, benevolence to Man, with devotion towards God. Even in the act of secret and solitary prayer, they remind us of our relation to each other. While we are presenting our private supplications, it is yet to the common Father of Mankind they are presented; and while our hearts are full of our own interests, the very words we use, recall to us the interests of our brethren. They remind us, that “the eyes of all wait up—“on him;”—that “it is he,” and he alone, “who openeth his hand, and filleth all

“ things living with plenteousness.” They remind us, that wherever creation extends, there his Providence is exerted ; and while we thus see, as it were, the whole animated universe prostrated with us before his throne, we learn to look upon the race of men around us, as children of the same family with ourselves, and to mingle a prayer also for their happiness and salvation.

4. There is yet a fourth reflection to which the words we are considering naturally lead us. They reveal to us the God of Nature as “our Father,” and as the common Father of Mankind ;—but there is yet a sublimer aspect in which they present him to us, “as our Father which is “in Heaven.” How many are the reflections, my brethren, which this expression is fitted to summon up in our minds !

It tells us, in the first place, that this is a lower world ;—that we see now only “darkly” the traces of Almighty wisdom ;—and that, in this infancy of our being, we are unable to comprehend the majesty of his whole administration.

It tells us, in the second place, that, amid all our doubts or darkness, there is yet One who presides over us ; and that the whole system, as it is constructed by his wisdom, is finally to be accomplished by his care. It tells us, that the power which governs

us, is the same which has launched the planets in their course; and that the day will come, when the moral system of nature will assume the same order and beauty which now reigns in the system of the Heavens.

It tells us, lastly, that there is a "Heaven" where our Father dwells;—a state of unclouded light and sinless love;—a state where tears and sorrows are no more, and where there reigneth "knowledge, and wisdom, and joy." While we utter the words, "Our Father which is in Heaven," we learn to leave the concerns of earth;—a mightier prospect opens upon our view;—the ties of mortality dissolve;—and we submit ourselves, in humble resignation, to that Father who dwelleth above, and who alone can conduct us to our proper home.

Such, my brethren, are the views of the nature and government of God, which seem to be involved in the opening of this memorable prayer; and I have dwelt so long upon it, because it seems, better than any human commentary, to explain the preparatory dispositions which are requisite for prayer:—those dispositions of heart and mind which are more valuable than the act of prayer itself, and without which all our prayers and all our ceremonies are in vain.

If I have rightly interpreted the words of our Lord, the feelings and dispositions that become us in this first and fundamental exercise of religion are these :

1. The most profound consciousness of the majesty of the Great Being whom we approach, and of the exalted nature of the service we perform :

2. That humble love and confidence in Him, which arises, from the consideration of his deigning to reveal himself to us as "our Father :"

3. That love of our brethren, and of every thing that he hath made, which arises from the consideration of his being the equal Friend and Father of all existence :

And, lastly, That trust in his wisdom, and that hope in his goodness, which spring from the belief, that the great scene of divine administration is as yet only opened, and that there is a Heaven where our Father dwells, and where the "pure in heart shall yet see Him."

If such, my younger brethren, be the views and the hopes which the words of your Saviour involve, and which he therefore empowers you to form, is there any school in which life can so nobly begin? If it were with such feelings and convictions, that you were accustomed to come to the service of prayer, whether in your own closets, or in the more solemn assemblies

of the church, how simple and how easy would be the course of goodness and of piety! and if it were in such meditations that the day began, what else would be necessary to render it holy and happy!

In such a frame of mind, "to ask," would indeed be "to receive." It would be to receive the spirit from on high, to animate, and to guide you. It would be to receive that spirit which would make you superior to the world, to all its temptations, and all its sorrows. It would be to receive, in the last place, that spirit which is alone the spirit of the gospel, which, while it gives glory to God, seeks also by "good works" to testify its "good will towards men."

SERMON IV.

ON THE LORD'S PRAYER.

LUKE xi. 2.

“ And he said unto them, When ye pray, say thus :”—

IN the preceding discourse from these words, I submitted to the young of our people, some observations on the spirit and character of our Lord's celebrated prayer, and on the dispositions of mind which it supposes in the worshipper.

The part of it I then considered was only its opening or commencement ;—that simple but sublime form of address with which it teaches us to approach the throne of God, and in which are involved all the mightiest conceptions we can form of the Divine Nature.

After this majestick opening, and all the high convictions it involves, our Saviour proceeds to prescribe the model of the petitions which it becomes us to present to that Mighty Father. We have prostrated ourselves before the Throne of Eternity, and we are now to be taught what are the wishes, the supplications, or the prayers

which we are to offer to "Him that inhabiteth it." In this respect, my brethren, or, at least, in the arrangement of these petitions, there is something very remarkable and peculiar, and which distinguishes our daily prayer from every other form of human worship.

There is a natural tendency to selfishness in all unenlightened devotion. It is in the hours only of trouble, or of fear, that men in general approach unto God: and it is the tumultuous expression of their own wishes or wants which chiefly forms their selfish communion with Heaven. It is not the Father of universal Nature they address, but the private Deity whose favours they beseech; and they rise from their knees without bestowing a wish or prayer for their brethren; and they return into the world without feeling their charity awakened, or their humanity increased.

It is with far higher and holier views that the prayer of the Gospel opens. The petitions it first prescribes are all general. It is the great family of nature for whom we are first taught to address our common Father; and ere we are permitted to offer up one prayer for ourselves, it is the Parent of Being whom we are enjoined to supplicate for the welfare of his creation. Instead of rushing into his presence with our own selfish and short-sighted requests, we,

and all our concerns, are as it were annihilated in the splendour of his presence; and it is not until we have bowed before him as the universal God, that we are emboldened to hope that he will listen to the "still small voice" of private supplication.

Singular as this arrangement of our petitions may appear, and unprecedented as it certainly is in the history of human devotion, it is yet, at the same time, perfectly natural to the truly pious heart. If in any fortunate moment we can raise ourselves to that height of devotion which corresponds to the lofty privilege of addressing ourselves to our Father who is in heaven,—if our hearts are truly penetrated with the majesty of the Presence in which we stand, and the holiness of that Being whom we approach,—we shall, without any effort, forget ourselves and the littleness of our own concerns. It is God alone who will then be present to our thoughts. It is the brightness of his glory, the infinity of his perfections, and the beneficence of his rule, which will then fill up all our contemplation; and it is in such a moment we shall feel all that the Psalmist means, when he says, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, "and what is there on earth that I desire "besides Thee?"

In such a frame of mind, the first words which it is natural for us to pronounce are

these, "Hallowed be Thy name!" It is the first, and almost instinctive expression of grateful adoration. It is thankfulness for being permitted to enter within the veil of the sanctuary, and to see God as he is. It is, still more, the generous wish, that all men may experience the same holy joy;—that the eyes of all may be uplifted with the same gratitude, to the Father of Nature,—and that the whole family of God may be united in the first tie of affection,—that of love and thankfulness to Him that made them.

2. In such a frame of mind, and with such impressions, the second petition of our prayer is equally natural: "Thy kingdom come."—Whenever it is that we retire into solitude to seek communion with God, we retire from a world, which is full of ignorance and imperfection; where all of us have wants, and doubts, and distresses of our own; and where, every where around us, we see the same sorrows and the same infirmity. When we are withdrawn from such a world, and when we are contemplating the mighty providence of God, how natural is it for us to pray that his "kingdom may come;" that kingdom in which there is "knowledge, and wisdom, and joy;"—that reign which shall dispel all doubts, and relieve all wants, and dry up all tears. And how insensibly do we close

with the supplication, that the Sun of Righteousness may ascend upon his way, that the people who lie in darkness may see the "visitation of the day-spring from "on high," and that life and light may fall upon all the yet dark and cheerless habitations of men.

3. We are still more, my brethren, in such moments, retiring from a world in which there is sin and suffering; where every vice is followed by its train of wo; and where the wayward will of man is scattering misery and desolation among the family of God. If we are duly sensible of the mighty presence in which we stand, how natural is the prayer that the "will" of God may "be done;" that all the weak and presumptuous passions of men may be sacrificed before the Throne of Heaven; that that Almighty will, which is exerted only in the diffusion of happiness, may become known and followed among men; and that, under its guidance, some foretaste of that sinless happiness may be felt by the children of dust, which constitutes the happiness of the sons of heaven.

Such, my brethren, is the nature of those petitions which we are commanded first to address to the Throne of God. Exalted and magnificent as they are, they are yet perfectly natural to every mind that is susceptible of the feelings of genuine devotion.

They follow insensibly from those views of the Divine Providence which the first words of our prayer have awakened; and they engage us in benevolent supplication for our brethren of mankind, ere we descend to the recollection of our own necessities.

Of the many reflections which this great subject naturally excites, there is one only which I shall at present attempt to dwell upon. It is upon the dispositions which prayer of so exalted a kind is fitted to leave in our minds, and the sentiments with which it sends us back again into the world. Little can our prayers avail us, if the spirit which dictates them be forgotten as soon as we leave the closet or the church; and our Saviour, in enjoining these mighty conceptions as the subject of our daily prayer, had doubtless in his view to habituate us to those exalted sentiments, which lay the foundation of all the honour, and all the happiness of men.

1. In this view let me observe, in the first place, how strongly we are thus led to trust and confidence in God. We have addressed him as our "Father which is in Heaven,"—as the author of every good and perfect gift,—as the source of life and happiness throughout this immense universe. We have addressed him, still more, not in mortal words, but in words prescri-

bed by him who alone knew him, and who could reveal him unto us. With how much holy confidence may we not now return into the world! That world is his world. Over every path His eye is present; in every obscurity He can see; amid every distress He can relieve. Whatever may be the part which we are called to act, it is his will which has determined it. Whatever may be the labours we are summoned to perform, that paternal eye which "seeth in secret," is awaiting on one greater day "to reward openly."

2. How naturally, in the second place, is such frame of mind productive of benevolence and good will towards men! We have prayed, not with the selfishness of unenlightened men, but with the wide humanity of Christian piety, for the world which we inhabit,—that the moral kingdom of its Author may come, and that the dominion of "his will" may diffuse truth and joy over every habitation of man. Is it possible, my brethren (if we have prayed in earnest,) that we can rise from our knees without feeling our charity exalted, and our benevolence increased? We have been admitted into the councils of God; and we see them all tending to the improvement and happiness of man. We are now returning into a world where there is much ignorance, much imperfection, and much

sorrow. Can we return into it without feeling the desire “of being fellow workers “with Him!” of lending our aid, feeble as it may be, in the diffusion of truth,—in the encouragement of virtue,—in the relief of suffering,—or in the spreading of the “glad “tidings of salvation among the dwellings “of men.” And can we permit the sun to be witness to our morning prayers, without wishing, that our course may be like his, to diffuse light and joy amid the society in which we dwell!

3. How strongly, in the third place, does the spirit of our Lord's prayer lead us to the recollection of the particular duties which we are called individually to perform. We pray that “his kingdom may come;” not a temporal kingdom, but that mental and spiritual kingdom, which consists in the reign of Innocence, of Piety, and Virtue. Of that kingdom, the words remind us, that we are all members; that its advancement or delay depends upon our individual efforts; that the scene in which we are placed is the true scene of our fidelity; and that the humblest man who, beneath the thatch of the cottage, passes a life of obscure and patient duty, and “brings up “his children in the nurture and admonition of their Lord,” is yet no less than a “fellow worker with God” himself in the present happiness, and in the final salvation

of mankind. How well fitted are such convictions to the various and unequal conditions of men! How exalted the principle from which they summon us, whether high or low, to duty; and even to those who are called to those labours of life, where “they are weary and heavy laden,” how noble are the struggles which they are thus summoned to undergo,—and how dear that “rest” in which it is promised their labours shall for ever close.

4. There is yet still a nobler reflection which these words are fitted to convey. In illustrating formerly what was meant in the words of our first address to God, I concluded by reminding you of the hope they inspired by the name of “Our Father who is in Heaven.” Let me now remind you, that the same consoling and animating doctrine is interwoven also with the general petitions we are now considering; and that, while we pray for the reign of human virtue, and human happiness under the gospel, we pray for it as the prelude to that greater happiness which reigns in heaven. Under such prospects, with what solemn joy may not the pious return into the world; with what firm eye may they not look upon the hardships they are doomed to undergo; and with what patient heart may they not receive every visitation which it pleases their Father to send!—

In that concluding scene, all mysteries will be revealed,—all doubts cease,—all inquietudes repose:—the pure in heart will see their God,—and “from the east and the west, from the north and from the south,” the gates of Heaven will open to receive the meek, the pious, and the good.

When from such meditations we return into the world, we often return to mark the reign of chance and time,—to see the place vacant, which was once filled by those we loved or esteemed,—or to follow to their graves those whom worth had dignified, or innocence had endeared:—sometimes the young who fell in the bloom of youthful promise; sometimes the mature, who have been summoned away amid all their plans of private good, or publick usefulness; and sometimes the aged, who sunk under the weight of years, and whose gray hairs have fallen into the grave, satiated with life and full of honour. In such circumstances, what is there that can console the hearts of those who have been bereft of all they held dear, and who refuse the voice of comfort? It is the preparation of this habitual prayer. It is the blessed belief that there “is” a kingdom in Heaven, in which the spirits of departed virtue repose,—in which they meet the Saviour whose footsteps they have followed, and the Father, whose will they have studied

to do. From the evils and the infirmities of life, they are removed to their "own border;" that border from which death separates us; but where there reigns Truth, and Wisdom, and Joy; that border which they have struggled to secure as their own, by deeds of goodness and benevolence while on earth; where they are received by all the just who have preceded them in the career of virtue; and where, under the influence of the Sun of Righteousness, the seeds of piety and goodness, which life has nourished, will be sown in a nobler soil, and "bring forth fruits worthy of immortality."

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SERMON V.

ON THE LORD'S PRAYER.

LUKE xi. 2.

“ And he said unto them, When ye pray, say thus :”—

IN the preceding discourses, I have attempted, in the plainest manner, to illustrate the nature and character of that celebrated prayer which our Saviour has left to his people as the model of their devotion.

In this view, I considered, in the first place, the majesty and solemnity of its opening, and the various sentiments of trust, of veneration and hope, which the words “ Our Father which art in Heaven,” are fitted to excite in our minds.

After this grateful preparation, I considered, in the second place, the nature of the petitions with which it commences,—the magnificent views which they afford of the reign and providence of God, and the wide and pure benevolence which they inspire in every thoughtful bosom, when, amid all the ruin and sorrows of the world, we pray that “ his kingdom may come,” and “ his

“will may be done in earth as it is in “Heaven.” It is then, my brethren, after we have contemplated the majesty of the Being whom we address, and prostrated ourselves with universal nature before his throne;—it is then, and not till then, that we are permitted to offer up our individual supplications, and reveal to “our Father, “who is in Heaven,” the wants and wishes of our own hearts. What these petitions are, and what is the spirit which ought to accompany this important part of our prayers, we are now to consider.

To a being like man, to whom the “inspiration of the Almighty” hath given both memory and foresight,—whose eye is formed to look back upon life, and forward upon eternity,—there are three distinct portions of time which have each their peculiar interest and importance,—the present, the past, and the future. All other beings that we see around us feel an interest only in the present time; and were their humble voices capable of prayer, it would be only for the relief of their immediate wants. Man, on the contrary, formed for nobler ends, and with anticipations of an existence which knows no termination, in his estimate of good, takes in the whole period of his being. The days that are past, bring with them remembrances either of sorrow or of joy, which the

heart in secret knows ; and the prospect of the days that are to come, can either brighten the darkness, or obscure the radiance of the present hour. It is accordingly to this character of our nature, and these three distinct portions of time, that the petitions of our prayer relate ; and in considering them, we shall see what is that spirit which becomes the devotion of those who are at once the children of dust, and the heirs of immortality.

1. The first of these petitions is for the present time ;—for the relief of those wants, and the supply of those necessities which incessantly return, and of which the return marks, to the greatest as well as to the lowest, their dependence upon a greater power :—“ Give us this day our daily bread.”—How many are the truths of which these simple words remind us ! They remind us, in the first place, with every morning sun, “ that the eyes of all wait upon him ; and that it is He alone that giveth them their food in due season.” From the hour in which we speak, they seem to carry us back, too, to the years that are past ; and while they remind us, that, in every day of these innumerable years, the daily prayer of nature has been heard, they teach us to put our trust in Him, “ in whom our fathers trusted and were holpen ;” and whose “ Providence

“neither slumbers nor sleeps.”—They remind us, in the second place, of what we owe to our brethren. We begin the day with imploring the relief of our necessities, and the supply of our wants. Can we forget, amid these supplications, that there are necessities also which we can relieve, and wants which we can supply?—that there are some, in every day, who depend upon our labour, or upon our love; and can we retire from the presence of God, without wishing, in our narrow day, to be “merciful, as He is merciful?”—They remind us, lastly, of what we owe to ourselves.—“Give us this day our daily bread.” It is the language not of possessors, but of travellers;—not of those who have here “a continuing city,” but of those who, with a nobler ambition, “seek one that is to come.” It reminds us that life itself is but a day;—that all its honours and distinctions are but the decorations of a transitory being;—that the night is at hand, in which all these distinctions will disappear;—and that the final morning is to arise, “in which every man will receive “according to his works.” Such are the impressions which this first petition is fitted to excite in our minds. I stop not at present any farther to illustrate them. I entreat you only to consider, how well they are adapted to the condition of human life;

and how wisely every day would begin, if it begun with such meditations.

2. From the wants of the present time, we are led, by an irresistible impulse, to look back to the time which is past. When we present ourselves before the purity of Heaven, and dare, on the renewal of every day, to solicit the renewal of its care, there is a question which rises unbidden in every heart. What am I? and with what preparation do I come into the presence of God? In what manner have I employed the days that are gone?—and what claims have I to the continuance of his goodness, by the use which I have made of that which is past? It is a solemn question; and solemn are the images which memory then must bring to every heart; and the best and the wisest of us have no answer to return but the lowly petition of our prayer, Lord “forgive us our trespasses.”

There is something very striking in the instruction which these words afford us. If the wisdom of the world were to instruct us, it would teach us to look back upon the past only for images of joy. It would summon up to us the memories of pleasures we had enjoyed,—of distinctions we had received,—of honours we had won:—and it would inflame every weak and worthless passion which had the present dominion of our hearts, by the remem-

brance of the gratifications of the past. The wisdom which our Saviour teaches us, is of a higher and a holier kind. The retrospect which he commands us, is solely a moral retrospect,—the retrospect which becomes a rational and accountable being, and to whom the past is valuable, only as it can influence the future. It is not, therefore, to pleasures or distinctions that he calls our remembrance, but to our conduct amid them. It is the memory of our errors, not of our enjoyments, which he brings before us; and while he prostrates us in sadness before the majesty we have disobeyed, he teaches us that abasement which may yet lead to exaltation, and that humility which is the surest forerunner of honour.

There is something, however, in this petition still more striking. In every other petition of this prayer, we employ the language of dependent beings; and it is in absolute submission to the will of God, that we offer every supplication. But this petition is conditional; and in the very moment we utter it, we ourselves express the terms upon which we hope and know it is to be granted. Father “forgive us our “trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.” There is not in the language of man, a sentence of so high and solemn a signification. With the dawn of

every day, it reminds us of that spirit, of "which alone is the kingdom of Heaven;" and ere we pass the threshold of our closets, it makes our own voice pronounce the conditions upon which the day is to be passed.—Let the kind and compassionate spirit go forth with renewed confidence, after such preparation, to its labours of mercy and of love. But let the selfish, the uncharitable, and the unforgiving man pause ere he advances into the scenes of guilt; and, if the pleasures of sin, of hatred and revenge allure him, let him consider well, what are those conditions which he renounces, and whose is that forgiveness which he disdains.

3. The last petition of our prayer is for the future. We have just prayed for the time that is past;—we have been looking back upon the days that are gone;—we have called to mind the errors by which they have been distinguished;—and we have solicited the pardon of Heaven, for all the wanderings of our way. Under such impressions, how natural is the prayer for the future. Lord! "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

If the wisdom of the world were to instruct us, it would here also instruct us in a different manner. Limiting its views to the present scene, it would teach us to pray for what we call the prosperities of

life, for the acquisitions of wealth, the splendours of fame, or long luxurious years of mortal pleasure. How simple, but how sublime, on the other hand, is the prayer of our Lord!

“Lead us not into temptation!” “What-
 “ever may be the scenes of that future time
 “which no eye but Thine can see, wheth-
 “er it be into the scenes of prosperity or
 “adversity that thy hand is to conduct us,
 “lead us not into those mighty trials where
 “our faith may fail, and our obedience give
 “way: To us, and to our weakness, the
 “extremes of prosperous and of adverse
 “fortune are alike dangerous. Lead us
 “not, O Father of Being, into these fatal
 “extremes; and suffer not that the day
 “which breaks upon us should bring with
 “it any hour in which our weakness may
 “be betrayed, or our duty may be undone.”

“But deliver us from evil:”—“BUT, if
 “thy will is otherwise,—if to thine all-wise
 “Providence, it seems fit that our faith and
 “our obedience should be tried,—if the
 “scenes of prosperity are advancing to
 “prove our weakness, or those of adver-
 “sity to make trial of our strength, grant
 “at least that we may not know the evil
 “of sin. Let neither evil thoughts intrude
 “into our understandings, nor evil desires
 “possess themselves of our hearts. And
 “while we are passing through the trials

“ of mortality, let not our eye be closed to
 “ that final kingdom, where reigneth right-
 “ eousness,—where the spirits of the good
 “ of every age are made perfect,—to
 “ which all that are born are equally ad-
 “ vancing,—and of which the eternal gates
 “ are closed only upon wilful unbelief, and
 “ unrepented sin.”——

——Such, my brethren, are the last petitions of our prayer.—The subject leads to many reflections. But it is at once the weakness, and the wisdom of this place, to leave much of the truths which it tells, to your own meditation; and after the majesty of the thoughts which I have proposed to you, I presume to offer you only two reflections.

1. Let me entreat you to remember, that it is our “ daily ” prayer. Great as are the conceptions to which it relates, and magnificent as are the hopes which it involves, it is yet prescribed daily to every one who names the name of Christ. It is prescribed to all, from the cottage to the throne; and to all it is prescribed for the same reasons, that they should “ walk worthy “ of immortality ; ”—that they should look upon the scenes of life, with the high mind of the traveller who is advancing through them to a greater home; and that no morning should arise, without renewing, amid every scene of darkness or of trial, “ the

“spirit which leads to the kingdom of heaven.” What would be the event even of one day passed under the influence of such morning devotion, the calm of the evening would tell. But what would be the event of life passed under such influence, though the repose of age might anticipate, the ear of mortal man is not made to hear, nor even his imagination to conceive.

2. Let me entreat you, in the second place, to remember, that, by a very natural piety, it is every where the “infant’s” prayer; and that the first words of devotion which the infant tongue is taught to repeat, are those which our Lord has prescribed. There is something very interesting in this reflection; and it is a call upon you, my elder brethren, who have the instruction of the young, to teach them “to pray with understanding.”

Teach them then, my friends, (and in so doing you will in no mean degree instruct yourselves) that whatever may be the circumstances in which they are born, they have all a “Father who is in Heaven;” from whom they came, and to whom they are to return; and let their infant lips learn to “hallow his name.”

Teach them, in the world into which they are to go, that whatever may be the reign of the vices or passions of men, “his

“kingdom” consisteth only in “righteousness;” and that his will alone can be done by “doing justly, and loving mercy, and walking humbly with Him.”

Teach them, in the last place, that while they are every day dependent upon Him, there are others in some measure dependent upon them;—that the value of past time is only in the memory of doing good, and of the future in the resolution to do it;—that to him who is called to honour, and glory, and immortality, life has no real evil but sin, and no real good but obedience;—and, still more than all, that the same divine Being who has thus taught them how to pray, has taught them also how to live, and how to die.

Upon all, whether old or young, may the grace of that compassionate Saviour descend, with all its saving and inspiring influence! May the prevailing words which He hath given, never be pronounced without rising to Heaven, “like the incense of the evening sacrifice;” and whenever ye prostrate yourselves before the universal Father, may your devotion be exalted by the high remembrance, that He who deigned to be your Master upon earth, is in that moment your Intercessor in Heaven!

SERMON VI.

ON THE EXAMPLE OF OUR SAVIOUR'S PIETY.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 5.

“ Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

IN these words, as in many other parts of Scripture, the example of our Lord is recommended to our imitation; and the great proof of the character of a Christian is considered as consisting in following the steps of his master. It has often accordingly been stated as an argument for the truth and excellence of our religion, that the divine Author of it has not only bequeathed us a system of the most pure and perfect morality, but that he himself is the great example of the perfection he describes, and has left a model, to the last hour of time, for the imitation of his followers.

To imitate, however, is not to copy. It is not servilely to use the expressions, or to adopt the manners, or to affect some of the actions of another. It is to enter into the spirit, and to acquire the dispositions which formed the character, and produced the

conduct of those we admire. It is not, therefore, the exhortation of the apostle that we should barely copy the example of our Lord, but that the same "mind should be in us which was in Christ Jesus."

It is, of course, my brethren, of the human nature of our Saviour that the apostle thus speaks, and which alone he proposes as the subject of our imitation. His divine nature can be known to us only as it resembles that of the Deity himself, in which it is so intimately blended, and where is it lost to our apprehension amid the splendours of Omnipotence. It is, therefore, the character of our Saviour only in his human nature that I shall at present attempt to consider, or what the nature of that mind was which has produced so perfect a model for the future imitation of man.

In every character of distinguished eminence there is always some ruling principle, which affords the permanent motives of conduct, and to which all its peculiarities may be referred; some prevailing disposition which absorbs every lower affection of our nature, and which throws over the whole conduct a degree of unity and consistence never to be observed in that of ordinary men. If in this view we consider the human character of our Lord, we shall find that the prevailing principle of his mind was that of PIETY—that deep and exalted

piety which is founded upon the “love of God,”—which is maintained by constant communion with him,—and which sees every other object as unworthy of its pursuit, but that of knowing his laws, and doing his will. It is a character which wise men in different ages have loved to conceive, as the utmost exaltation of the human faculties, and as approaching to the perfection and happiness of the Divine Nature: but it is a character also, which no age (except that of Jesus) has ever hoped or attempted to realize.

I speak not, at present, of the numerous or affecting instances of his devotion,—of those retirements of meditation,—of those perpetual acts of thanksgiving,—of those ardent and humble prayers, which we meet with in every page of the Gospels. These are, indeed, the signs and expressions of piety; but they are not piety itself. I speak of the course and tenour of his life,—of the simple and undeviating system of his whole conduct,—of that piety which was exemplified, not in words alone, but in every scene of suffering or of repose.

1. It is exemplified, in the first place, in the early dedication of his mind to religious thought, and in the great and exalted views which he then attained of the wisdom and goodness of God. Of the events of his youthful years, we are ignorant. We know

only, that "he dwelt with his parents at Nazareth, and was subject unto them." The only incident which marks this long period, is his appearing, at an early age, in the temple at Jerusalem, "sitting in the midst of the teachers of religion, both hearing them, and asking them questions." From this simple incident, however, we may learn what were the occupations of his youthful mind. Amid the obscurity and solitude of Nazareth, we can see him employed in silent communion with God. We can follow the progress of his youthful devotion, as it rose amid the scenery of nature, and grew in his study of the history of the people of Israel. We can see him from hence, gradually entering into the merciful purposes of his Father towards fallen man; and while unknown to men, yet preparing his mind to become the instructor and the Saviour of the world. We know at least, at this period, that "he grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and that the grace of God was upon him." There were, indeed, greater illuminations, with which he descended from above. But, in examining his human character alone, it is natural for us to consider this early and secret devotion, as the great foundation of that character which distinguished his future days, and as recorded for the perpetual imitation of the young of his people.

2. From this origin, the piety of our Saviour, is, in the second place, exemplified in the zeal and activity with which, in maturer years, he fulfilled the mighty office for which he was sent. It is a striking contrast which the energy of his active life presents to us, when compared with the silence and solitude of his early days. From the hour that his ministry commenced, we no longer see the retired and thoughtful sage; but the ardent and unwearied teacher. We see him descending into the ordinary scenes and exigencies of life; healing the sick,—giving sight to the blind,—above all, “preaching the gospel unto the poor.” But of this change, the great principle he every where explains himself. “It was his Father’s work. It was the work which was given him to do. It was the end for which he came into the world.” This was the principle which prevailed over every other affection of his being, and which made him solicitous only “to do the will of Him that sent him.” Amid the various temptations of mortality, none for a moment ever seduces him from the great end he had in view; and no consciousness of more than human powers ever makes him descend even to the greatest weaknesses of man. In the scene of the temptation in the wilderness, are shadowed out to us, as on purpose, those greater seductions which

alone could affect a superiour mind; the seductions of power,—of ambition,—of universal dominion;—yet these cost him no trouble to resign; and he dismisses them with that calm contempt, which marks the established resolution of his heart, and shews the mightier purposes he had in view.

3. The piety of our Lord is, in the third place, exemplified in the cheerful submission with which he bore all the evils to which his great office too surely destined him.—It was a life indeed of hardship unparalleled among men, and deprived of every consolation which in general mingles with the sufferings of humanity. No fame attended his ministry,—no veneration followed his doctrines,—no private happiness awaited him, to console the sufferings of his publick life. He was, on the contrary, “despised and rejected of men,”—doomed to associate with the lowest of the people,—left to want and neglect;—or, if raised into notice, raised only to be the object of brutal ridicule,—to be the jest of the Pharisee, and the derision of the Scribe. As his life advanced, these evils all assumed a deeper hue; and to him alone, in all the history of man, belonged one exquisite source of suffering—the prophetick certainty of every additional evil he was yet to bear. To all other men, the future is

unknown; and even in the most trying circumstances of duty, Hope will yet come to animate their minds. But to him no mortal hope could come; and from the first hour of his ministry to the last, he saw the awful scene more nearly approaching, when Nature herself was to shudder at his sufferings, and when "no sorrow was to be like unto his sorrow." "Behold," said he to his disciples, in the simple and unpretending narration of the gospel, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man, shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully intreated; and they shall scourge him and put him to death."

4. It is in this last scene, and in the divine magnanimity with which it was borne, that the piety of our Lord was finally exemplified. I will not, my brethren, retrace to you its history. I will not mention the sad incidents which compose it,—the scourge, the spear, and the cross. I attempt not to describe that conduct which wrested even from the heathen Centurion the sublime confession, that "truly this man was the Son of God." I entreat you only to consider what was the foundation of his magnanimity; and to observe, that it was the same unconquered spirit of pie-

ty which animated every other period of his life. "It was for this purpose he was born, and for this end he came into the world." Such was the mighty destiny to which his Father had called him. It was his only to obey. His conduct accordingly, through the whole of this terrific scene, has none of the appearances of human heroism; none of that assumed ease, or indignant disdain, or philosophick indifference, with which they who looked only to human praise, have sometimes met their fate.—It is not to the world He looks, but to God. It is not with men that He holds converse, in that trying day, to awaken their admiration, or stamp his memory on their hearts. It is his "Father" only to whom he prays,—to whom alone he lifts his eyes,—to whom in silence he dedicates all his woes. Even in the final moment of expiring life, he says only, "It is finished!" and "bows his head," as the last act of submission to the majesty of God, and then "gives up the ghost."

—Such was the human character of Jesus Christ,—such that prevailing principle which influenced the system of his life, and gave accordingly to his conduct, that unity and consistence which we should look for in vain among the children of men. It was that spirit of high and exalted Piety, which was founded on the early knowledge

and love of “Him who alone is good,”—which, improved by thought and secret meditation, raised his mind to the full conception of the ends of the divine government,—which, in the progress of these sublime conceptions, led him to consider himself only as an agent in this system of beneficence,—and which finally determined him to cast away every care, and every fear, but that of doing the great work for which he was designed.

It is a character, indeed, my brethren, worthy only of that region from which he descended; and it must ever be with humbled and subdued hearts, that the best of us can come to its examination. Yet there is joy in thinking on the greatness of him who is the “leader of our salvation,”—there is comfort in being called by himself to be “his followers,”—there is hope in the expression of the apostle, “that the same mind may be in us which was in Christ Jesus.”

Does then the example of your Saviour, my young friends, awaken your ambition? Does your eye follow with rapture the steps of his “most holy life?” and in the world that is before you do you wish and pray to be his disciples? Let then “the mind which was in him” be ever present to your thoughts. In your retirements of devotion, spread before you the volume of

his life, and “muse” upon it until the “fire” of piety “kindles in your hearts,” and “your tongue speaks,” with unbidden homage, the praises of your Lord.—In your intercourse with men, let your eye “look ever unto him;”—whatever may be the part that is assigned you, whether it be to act or suffer, remember that he has gone before you on the way, and that the scene which you now tread, was once trod by him. Remember what was the “spirit” that animated Him,—what that prevailing principle which led him “to despise all glory, and to endure all shame” in the discharge of the high and eternal service to which he was appointed. Remember, lastly, that his “father is also your father, and his God is your God.”——

II. There is yet, however, a farther view of this subject:—Ye have seen the close of your Saviour’s life,—ye have seen him “humble himself, and become obedient to death, even the death of the cross.” It is now that revelation opens to you a mightier scene, and that the veil is withdrawn from the eyes of mortality. “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of JESUS every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue

“ should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
“ to the glory of God the father.”

Such is now the glorious completion of that humble and pious life “ which was once despised and “ rejected of men!” And such, my young friends, (whoever you may be,) is the final scene to which ye also are called. Ye are the children of the same Father; ye also are fellow workers in the same service, and the same “ mind” which was in him may also be in you. In that Heaven to which he hath ascended, he now prepareth mansions “ for those “ that love him;” and “ your labours and “ tribulations, which are but for a moment,” may also be crowned, by his redeeming hand, “ with an eternal weight of glory.”

“ What then shall separate you from the “ love,” and from the imitation of Christ? “ Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecu- “ tion, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, “ or the sword? God forbid!” for through all these, his triumphant step has passed before you, “ and in all these things, ye “ also may be more than conquerors, “ through him that loved you.”

SERMON VII.

ON THE EVIDENCE WHICH ARISES FROM THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF THE GOSPEL.

ST. MARK XV. 39.

“And when the Centurion that stood over against Him,
“saw these things, he said, truly this man was the Son
“of God.”

EVERY year, my brethren, to those of our communion, brings round the grateful season, when we commemorate the arrival of the Author of our Faith, and the Leader of our Salvation; and, in the progress of time, every year also brings forward to us the young of our congregations, who are entering upon the eventful stage of life, and taking upon them the obligations of that religion into which they were baptized.

In obedience to these affecting circumstances, it has been the usual practice of this place, to devote the season to some explanation of the nature and evidences of the Christian faith;—to select from the great mass of evidence, some of those familiar illustrations which may suit the apprehensions of the young or the busy,—

and, by the prosecution of these subjects, to lead them on, (under the blessing of God,) to a right estimate of the majesty of that service in which they are to be engaged, when they celebrate the birth of the Saviour of the world.

Of this privilege I wish, in the present season, to avail myself, and, (surrounded as we are with the young, not only of our own families, but of those who, at a distance from their families, are assembled in this place to carry on the great business of their education,) to lay before you some views of the divine origin of the Gospel, which I trust may not be unsuited to the character of youth, and to the nature of the studies in which they are engaged. In attempting this, I am to entreat my young friends to consider me in no higher light than that of a Father who addresses the family whom he loves, and who wishes, while this grateful season is passing, to lay before them, in the simplest language, the progressive evidences of that religion, which he considers as their greatest and best possession. My elder friends will, I trust, listen not unwillingly to the views I am to present of that faith, of which they experience the value; and those among them who are parents, may perhaps find some subjects suggested to them, which they may perhaps think fit to prosecute in the education of their own children.

When we hear of a religion descending to us from Heaven; and of one appearing upon earth invested with the lofty commission of revealing the Divine Will to men, the first question is, "Are the facts ascertained? Was there in truth such a person? or is it the tradition only of dark and credulous ages?" To this first question, the answer is completely satisfactory. The birth, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, are proved by the same evidence, and in the same manner, by which the existence and history of any other person is proved at the same distance of time. They are recorded by contemporary historians;—they are acknowledged by all the enemies of his religion;—they have undergone a more severe examination;—and they are now proved by a more complete accumulation of testimony, than any other events which have occurred at a similar distance in the history of man. Of all this, therefore, we have not only a sufficient evidence, but the same evidence which we uniformly receive in similar investigations.

The next question is, "Are the doctrines which he taught faithfully transmitted to us? Is the religion of the Gospel that which he actually taught? or has it been changed or adulterated amid the traditions of the ages which have succeeded?"

To this second question, the answer is equally satisfactory. The religion of the Gospel has not been entrusted to the weakness of human tradition. It exists in a book which is coeval with the religion itself which it announces,—which has remained through every age, and amid all the varieties of subsequent opinion, as the great standard to which all have appealed,—and which, from the first age of Christianity to the present, has been hallowed with a care, and preserved with a reverence, which substantiate to all men, not only its authenticity, but its purity. No work of man has ever been guarded with such jealousy,—or spread abroad with such zeal,—or examined with such minute accuracy as the book of the New Testament;—and all the evidence, therefore, which satisfies us, with regard to writings of the same distance of time, applies with increased force to the book which contains the principles of our religion.

When we have arrived at these preliminary conclusions,—when we are satisfied that the Author of Christianity existed, and that the book of the Gospel contains the precise religion which he taught,—the next question is, “What is the peculiar nature of this religion? In what respects does it differ from the numerous religions which have arisen among mankind? and

“are there any circumstances peculiar to it, which evince its proceeding from a higher origin?”—This is the most important question which we can examine; and for the examination of it we possess many advantages, whether we consider it in relation to human nature, at the era of the arrival of our Lord, or at the period of the world when we now exist.

The era when the Author of Christianity appeared, as you know, was one of the most important in the history of man. It was a period when the ancient world had arisen to its highest state of improvement,—when all the powers of the human mind had been exerted, and exerted with success, in almost every branch of art, and every department of science, and beyond the limits of which the wisdom of antiquity never advanced. We are able, therefore, to compare the doctrines of the Gospel, with all that the accumulated wisdom of ages had discovered at that era; and to mark in what respect they differ upon the greatest objects of human thought. The era in which we live, in this view, is not less important. From the one to the other, eighteen hundred years have passed, and in that time the ambition of conquest,—the pursuits of commerce,—and the enthusiasm of science, have made us acquainted with almost every nation that inhabits

this globe, with their laws, their manners, and their systems of religion. The map of human understanding, and of human attainments, in all their varieties, from the rude superstitions of the savage, to the most refined institutions of civilized men, thus lies before us; and we are able, therefore, to compare the religion of Jesus Christ, with every other system of opinions that has existed or now exists among mankind. It is to this comparison that I at present wish, my younger brethren, to solicit your attention; and although the views I am now to present must necessarily be very slight and superficial, I yet trust that, in the prosecution of them, you will be able to see, from the history of human nature itself, that the origin of your religion is, and must be from Heaven, and that he who brought it to mankind, "was truly " the Son of God."

1. Under these views of comparison, I am then to say, in the first place, that the religion of the Gospel is the only one which has ever yet appeared among mankind, which is adequate to all the instinctive desires and expectations of the human mind. I am not now to speak of the intrinsick excellence of this religion, or of its accommodation to all the wants and all the wretchedness of a being like man. I am to speak of it only as compared with the

conclusions of human wisdom, as they appear either in the ancient or in the modern world. Both of them are before us; and from both I am persuaded the thoughtful mind must draw the same conclusion.

If we look to the ancient world,—to that period when science and philosophy had attained, through progressive ages, to their highest point of improvement, we see them terminating uniformly in doubt and indecision; we see various schools with various principles,—some leading to piety, others to atheism;—the great mass of the people left (and left willingly) to the dominion of superstition;—and the wise concluding all their inquiries, either in the belief that these subjects were beyond the reach of human thought, or in the ardent prayer that the Deity would at last reveal himself to the inquiries of his creatures.—

If we look to the world as it at present exhibits itself in every country unvisited by the Gospel, we see it covered with varieties of imposture and superstition; the great principles of religion buried under the mass of barbarous rites or unproductive ceremonies; and the wise and the thoughtful retiring from the delusions of the vulgar, into the dark shade of doubt and skepticism. If, from these melancholy prospects, you turn your eye to the religion of the Gospel, you see a system which even

its enemies acknowledge to be a system of religious and of moral grandeur. You see a system, simple in its doctrines, but sublime in their nature, beyond all that the imagination of man had hitherto in any age conceived; adapted to the comprehension of the infant, and yet adequate to the exaltation of the sage; comprehending within its pale all the most cultivated nations of mankind,—numbering among its disciples all the greatest names which have ever adorned humanity,—and accepted by them as the highest exaltation of their present nature, and the surest foundation of their future hopes.

While you thus see, my brethren, the difference which exists between the religion of the Gospel and every other which has ever appeared among men, you are then to remember,—that the Author of this religion was a man of humble origin, and of obscure parentage; that his life was passed at a distance from the wise or the learned, among the poor and the lowly; that a few years terminated his history; and that a few humble inhabitants of Judea constituted all his society:—and you are then to say, Whether a religion of such a kind *can* have only a mortal origin? Whether there is any thing in the history of human nature, at that age, which, in any degree corresponds to such a fact? And

whether there be any possible way by which the appearance of such a system of religion, in such circumstances, can be accounted for, but by the immediate providence and inspiration of God ?

2. Such is the conclusion which I think must be drawn from the view of the nature of the religion of the Gospel, as it relates to the mind of the individual. There is a second view of it which arises from its relation to the welfare of society, or the prosperity of the world. When you look over the history of religion;—when you examine the nature of the systems of religious belief that have existed before the era of the Gospel, or which have arisen since,—you will find them marked by one uniform feature of mortal origin, that of carrying within themselves all the weakness or all the ignorance of the age or country in which they arose. You will see them incorporating with themselves the forms of government—the institutions of society—the manners, the opinions, and the prejudices which were peculiar to the country or age which gave them birth; sanctifying thus the errors and even the vices of barbarous times, and checking, by the most powerful of all restraints, the natural progress of the human mind, and all the improvements of which society is susceptible.—From this uniform picture of the

narrowness of the mind of man, even in its greatest exertions, turn your eyes, my brethren, to the religion of the Gospel, and mark the view which it takes of human nature. You will see, in the first place, that it belongs to no age,—to no government,—and to no climate;—that it incorporates nothing with itself of the period of society when it arose;—that it embraces, on the contrary, the whole human race in its contemplation;—and that, while it leaves to society all the improvement of which it is capable, it prescribes only those general laws of social welfare, upon which the prosperity of the world must finally rest.—You will see, in the second place, that this accommodation of the religion of the Gospel to the welfare of mankind has actually taken place;—that it is it which has given to modern Europe the foundation of all its greatness;—that it is it which has given to all Christian countries the relation of brethren, and to all Christian people the belief of equal rights, and equal duties;—that it is it which has thus, (either directly, or indirectly,) broken the chains of the captive,—softened the sufferings of the prisoner,—poured even into the systems of legislation the elevation of its own spirit; and given at last, to the poor and the lowly of mankind, to whom it first was preached, the dignity of men, and the rights of na-

ture.—You will see, in the last place, that the world is yet far below the perfection which the Gospel contemplates. In the eighteen hundred years that have passed since its promulgation among mankind, the human race have doubtless made in every respect the greatest advances; and whether we regard the progress of knowledge, of laws, or of manners, we shall find in its influence the most powerful cause of this progress. Yet, who is there that looks at the internal government of nations, or the maxims by which they are yet governed, with regard to the nations around them, who does not sigh to think of the deep and selfish prejudices which still hang upon the minds of men? Who is there who does not see, that if the principles of the Gospel were really felt, and fully acted upon, the prosperity of all nations would be consulted?—that the human race would terminate in the simple conception of a family,—in family relations, in family duties, and family affection; and that the universe of mankind would find at last, that they had only one Father in Heaven, one relation to his various children, and one duty to their brethren upon earth.

When you have considered these things, my young friends;—when you have seen the difference of this religion from all others that have been presented to men;—

when you have seen, that it has a greater aspect, and that all the wisdom of men is yet still infinitely beneath it,—I am to request of you, to lay your hands upon your hearts, and to say, whether such a system of religion is proportionable to any thing that you know of human wisdom?—whether its appearance in such an age, has any resemblance to the known capacity of the human mind? and whether there be any other account that can be given of it, than that it arose immediately from the inspiration and the benevolence of Heaven?

3. There is yet, however, a greater view of the subject; and I am to state, in the third place, That the religion of the Gospel is the only one which has ever appeared among mankind, which is commensurate to the future hopes or expectations of the human soul. Upon this subject, I have little necessity to dilate. When you look at the opinions of the unbaptized world, either in ancient or in modern times, you see in their views of futurity, the traces only of a gross and of a barbarous invention,—a state little elevated above the ignorance or the darkness of mortality,—in which the same passions, the same prejudices, and the same appetites prevail,—which promises only the continuation of the frail and feverish existence we have experienced,—and which holds forth no promise of some sublimer

state of being, where nobler acquisitions may be made, and higher joys be tasted. —When you look at the religion of the Gospel, on the contrary, (simply as it speaks upon this awful subject, and fearfully as it withdraws the veil which hides the sanctuary of God,) you see a “new heaven” and a new earth.” You see humanity exalted from the grossness of a lower world.—You see all that is great, all that is good, all that is pure in your nature, bursting from the chains within which it has been confined, and purified by the merits and mediation of a diviner Being, from the corruptions which it has acquired.—You see the immeasurable space extended, in which the ascending mind may pass to higher states “of knowledge, of wisdom, and of joy.”—You see, (what is yet more) that, to this exaltation, the precepts of the same religion naturally conduct its followers; that the discipline which it prescribes in time, is that which leads to the glories of eternity; and that, in the lowest situation of human nature, the mind of the Christian may be ripened, under the influence of the Spirit of God, to become at last the companion of the angel and the archangel, “and of the spirits of the just,” then “made perfect.” Of such doctrines, I am not now to say that they are the only ones which meet all the instinctive wishes and

expectations of our mysterious nature. I am only to remind you of their difference from every thing that human wisdom has taught, either in former or in succeeding ages; and to ask you, whether He who, eighteen hundred years ago, taught these doctrines, and proposed these views, was only a human being? Whether the difference of these doctrines, from all that nature and philosophy had arrived at, is not a proof of the difference of the origin from which they proceeded?—and whether any other cause can be assigned for this astonishing exception from all the uniform appearances of human nature, than the immediate presence and providence of the God of salvation?

—Such are, my young brethren, the first views which present themselves, when we take a general survey of our nature, and of the capacity and attainments of man. In every light in which we consider the religion of the Gospel, whether as adapted to the mind of the individual,—to the prosperity of the human race,—or to the future expectations of the human soul,—it is in all respects different from what we know or learn, either of the progress of human powers, or the reach of human foresight. The question is (after all this survey,) to what origin shall we attribute it? and I trust, (when you prosecute the very imper-

fect illustrations I have presented upon this great subject) you will feel that there is no other possible origin to which it can be attributed, than to the immediate inspiration of the Almighty; and that he therefore who brought it to a dark and doubtful world, "was truly the Son of God."

—Every season of devotion, my brethren, which our church prescribes, has its peculiar and appropriate sentiments. The season upon which we now again annually enter, is a season of religious Joy; and the sentiments with which it ought to be met, are those of hope, of thankfulness, and of adoration.

The views which I have now presented, may, on this account, I trust, be of some use to my younger brethren, in leading them to form adequate notions of the character of that religion in which they were born; to feel what was the blessing their parents conferred upon them when they poured upon their infant heads the waters of their baptism; and to give them, in their early years, some substantial grounds of conviction, which may enable them to meet all the sophistry and skepticism with which the world is afterwards but too likely to assail them.

In the present moment, I have only to pray the God of salvation, that His Spirit may descend upon this congregation, and

upon all of every church or country, who are now assembled in the same grateful service;—that He, “without whom nothing “is strong, and nothing is holy,” may, in the time of this mortal life, so pour his grace upon all our souls, “that, by casting away “the works of darkness, and putting upon “us the armour of light,” we may meet with pure hearts the arrival of his Son; “and “that, in the last day, when He shall come “again in his glorious majesty, to judge both “the quick and the dead, we may arise to “the life immortal, through Him,” who alone was commissioned to promise, and alone is empowered to give it.

SERMON VIII.

ON THE EVIDENCE WHICH ARISES FROM THE PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL.

ACTS xii. 24.

“ But the word of God grew and multiplied.”

IN obedience to the feelings and duties of this season of devotion, (and in the anxious hope of leading the minds of my younger brethren to some adequate notions of the majesty of that service in which they are employed when they commemorate the birth of the Saviour of the world,) I have proposed to devote it to the suggestion of some general views with regard to the nature and character of the religion of the Gospel, which may lead them to conclude, that it must necessarily derive its origin from a higher source than human wisdom; and that, therefore, He who brought it to the world, “ was truly the son of God.”

With this view, when we were last assembled, I pointed out to them some general heads by which it might be compared with the religions either of ancient or modern

times. I reminded them, that it was the only religion which has been ever presented to man, which was adequate to all the wants and desires of the human mind;—that it was the only religion which was adequate to the social character of man;—that it embraced the whole race of man in its contemplation;—that it contained the principles of universal prosperity;—and that all the attainments of social wisdom, were yet far below the happiness and perfection to which its precepts and its spirit virtually lead.—In the last place, I reminded them, that it was the only religion which was adequate to all the future hopes and expectations of the human soul;—that the discoveries which it made, mighty and undeserved as they were, yet fell in with all our instinctive principles of belief; and that, while it realized all the greatest wishes which the human heart can form, it prescribed, at the same time, the simple precepts by which the lowest and most obscure of its true and faithful disciples might attain to all it promised. After this comparison, I entreated them to reflect, in what age, and in what circumstances, this magnificent system of religion arose;—to consider whether it has any resemblance to any thing the world has ever presented of human wisdom, of human foresight, or of human benevolence?—And then to ask themselves, whether there be any

other reasonable or satisfactory account that can be given of its origin, than that it proceeded immediately from the providence and inspiration of God?

From this first and fundamental consideration of the nature of the religion of the Gospel, I am, in the present hour, to solicit your attention to a second consideration:—to the view of its Progress,—to the circumstances which, in this respect also, distinguish it from all the usual appearances of human nature,—and to the conclusions which naturally follow from these appearances.

If we look at the history of human opinions, we shall find, that the principles of religious belief are those, in every age, which have been the least changed, and which are the least susceptible of change. They are incorporated with the earliest feelings of youth,—they are sanctioned by impressions of awe which belong to no other subject;—they are maintained by the dread of impiety, and guarded by the terrors of apostasy. If we look accordingly over the actual condition of the world, in the many regions where the Gospel is yet unknown, we shall find their religions coeval with the history of the countries which gave them birth; the present generations adhering blindly to the superstitions of their remotest ancestors; and all the improvements of time, and all the progress of society, incapable of

subduing the tenacity with which the human mind adheres to its first impressions of religious faith. We shall find, still farther, that the only method in which new religions have ever been propagated among mankind, has been by the force of conquest, and chiefly by that conquest of enthusiasm, which, exterminating the race it had subdued, paused not till it had planted the banners of its own faith upon the ruins of all former opinion. Such has been in all ages the history of human nature. I am now to entreat you to remember what has been the history of the progress of the Gospel.

1. It began (as you well know, and at this season must well remember) in the deepest obscurity;—in a country despised by all the rest of mankind, and among the lowest people of that country. The author of it appeared to expire as a traitor and a malefactor, and his opinions seemed, and were designed, to be buried in his grave. What remained of them was confided to the care of a few simple and ignorant men; so very ignorant indeed, that, from their own artless avowal, they knew nothing of the great designs which they were to execute, until they were directed by a wisdom above their own.

The country which had conducted their Master to the cross, naturally rejected and

persecuted his disciples. The countries by which they were surrounded, were at the height of their civilization and improvement, and had long looked down upon what they considered the superstitions of Judea, with indignation and contempt. In both these countries, however, the apostles of the Gospel sought for converts; and in both these countries they found them. Called upon to carry "the glad tidings" which they had received, to every race and nation of mankind, they met every where some who welcomed them. In their own age, and before they had sealed their faith with their blood, they saw the religion of the Gospel dawning among every surrounding people. Amid all its humility and all its dangers, there was something in it which carried conviction to the souls of men; which dissolved the tenacity with which they were accustomed to adhere to the opinions of their forefathers; and which made the old fabrick of superstition fall, as if by enchantment, before the humble preaching of "the fishermen of Galilee."

When this first age expired; when the miraculous assistance which was given to the first apostles ceased with themselves, the progress of the religion of the Gospel became still more extraordinary, because it was assisted by less powerful aid, and met by more powerful obstacles. It was

derided by the wise; it was despised by the great; it met the opposition of the priesthood of all the established faiths; and it met, still more, from its silent progress among the lowest orders of the people, the jealousy and the revènge of Imperial suspicion. For some centuries the history of its progress is that only of persecution and martyrdom. All the wise, all the privileged, all the established orders of society were ranged against it; and yet, during all these various oppositions, it was, by some inherent power of its own, slowly, but surely, gaining its way. Beginning with the lowest conditions of society, with the lowly and the poor, it exemplified that divine wisdom which made the preaching of the Gospel, in its final consequences, a more stupendous miracle than that of "raising the dead," or of "giving sight to the blind." From this humble level, from these unnoticed portions of ancient society, it spread slowly, but steadily, its influence upwards. Every age of persecution added only to the number of its followers. Slaves became heroes under its discipline, and peasants martyrs. The infliction of chains and of death, seemed to awaken only the courage that could bear them; and when they were endured, the language of the lowest sufferers spoke of them as not only "honourable," but "glorious."

Such was the first struggle between imperial power and the "Gospel that was preached unto the poor." The consequences, my brethren, you are all acquainted with. The religion of the Gospel spread silently amid all its obstacles, until it reached the highest and the most refined classes of society,—until all the schools of ancient philosophy faded before its ray,—until it raised itself at last to the imperial Throne,—until the cross of Christ rose triumphant upon the Capitol,—and the religion of the Gospel became the established religion of the mightiest empire, which has ever either subdued or enlightened the world.

Is there not something, my young brethren, in this simple detail, which has to you the persuasion of eloquence? Is there any other event in all the reach of history, which in any degree corresponds to this progress of the Gospel? and, at variance, as it is, with all the known laws, and opposed by all the prejudices, of the human mind, is there any just or satisfactory cause that can be assigned for its success, than its connexion with the designs and providence of the Almighty.

2. Striking, however, as is the fact of this progress of the religion of the Gospel over all the wisdom and all the refinement of antiquity, and contradictory as it is to all

we know of the history of religious opinions, there is yet another spectacle of which I am to remind you, in following out the history of the world, perhaps still more striking. The mighty empire, which, after conquering the world, had ended in being conquered by the religion of the Gospel, was destined to be dissolved. A new race of mankind, brave from necessity, and barbarous from their origin, descended from the north, spread themselves, under various names, over the cultivated regions of Europe, and finally succeeded in destroying every remains of Roman civilization or greatness, and in covering the world which Rome had enlightened, with the dark tide of rudeness and barbarity.

What was the consequence of this tremendous revolution to the religion of the Gospel?—what was the consequence of the introduction of a new and barbarous race of men into the countries, which were then (amid all their political sufferings) enjoying the spiritual doctrines of Christianity?

The consequence was, that they all gradually adopted this religion,—that as they advanced into Christian countries, they became voluntarily Christians,—and that at this hour, there is not one of their descendants who does not glory in the name of Christian. In spreading themselves over

the Roman world, every thing was changed by them. They introduced new governments, new laws, new manners, and new opinions : and every thing of the modern world reminds us of the revolution which they occasioned,—of the contempt in which they held the institutions of those whom they had conquered,—and of the profound and superstitious adherence with which they maintained their own. In one respect alone, they were uniform : in accepting the doctrines of the Gospel,—in surrendering their former religious opinions whenever they met with the truths of Christianity,—in adopting the religion of the very nations they had conquered and despised, and retaining every thing else of their ancient character,—in yielding themselves voluntarily and uniformly to the “new and grateful light” which was then afforded them.

To what cause, my young brethren, are we to attribute appearances so different from all that have ever occurred in the affairs of mankind? On what principle are we to account for so astonishing a fact, as this gradual, but uniform diffusion of the religion of the Gospel over nations alike in the highest and the lowest state of improvement ;—of its triumph over all the strongest prejudices either of men or of nations,—of its speedy progress through centuries of

change and of corruption,—and of its final establishment among every refined and every cultivated people who now inhabit the earth.

To this great question, there are, I apprehend, only two answers: either, that it owes its success to the immediate agency and providence of God; or, that it arises from its adaptation to the constitution of human nature itself;—that the hope and the expectation of a REVELATION is a part of the original frame of fallen man; and that the religion of the Gospel is that which, “from the beginning,” was destined by the providence and the mercy of God, to gratify this ardent hope, and to give satisfaction to this lofty expectation.

If we adopt the first of these opinions; if we conclude that the progress of the Gospel could arise from no other cause than the immediate agency and providence of God, the truth of the Gospel is then established beyond the power of contradiction. What his immediate agency was employed to support and to diffuse, must be true; and its divine origin is then demonstrated by the very circumstances of its progress. If, on the other hand, we rest in the humbler opinion, that its success is owing to its fitness and adaptation to the frame of our nature; to its giving final satisfaction to all the wants and all the expectations of the human soul,

we shall arrive at a conclusion not less firm, and perhaps still more sublime.

That there is in the frame of our nature a want and expectation of a revelation from Heaven, and that, without the belief of this, the mind of man remains, and for ever must remain, unsatisfied and forlorn, is, I apprehend, the most general fact with which the history of man presents us. Every country on earth has had its religion; but no country ever yet took its religion from man. It is to Heaven alone that they look upon this anxious subject; it is the will of Heaven alone which they wish to know; and it is "one therefore commissioned by "Heaven" whom alone they will believe. It is this anxious desire which has in truth given origin to all the religious impostures of which history is so full! It is in these very impostures that we may discern the force and the universality of the principle which has given them birth; and in the principle itself, we see the preparation of the human mind for a final Revelation, and the adaptation of the human mind for its reception.

That, in the second place, the religion of the Gospel is adapted to give satisfaction to this original want and expectation of human nature; and that, as completing the design of the Author of our nature, it must originate from him, is a truth of which no

illustration can be so powerful as that of its Progress and Success. When we see it embraced not only by individuals, but by nations;—when we see millions of mankind in every age, and in every state of society, hailing it with joy, and adopting it with enthusiasm;—when we see them deserting all their former and most sacred opinions, and accepting those which it prescribed to them;—when we see them retaining every thing else, and surrendering their religions alone, we cannot but conclude, that there *must* be something in this religion satisfactory to human nature itself; that, as it was formed for man, so man was formed for it; and that the appearance of a Saviour upon earth was the completion of that great design of the Almighty, which had been uniformly testified by the want and expectation which Nature every where had previously exhibited.—

—When we were last assembled, my brethren, I endeavoured to point out that evidence of the divine origin of the Gospel, which arises from its own nature, and from the impossibility that, at the time and in the circumstances in which it arose, it could have been the production of human wisdom.

Strong and irresistible as I think that evidence in itself is, the views which I have now very slightly presented to you, from

the history of its progress, seem to carry this evidence a step farther.—They shew us, that its evidence is incorporated with human nature itself,—that the universal want and demand of the human mind for some revelation from Heaven, testifies that our nature is incomplete without such a revelation; and that the acceptance of the religion of the Gospel by every people, under every circumstance of refinement or of rudeness, (while it is contradictory to all we elsewhere know of human nature) is demonstrative of their conviction of its truth: And that therefore, from this long and broad survey of human understanding and human feelings, we may rest in the great and general conclusion,—That the human mind is framed to expect a revelation from Heaven; and that the revelation of Jesus Christ is that alone which can fully and finally satisfy it. If such be our conclusion, my brethren, the evidence of our faith (the evidence of the divine nature and origin of Him whose birth we are now to commemorate) rests upon no abstract or metaphysical arguments, but upon the basis of Human Nature itself. Instead of being an exception or contradiction to the general laws of nature, it is, on the contrary, their completion and confirmation. That “some one” should come, we see, has been the universal expectation of mankind. That He is that di-

vine and commissioned being, Nature itself spoke in the voice of the Roman centurion, when, as the first representative of the Gentile world, he exclaimed, even at the foot of his cross, "Truly this man was the "Son of God."

I cannot now, my brethren, in regard to you or to myself, pursue the subject farther. I aim only at suggesting materials for your own reflection; and I presume to say, that there are few subjects of a higher or more delightful nature than those which I have now most feebly presented to you.

The ancient world descends to us full of the evidences of the Gospel. It is grateful to think, that the present world, (in spite of all its crimes, and all its guilt,) yet holds up to the thoughtful mind the continuance of the same evidence;—that the doctrines of the Gospel are now known (at least) in every climate, and in every language;—that they have spread with the progress of civilization and humanity;—and that they are destined to spread with the improvement of man and the progress of our social nature.

In the hour in which I now speak,—in the eve of that day, which every age "has kept holy,"—the disciples of the Gospel, in every nation and country beneath Heaven, are preparing themselves for the solemn but joyful service of the morrow. The high will be there, and the low,—the

rich and the poor,—the wise and the ignorant,—the happy and the sorrowful,—the virtuous and the penitent. In the multitude of the Christian world, none will be absent but the unbeliever and the sinner.

It is the greatest spectacle which the race of man exhibits, or ever can exhibit to Heaven. And could we, with mortal eyes, behold the myriads whom to-morrow's dawn is to summon into the house of God,—or could we, with mortal ears, listen to the songs of praise which are now awakening in holy harmony from every corner of the habitable earth,—there is no human heart that could resist the sacredness and sublimity of the impression.

Let us at least, my brethren, present it to our imaginations;—let us remember, that millions whom seas divide, and tongues separate, are yet all, in these hours, united with us in one sentiment of thankfulness and praise; and while the world, in its mightiest aspects, shews us only “nation divided against nation,” and men against men, let us feel what is that higher tie which unites us, and that divinest Master who comes to make us one.

The Star of salvation is now again preparing to rise over a darkened world, and Heaven and earth are beginning to brighten beneath its ray.—Let us, my brethren, prepare to hail it in the sacred hours of si-

lence and of night, with feelings fitted for its rise!—Let us meet it with those offerings of humble thankfulness, and of conscientious joy, which are more precious in the sight of Heaven, “than all the gold, and “the frankincense, and the myrrh,” which were presented “by the wise men of the “East!”—And let us pray that we may all assemble again on the morrow, with minds fitted “to give glory to God in the High-“est;” from the full sense of that “peace” which His Son has given “upon earth,” and that divine “good will” which he has brought to the hearts of “the children of “men.”

SERMON IX.

ON THE EVIDENCE WHICH ARISES FROM THE JEW-
ISH REVELATION.

HEBREWS i. 1, 2.

“God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake
“in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath,
“in these last days, spoken unto us by his Son.”

THE solemnities which our church has annually appointed, are not only important in awakening us to the sentiments of our religion, but in reminding us of the evidence upon which it is founded. We meet the multitude of our brethren in the house of God; and, in the appearance of this multitude, and in the remembrance of that greater multitude, who, over the wide extent of the world, are at the same moments engaged in the same service, we feel something more than evidence,—something which tells us, after these things, that truly he that we commemorate “was the Son of God.”

It is to the elder among us, however, upon whom this general consent of nature has its full influence. The young, the in-

nocent, and the inexperienced, look for some more precise evidences,—for that species of evidence which corresponds to their knowledge of history, and their high opinions, both of their nature and its author; and they ought to be satisfied that that religion into which they were baptized is consonant to these lofty expectations,—that it is agreeable to all that their yet uncorrupted nature has taught them to believe of God, and all that they are so willing to hope of man.

It was under these views, and to avoid all abstract disquisitions, that I submitted to you lately a few general observations upon the subject; and to shew to those of my younger hearers, who are now acquainted with the history of the human race, that the evidences of the Gospel rest upon this very history;—that every thing which belongs to it, is in opposition to all that we know of the character or progress of human nature;—and that therefore the obvious and candid conclusion must be, that it arose from a higher source than human wisdom, and must be finally resolved into the immediate providence and inspiration of God.

The first evidence which I stated was that which arose from the very *nature* of this religion; that it was altogether different from any which man had ever known; that the age in which it arose was that of

the last and highest improvement of the ancient world;—that we were in a situation, therefore, to compare all the noblest attainments of human wisdom with the truths which the Gospel revealed;—that the comparison was altogether in favour of Christianity;—and that, when it was farther considered in what country, and under what circumstances this religion arose, it was impossible (from all we know of man,) to attribute it to mortal wisdom, or to mortal foresight.

The evidence which I stated, when we were last assembled, was that of its *success*;—that, “while the word of God grew “and multiplied,” it was from its own inherent energy, and not from any circumstances of human support;—that, amid opposition and persecution, it triumphed over the strongest passions and prejudices which belong to man;—that, in the first instance, all the improvements of the Roman world ended in raising the Gospel to the throne;—And that, when this mighty empire was destroyed by barbarian power, this mighty revolution also ended in bringing all these rude multitudes into the pale of Christianity,—in making them renounce their religious opinions, while they retained every other,—and in subjecting them voluntarily, and without effort, to the new and grateful Light which then arose upon them. Of

effects so strange, so unexampled, and so unaccountable upon all the known principles of human nature, there are only two causes (as I said) which can be assigned;—either, that the immediate agency and interposition of God was employed in conducting this progress of truth; or, that there was in all minds, whether civilized or barbarous, a want and expectation of illumination from Heaven; and that the doctrines of the Gospel were fitted to answer this want, and gratify this deep expectation. In either case, that the religion of the Gospel was thus proved to be true, either from the history of man, or from the consideration of his original character and constitution.

I am now, my brethren, to suggest to you another consideration. From the view of the religion of Jesus Christ, in its own nature, and from the success which, in opposition to all known and experienced causes, has attended it, I am, in the present hour, to request you to carry your eyes backward,—to remember the circumstances which preceded it in the earlier history of the world,—and, from this point of view, to observe *another evidence* which belongs to it, and which undoubtedly belongs to it alone.

Obscure as was the birth of our Saviour, and humble as were the circumstances of

his first appearance in the world, it was yet an event preceded by a longer and a loftier train of preparation than any which has ever taken place among mankind. It was foretold by a series of prophets through many hundred years;—it was signified by the institutions of a whole nation;—incorporated every where with their belief and policy;—and typified, from the earliest antiquity, amid every ceremony of their civil or religious service.—It was prepared by a previous revelation from Heaven itself;—by a dispensation of a kind altogether unlike every thing else that has been known among mankind; and which, while it goes back to the earliest dawn of time, is, from its first hour to its last, prophetick of Him “who was to come,” and altogether imperfect without his arrival.

To such an evidence,—to the evidence of a former and a preparatory revelation, no other religion upon earth had ever any pretensions. If this preparatory revelation was true, and if all its predictions were accomplished in the advent of our Saviour, the conclusion here again is inevitable, that “He was the person who was to come,” and that “we ought to look for no other.”

Upon this subject, upon the truth of the Jewish faith, and upon the consequences which follow from it, I am at present to offer you, my younger brethren, a few

general observations. I dare enter into no particular detail. I have to state only, that such a religion (as you all know) did exist in the first ages of mankind, and, from the nature of that religion, to implore of you to consider whether it was of man or of God?

I. When in this view you look, in the first place, at the state of the world, when the Jewish nation began, and when the Jewish religion was instituted, you see the inhabited earth covered with all the darkness and immorality of barbarous times;—you see, amid all the early tribes of which society then consisted, a deep ignorance of the unity of God, and all the sad consequences which follow from the want of that first principle of human knowledge and human comfort;—you see the faint traces of patriarchal religion debased by all the terrors of superstition, or by all the licentiousness of a gross idolatry; you see the moral feelings of nature sinking under the dominion of imposture, or sacrificed to the purposes of priestcraft and delusion. When from this prospect you turn your eyes to the people of the Jews, you see the “one God” revealed and worshipped; you see the lowest of that peculiar people in possession of a discovery to which no other people were yet approaching; you see the worship of this God instituted with deep solemnity,—

the belief in his name incorporated with every civil and every religious establishment of their nation;—and the great moral law, which was given by Him in ages so distant, remaining still the moral law of nature, in its highest and most improved generations. To what cause, my brethren, are we to attribute this striking exception to all that we know of the character of man, and to all that we observe of the actual progress of human nature? If it be different from all we know of mankind, it is not to be accounted for from the usual principles of our nature. If it be superiour to all we know of these ages,—if the religion of the Jews is above all that we perceive in the contemporary opinions of mankind—it is to be accounted for only from a higher cause than human wisdom; and must ultimately be resolved into the will and inspiration of heaven.

2. When we look, in the second place, to the history of religious opinions, we find every where that the authors of them considered and bequeathed them as complete and perfect. Whatever we may suppose to be the motives of the religious legislators of mankind, whether vanity, enthusiasm, or benevolence, every one of these motives concurred in making them consider their own doctrines as complete and unimprovable; that in them was contained all the

wisdom of their own age, and that in them was to be rested all the wisdom and happiness of posterity. The fact accordingly is, that, of all opinions, those of religion are most tenaciously preserved by mankind; and the history of every country (that has not been enlightened by the Gospel) shews us, both the rigid adherence with which men cling to the doctrines of their forefathers, and the awful denunciations which the founders of these religions have every where pronounced upon infidelity and apostasy.

When from this uniform picture, we turn to the religion of the Jews, the most remarkable fact which strikes us on the other hand is, that it is an imperfect and a preparatory religion; that, instead of being complete, it is only a step to something greater; and that in it, the pious eye, instead of being turned with veneration to the past, is always directed with hope and expectation to the future. There is no name which can be mentioned among men, so great in that age, as that of Moses, their first legislator; yet he himself refers his people always to some greater legislator, to some One who, in distant ages, was to arise, and who was to be "greater than him." There are no compositions of that age which can bear any comparison with the Psalms of the King of Israel, or the sub-

lime illuminations of the Jewish prophets. Yet, in all these, it is not their own times, their own opinions, their own doctrines, which are the subject of their devout praise, but the prospect of "something greater yet to come," which they saw "darkly;" but upon which they kept the eyes of their people steadily intent, and in doing which they sacrificed every thing which could constitute their own wisdom, their own power, or their own consequence. To what are we, again, here to attribute this peculiar constitution of the Jewish religion? Is it analogous to any thing we know, in other nations, of the character of man? And when we see it, peculiar not to one man, or one age, but the predominant spirit of the religion throughout many succeeding ages of men,—is it possible to attribute it to any other cause, than to the immediate agency of God, and the consciousness that all these successive generations had of this immediate and irresistible agency.

3. When we go a step farther in this inquiry, there is a third and very striking evidence which meets us. The Jewish religion not only incorporated in itself the hope and the expectation of another revelation, but the revelation it did thus incorporate, was of a nature altogether unlike and superiour to its own. It prophesied, amid

all its own forms and all its observances, the arrival of a spiritual religion; a religion which was to make unnecessary all their own most sacred rites, and most hallowed ceremonies;—which was to destroy all that in their opinion was great, all that was venerable among the Jewish people;—and which, still more, was to extend itself to all the nations which surrounded them,—to all that their present religion bound them to hold in abhorrence and contempt. Such circumstances are surely irreconcilable with every thing we know or experience in human nature, and are therefore not to be accounted for by the agency of ordinary causes. But the circumstance to which I particularly wish to draw your attention, my brethren, is this, To what principle in human nature are you to ascribe this uniform and astonishing line of prophecy? In the age when the patriarchs and Moses lived,—in the dark hours when the prophets spoke,—what was it that gave them this mighty foresight? What was it, when the world around them was lying in grossness and idolatry, that led them, not only to the anticipation of a faith, then unconceived and unexampled among mankind, but which led them to foretel all the future progress of human nature,—to see that their own religion was yet only an apprenticeship to something greater,—to foretel

events, in contradiction to every thing which nature experienced,—and to perceive, in opposition to all their own most powerful prejudices, a future religion arising, which was to be erected upon the ruins of every thing that was dear to themselves as a people, and to be conveyed to every people whom they hated or despised?—To these questions, I apprehend, there can be only one answer. They have no relation to any thing we know of the character or progress of man in other countries, and the whole of that extraordinary, and even apparently inconsistent system of religion, which distinguished the Jewish people, and which still distinguishes their unhappy descendants, is utterly unaccountable upon any other principle, than as being, in the wisdom of God, a preparation for one that was greater; as “the school master,” as the apostle has expressed it, to lead a suffering, but a progressive world into that light and truth in which it is our first blessing to dwell.

4. The last circumstance which I have to state, is the actual accomplishment of all the prophecies of these dark and distant times. I cannot (in the limits of a single discourse) presume to speak to you of all the extraordinary evidence upon this subject, which arises from the minute and precise correspondence of all “the signs and

“types, and figurative meanings,” in which the dispensation of the Gospel fulfils the introductory dispensation of the Mosaick law. I presume to remind you only of the great and prominent facts which every age has known, and which the present hour verifies.—It was foretold by the lawgiver of the Jews, that a greater than him was to come,—and a greater than him has come. It was foretold, that this mighty Saviour “was to be despised and rejected of his own people, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” That Saviour has come, to be rejected and despised; to be in truth a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. It was foretold that Jerusalem was to be destroyed when this mighty event arose;—and when this mighty event arose, Jerusalem was destroyed. It was foretold, that the light of Heaven was to arise upon the Gentile world;—and upon the Gentile world (and upon us in the mercy of God) that light has arisen. It was foretold, that the Jewish people was then to be dissolved, “that they were to be strangers and wanderers in every land,” until some future day of repentance and of pardon;—and at this hour, the Jewish people are strangers and wanderers in every country upon earth. To this weight and consent of evidence, I have nothing, my young brethren, to add. The characters

of the religion of the Jews are in themselves irreconcilable with every common principle of human nature, and must therefore be referred to some higher wisdom and foresight than that of man. But when all the prophecies of this extraordinary religion are found to be accomplished,—when, resting solely upon the future, all that they predict of that future has really taken place;—when all point to a final and greater revelation, and when all the circumstances of that greater revelation correspond fully to the predictions of earlier time, the conclusion is inevitable,—that the Saviour whom we worship, is “he that “ should come, and that we ought to look for no other.”

— In the very rapid and superficial view which I have taken of this great argument, I have wished to shew you, that there is an evidence belonging to Christianity, which belongs to no other religion that has ever appeared among mankind,—that of being preceded by a former and introductory revelation;—that this previous revelation contains in itself the evidence of its own truth;—and that all that it prophesied has been verified by the coming of our Lord, and the publication of his religion. If these facts are admitted, it is impossible to deny the divine origin of that faith in which it was our blessing to be baptized.

But there are, beside these, one or two other points of religious view, to which I

wish to conduct you, ere I leave the subject, and which may serve perhaps to shew to my younger brethren, how reconcileable the whole system of revelation is to that simplicity and unity which must subsist in the system of Divine administration.

1. The history of revelation is agreeable to all we know and feel of the character of the Almighty. When you look to religions of mortal origin, you see in them all the weakness and all the passions of men,—heroes deified,—divinities actuated by human vices and national prejudices,—and the God of universal nature compressed into the partial god of a nation or of a tribe. When you look to the records of Scripture, on the contrary, when you look even to the earliest dawn of human existence, you see One God, firmly and uninterruptedly recognized;—you see *one* design begun in the hour when man was created, *one* plan of wisdom and of beneficence pursued, amid all the vices and corruptions of a fallen world;—you see this plan, embracing in its final object the whole of moral nature, advancing gradually to its perfection, through all the darkness and clouds which seem to oppose it; and promised then only to close, when it has brought all the wandering varieties of the human race, “into
“one fold, and under one Shepherd.” If the God of Nature will indeed deign to

reveal his will to mankind, can we conceive any system more analogous to all that we conceive of infinite wisdom, or all that we can hope of infinite goodness?

2. The manner in which the Almighty has thus revealed himself, corresponds to all we know or experience of human nature. If there be any feature beyond others by which the nature of man is characterized, it is, "That he is a progressive being;"—a being susceptible both of intellectual and moral improvement, as his race advances in time. How beautiful, in this view, is the accommodation of revelation to this character of man! and how aptly does it correspond to the actual progress of human nature! Beginning at first with those faint illuminations which suit an infant world; established then in a system which, by its dark and ceremonious grandeur, was adapted to the minds of a rude and unenlightened people, it expands gradually into the high and lofty enthusiasm of prophecy, and breaks forth at last into the mild and spiritual majesty of the Gospel of our Lord. How striking is here the analogy to the conduct of a father, who accommodates his instructions to the age, and to the acquisitions of his children; and how sublime the consideration of that Eternal Father, "under the shadow of whose wings," the human race has been fostered in all their

progress from infancy to maturity; whose parental eye has never known "to slumber or to sleep;" and within whose "everlasting arms," the last generations of men will be folded like the infant generations of his own peculiar people.

In the last place, the sketch which I have presented to you of the progress of Revelation, exhibits to us, in the loftiest manner, the majesty of that final Revelation in which we dwell, and its coincidence with all that is originally good or great in our nature. When we look at the records of history, and see religions arising and falling among mankind, we are apt to suppose, that our own has no earlier or more permanent origin; to date it only from the hour when our Saviour was born; and to imagine that it has no higher claims to belief than its own plain and intrinsic truth.

In the remembrance of the mighty revelations that preceded it, a more majestic argument occurs to us. Instead of being a separate and anomalous fact in the history of nature, we see that it is only the accomplishment of connected facts, and of a kindred design; we see, that from the first hour of the human race, a system has been carrying on for its progressive happiness, and its final salvation,—that the rise and the fall of nations have been equally instru-

mental to the accomplishment of this paternal plan;—that man, in short, is nothing, and God is every thing; and that all that was great in the history of antiquity, is great only as being instrumental in introducing that final light, which was destined to illuminate the world, and to carry it on to that perfection, which, though none of us can now experience, all of us can at least conceive. It is thus, my brethren, that not only the harmony of these two revelations is felt, but their harmony with nature itself; that the conduct of God is felt as the conduct of a Father;—that revelation, instead of being considered as an exception to the laws of moral nature, is seen as consistent and as ancient as these laws themselves; and that, while the human heart has every where felt that some one “should come,” the history and plan of this communication shews, that that One “has come,” and that nature “itself” looks for no other.——

——I do not know, my brethren, whether there is any subject to which I could lead your attention, more fitted to the hour in which I speak, than this retrospect of the past history of mankind. We are about to close another year of our lives,—a few days will bring with them a new year;—and there is no human heart which must not now swell with the remembrances of

the years that are gone. Be the remembrance what it will, the first, the greatest, and the most becoming feeling in us at this hour, is that of thankfulness. We have all enjoyed, if not as much as imagination would desire, at least far more than conscience tells us we have deserved; and the service in which we have so lately been engaged has taught us nothing, if it has not taught us that we are sinful, and that God is merciful.

Years are passing, and all of them are marked by the fashions and the follies of man. It is here only, my brethren, that we can see the steadiness of a greater design;—that we can look back upon the world from its cradle, and see one plan of mercy commencing with its origin, and to be closed only with its end;—that in this plan we can feel ourselves to be included, and that the years of time are merely preparatory to the possible happiness of eternity.

It is thus, my brethren,—it is with these lofty meditations upon the past and the future, that this great solemnity should arrive, and the Christian year should close.

I pray, therefore, the Father of all mercies, “that we may all bless him,” in these moments of the expiring year, “for our creation, for our preservation, and for all the blessings of this life; but, above all,

“for his inestimable love, in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,—for the means he has afforded us of grace, and for the hopes he has given us of glory.” And I beseech him, my brethren, for you and for myself, “that he may give us that due sense of all his mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful!”—that, in the new year which is approaching “we may shew forth his praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to his service, and by remembering what manner of men they ought to be,” to whom the God of the universe hath deigned “to speak by his Son.”

SERMON X.

ON THE EVIDENCE WHICH ARISES FROM THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF PROPHECY.

GENESIS xxii. 15, 16, 17, 18.

- “ And the Angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of
“ Heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I
“ sworn, saith the Lord (for because thou hast done this
“ thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thy only son,)
“ That, in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiply-
“ ing I will multiply thee, as the stars of Heaven, and
“ as the sand on the sea shore.
“ And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be
“ blessed.”

THESE were the words of the messenger of Heaven to the patriarch Abraham, nearly four thousand years ago,—when he was chosen as the father of a peculiar race, and as the founder of a select institution. In the words, though spoken so long ago, we have an interest of the deepest kind. The faith into which we have been baptized, dates itself from the dawn of the world. And while nature has been changing in every age, and the vices and follies of man filling the page of general history with tears and with blood, there is yet One book

which tells us of nobler things, and which contains the record of a more steady administration.

When the dispersion of mankind naturally gave rise to new systems, both of opinion and of policy;—when the great family of man became necessarily separated into private interests, and divided by national passions;—when the exertions of human genius, ever following, and never leading, the opinions of the world, were gradually estranging men from each other, and, from the first principles of their common nature; there arose at that time, in the beneficence of God, among the “children of Abraham,” a new system of communication of the Father of nature with his infant children,—a system supported by the only evidence which could have effect upon the minds of barbarous people;—a system which incorporated in itself the noblest truths which the human mind can know, in the same hours when all the rest of the world had fallen below them;—a system, still farther, which looked to futurity,—which, imperfect in itself, promised always something greater,—which could only be accomplished by the dissemination of light and truth to the whole world; and which proved to mankind the moral government of one Father throughout the varying scenes of time, and the fitness of

this paternal government, to the progressive improvement of the human race.

Upon the subject of this magnificent, though only introductory dispensation, I lately offered you, my younger brethren, a few observations. I wished to shew you, that, to the evidence of a preliminary revelation, no other religion than that of the Gospel has any pretension;—that the truth of this previous dispensation is proved to us by its nature, by its peculiarities, and by its accomplishment;—that there thus belongs to our faith an evidence, not only peculiar to it, but which is supported by the history of nature itself;—that it corresponds to all our conceptions of the conduct of the Father of nature to his children;—and that it corresponds equally to the actual progress that has taken place among mankind, and to all that the history of the world has shewn us of this progress.

I am, in the present hour, my brethren, to solicit your attention to another view of your religion. We have arrived at the accomplishment of the prophecies of so many ages;—we have seen (and we have lately gratefully commemorated) the birth of the long-promised Saviour and Legislator of the world. I am now to request you to sit, in imagination, beside the humble cradle of this mysterious infant; and (while you listen to the dark sayings of old, and hear

the voice of the angels who announced his birth, in words which no human imagination could frame) to implore you to carry your eye into futurity;—to observe, whether the mighty promises which then were given, have been accomplished; and whether the apparent son of Joseph of Nazareth has, or has not, become the mighty Legislator of the human race?

1. From such a position, you will see, in the first place, that all these prophecies have been, in a certain measure, accomplished;—that the religion of the Gospel has found its way throughout every difficulty which opposed it;—that, unsupported at first by genius, unaided by learning, and altogether unprotected by power, it yet, by its own inherent evidence, has subdued gradually every institution, either of classick refinement, or of barbarian policy;—that it is at this hour the religion of every people who are wise, or great, or progressive among mankind; and that the mark of civilization and capacity in all the nations who at this moment inhabit the earth, is precisely that of their being, or not yet being, the disciples of the Christian faith.

2. You will see, in the next place, that wherever the Gospel has spread, it has been efficient in raising the human race to greater exaltation of mind, and greater capacity even of present happiness, than all

the records of former ages could shew. Upon this subject, there is no need of reasoning. We have only to spread before us the map of the ancient world; to remember their institutions, their doctrines, their manners;—we have only, with a similar view, to examine the map of the modern world under the reign of other religions and other systems. From this useful but melancholy survey, why is it, that all Christian countries are so far above all that meets our eye, in the geography of nature?—why are their laws more equal, their manners more pure, their knowledge more wide, their comprehensions more exalted? To these questions the answer is—in their religion;—in the lofty but simple aspect which it affords of man and of his duties;—in the exaltation which it gives to all its powers, when he sees “life and immortality presented to him by the Gospel.” I am well aware, that the character of individuals, and of nations who call themselves Christian, is yet far below the design of Providence. But while the vices and the follies of men are for ever retarding the merciful will of their author, the retrospect of eighteen hundred years must shew us, that there is a design carrying on in the present hour, which man can never defeat; and that the misery of men or of nations, is not because they are, but because they are *not* Christians.

3. You will see, in the last place, my brethren, that the prophecies which the Gospel records; in particular, long before its arrival among mankind, the wondrous prophecy to Abraham, "that, in his generation, all the nations of the earth should finally be blessed," is now in the career of its accomplishment. While we look back to the history of eighteen hundred years, we are entitled to judge, in some measure, with regard to the future; and those truths which, through so many centuries, have prevailed alike over the wise, and over the barbarous, which have brought within their pale, the voluntary submission of human kind, we are justified in believing to be the great truths of which man was in want, and which, therefore, are finally to prevail while human nature remains the same.

Of the future, however, we must ever conjecture darkly; and of the mighty conclusion of so many centuries of prophecy, when the human race are to terminate "in one fold," and under the guardianship "of one shepherd," we, in the present hour, must remain unconscious. But there is another evidence, my brethren, (in my apprehension still greater,) which we all feel, and which, in itself, is the real and prevailing evidence by which the Gospel is finally to arise to its promised dominion. It is the

evidence of our own hearts; the conscious correspondence which we feel between the system of Christianity, and all that our fallen but ardent nature implores of divine truth; the belief, therefore, that the word of God will "grow and multiply," from its own inherent energy, in every future age, as it did in the dark and disastrous days of the apostles. Of this important consideration, the limits of this place permit me only to present to you the simplest illustration.

The hour in which I speak is an hour of kindness and of charity. We have met our friends, our relations, and our children, in all the warmth of domestick affection; and while a new year rises upon them, and while our hearts sink at imagining what years may bring forth, there is no eye which is not raised to heaven, and no voice which does not implore blessings upon those whom they love.

1. Is it for your children, my friends, that you implore these blessings? Is it upon their innocent and unconscious heads that you pray for all that is good, for all that is wise, and for all that is happy, in that life which is before them? Then lay your hands upon your hearts, and let me ask, if (even unconsciously) you have not prayed that they might possess the faith, and perform the obedience of the Christian? In calculating the blessings which you have pray-

ed for,—in wishing naturally for all the honours and the distinctions of time,—have you not felt that there was something greater than all these for which they were born? And where has all the ardour of your supplications closed, but in praying that their life “should end according to that beginning,” when the waters of baptism were poured upon their heads, and when they were received into the communion of a Saviour, and into the hopes of a blessed immortality.

2. Is it for the human race, my brethren, that you offer, in this opening of a year, your benevolent prayers? And, amid the sufferings of so many nations, do you present those secret supplications, which, though unknown to men, are yet known at the Throne of God? Then, ask yourselves what is that dominion upon earth for which you pray? that discipline of human affairs in which the world is to be made happy—that system of private and of national government, under “which all nations may dwell in secure habitations, “and in quiet resting places?” You will find that you pray only for the dominion of the Gospel; that its spirit contains all that can make man great and nations happy; that all that is liberal or profound in the speculations of philosophy are only the application of its simple principles; that

the miseries which we now witness, and have so long witnessed among mankind, are the effect only of opposition to these principles; and that, in these miseries themselves, we may read the providence of the same God, whose system is to "overcome evil with good," and to lead mankind to the truth of the Gospel by means of the very evils they create, when they deviate from it.

Do you go farther, my brethren, in these hours of kind wishes and of charitable prayer? Do you pass the bounds of time, and look and pray for all you love, that they may know the happiness of eternity? Then I appeal to all your hearts, whether there be any other Faith that man has ever been taught, or any other obedience that man can ever perform, which in your belief can fit him for the greatness and the purity of a future life, than the faith and the obedience of the Gospel. In our usual hours we are blinded with the illusions and the dust of time. But in hours like these we can see beyond them. The hopes of every age since man arose have looked to some future scene, "when the wicked shall cease from troubling, and when the weary shall be at rest;" to some final scene when God shall "wipe all tears" from every virtuous eye; when a kingdom shall begin "where only reigneth righteous-

“ness;” and where the inhabitants of it “shall be wise as angels,” but “innocent as doves.” And such hopes the Saviour of mankind has established, not only by his doctrines, but by his example. To this magnificent end, You, my brethren, and yours are called. And what, I beseech you, is the subject of your secret prayers for yourselves, or your deeper supplications for those you love, but that the same “mind” may “be in you which was in Christ Jesus;” that “you may throw off every work of darkness, and put upon you the armour of light;” that you may thus be fitted to ascend (in the mercy of your Saviour,) to the society of those who are “now made perfect,” and who dwell “before the Throne and the Lamb for ever.” To such ends no other system you know conducts;—for such exaltation no other preparation you feel is adequate;—and while the dark scene of time is thus made to close in glory, your imagination itself can conceive no other system of discipline by which it can be attained, than by the faith, the purity, and the obedience of the Christian.

Such, my brethren, is the concluding evidence of your faith. It is supported, not only by every thing without, but by every thing within us. It corresponds to all that we believe of the God of Nature, and to all

that we hope of that being whom he formed in "his own image." It embraces all that we know of the past, and all that we pray with regard to the future; and, amid all the darkness and convulsion of human affairs, it shews us the progress of that magnificent system of providence and of mercy, which thus expands as it advances, and which, beginning with time, is destined to terminate only in eternity.

II. It is to these lofty remembrances that every new year awakens us; to the recollection, "that we dwell not now in the darkness and in the shadow of death; but that the day-spring of Heaven has visited us, and that the Sun of Righteousness which has arisen," is advancing, through all the clouds which the breath of man raises to eclipse his glory, unto the ascendant "of the perfect day."

But religion, my brethren, and, above all, the religion of the Gospel, is not merely a subject of intellectual or of contemplative gratitude. It is a subject of active obedience, of filial affection, and of grateful imitation. Of the lofty system in which all the nations of the earth are finally to be blessed, we are not spectators only, but we are every one called to be actors. To us, even to the feeblest being who, in the long succession of time, numbers his years by the sum of "threescore and ten," is given the

sublime privilege of being a sharer in this progress ;—the mighty capacity of accelerating or retarding the designs of Omnipotence ;—the awful power either of leading those who follow him to destruction, or of numbering them among the children of God.

—Were we to conceive a human being raised at once into existence, (like our first progenitor,) with all his powers, and all his feelings in perfection, the first and the most exalted question which he would make to himself, would be, “ How shall I shew the love I owe to the God who made me, and to that thinking and feeling world in which he has placed me ? ” The beginning of a new year, my brethren, is something like the beginning of life ; and I believe there are very few who have not in these hours put to themselves at least some such question. The answer, and the answer both of Nature and of Revelation is, —Be a Christian. In the faith of the Gospel, let your youth be nursed ;—in its charity, let your maturity be passed ;—in its hopes, let your gray hairs repose. It is in this course, that the greatest honours of humanity have been won ;—the greatest duties of humanity performed ;—the greatest exaltation of humanity attained. It is in this course, that that love of God can be shewn, which glorifies him by the light

which it displays, and the good works which it performs. It is in this course, that that love of Man can be shewn, which makes religion the benefactor of the human kind ;—which makes the humblest Christian, beneath the thatch of his cottage, not only the blessing of all who surround him, but the fellow worker with the system of Heaven itself, and the instrument of conveying the blessings of salvation to all the future nations of the world.

Such are the reflections which become every new year. Amid the passions and the infirmities of men, we see nothing at present but “thick darkness,” and national distress. In the council of God, it is our blessing to foresee a steady system, and an invincible career. Through all the clouds of former ages, the “Sun of Righteousness” has risen upon his path ; and through all the darkness of the present day, the same sun will pursue his glorious course, until it terminates in the “light and the liberty of the children of God.”

Many thousand years have passed since the mighty prophecy was given unto Abraham.—and that prophecy has been fulfilled. Many hundred years have passed since the voice of the angels announced to an infant Saviour, that, in his birth, “glory was given to God, to earth peace, to mankind divine good will ;”—and this prophecy has

been accomplished, and is now accomplishing. It is in this middle point of the divine system, that we, my brethren, in our short hour, stand. The years that are passed shew us the progress of this system. The shades of all the good and all the pious who have gone before us, rise in this moment to our imaginations, and point to the course which we ought to pursue. The infant forms of posterity seem to bend before us, and to solicit from us that instruction and that example, which may make them associates in the same service, and the messengers of salvation to the utmost limits of the moral world.

The year which has passed, left us, my brethren, in calling to mind the remembrance of our own ways. Of that remembrance, what now remains that can give peace or joy to our hearts, but the remembrance of Christian piety, and of Christian virtue?—It is the sacred presage, not only of years, but of life: Extend it to what length you please, still the same account will be presented; and whenever the human spirit “returns to him that made it,” the choir of angels who announced that religion into which all of us have been baptized, can convey only those spirits into happiness, who have given “glory to God “in the highest upon earth,—who have “spread peace, and who have taught good “will among human-kind.”

In the opening, therefore, of a new year,—in the opening of a year awful by “the judgments of God,” which are now so visibly “upon the earth,” and hopeful only if “the nations of the world shall learn righteousness,”—dark in its beginning, and awful perhaps in its progress,—for what shall the voice of this place pray for you, or for our country?—Oh! not for conquest or dominion,—not for riches which may deceive, or for glories which may betray,—but for that “spirit” which can “overcome the world;”—for that elevation of thought which makes “things temporal” instrumental only for “things eternal;”—that the same mind may be in you, and in all the people of this land, which was in Christ your Saviour, and which, whether in acting or in suffering, acknowledged no other motive than that “of doing the will of his Father.”

These are the lofty and the eternal things for which I kneel before the throne of the Almighty for you, and for all our brethren of mankind in this solemn hour. In the awful circumstances of the present world, there is something which is unhappily fitted to dim the radiance of youthful piety, and to shake the first foundations of moral belief. It is on this account that I have wished to lead the minds of the young around me to higher meditations; to shew them,

from the uniform history of the world, that there is a system in nature, which all the guilt of nations or of man has never been able to overthrow ;—that all the prospects of social happiness rest upon the dissemination of Christianity ;—and that, whatever may be their rank or condition, the noblest part which life offers them to perform, is that of being faithful to the vows and the promises of their baptism. And in now concluding, my young brethren, these humble illustrations, I conclude, with the solemn assurance,—that, if the beneficence of Heaven were to grant to me the accomplishment of all my prayers for you, and for those who are most dear to me, I would ask for you no other blessing, than that of a steadfast and unshaken faith in the Gospel of him who ought to come, and who has come, “to make you wise here, and “wise unto salvation.”

SERMON XI.

ON THE LOVE OF EXCELLENCE.

PHILIPPIANS i. 10.

“That ye may approve things that are excellent.”

THESE words are part of the warm and beautiful prayer of the Apostle for his church in Philippi: “And this I pray for you (says he) that your love may abound yet more and more unto knowledge, and in all judgment,—that ye may approve things that are excellent,—that ye may be sincere, and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are, by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and the praise of God.”

It is a passage which it would be well for us to keep perpetually in our remembrance, as it expresses, in a very striking manner, the nature of that religion which the Apostle taught, and the consequences which he expected it to have upon the minds of mankind;—not in subduing their understandings, and making them the slaves of any dark or illiberal superstition, but in blending religion with every common bu-

siness of their lives,—in rendering it the means of leading them to “all knowledge, and all judgment,”—of elevating their minds to the approbation of things that are excellent,—and of thus carrying them on, through the grace of their divine Master, to the highest state of perfection of which mortality is capable,—that, “of being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are, by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and the praise of God.”

Of the moral and intellectual discipline of which the Apostle thus sketches the outline, there is one branch only of which I am now to speak,—“that ye may approve things that are excellent.”—It is the affectionate wish which the Apostle forms for his disciples. It is a wish which probably every thoughtful man has formed for himself; and it would be well for all the interests of humanity, if it were formed in every youthful bosom.

“It is from the heart,” says the wise man, “that all the issues of life proceed;” and it is, in truth, much more in the right government of it, than even of outward action, that the genuine wisdom of human life is shewn. It is in that secret and dark recess, unknown to every human eye, and searchable only by the eye of “Him who inhabiteth infinity,” that the springs of Vice or Virtue begin their infant course.

It is in the private meditations of youthful years,—in the secret opinions which the young then form, and the sequestered wishes which they then indulge,—that their future character in life, and even their fate in eternity, is determined; and that from the shade of secret thought, they all come forward upon the stage of active life, either to be the blessings or the curses of the society to which they belong. The influence of example, the contagion of temporary manners, have in truth no farther effect upon them, than as they fall in with the character and dispositions which have been thus forming in solitude; and he who has not learnt to “keep his own heart with diligence” in the morning of his being, has lost the best hope of honour in its noon, or of dignity in its close.

By what means then shall the heart be governed? By what rule or discipline shall those desires be regulated, and those affections awakened, from which “come all the future issues of life?” To this important question the answer of the apostle is, “Approve things that are excellent.” Elevate your minds (as if he had said) to the proper, and to the genuine dignity of your being. Consider what becomes you as men and as Christians. Remember on what theatre you act, and in whose sight you are acting; and, when you look on the

world around, let the models of your imitation be those only who are displaying "religious and moral excellence," and who are pursuing their lofty way "to glory," and "to immortality." It is this view of the animating advice of the Apostle which I shall now attempt to illustrate.

1. It is impossible not to observe, in the first place, that there is in human nature an ardent love and desire of Excellence, a sense of something dignified and honourable, that is required of man by that rank and condition of being to which he belongs. It is an instinct of nature, as well as a truth of revelation, that in this world man possesses the pre-eminence of existence; that there are powers and capacities which raise him above every other class of beings that are formed; and that, in consequence of this high distinction, there are mightier ends for which he is created, and nobler designs which he ought to pursue. Even amid all the ruins of our fallen nature, there are remembrances of its original glory; and there is a kind of want (if I may so express myself,) in every noble and generous nature, to purify itself from the frailties and corruptions which it at present experiences, and to raise itself to those higher and incorruptible classes of existence, for which, even here, it feels that it was ultimately destined.

To this original want or wish of humanity, how beautifully is the revelation of the Gospel adapted! It tells us, that these are no visionary desires; that they are the throes of nature struggling for deliverance; and that, in mercy to the human soul, One at last is "come," who "is able to set us free." It is in the high and generous mind of youth that these desires of excellence are chiefly to be found; and how strikingly are the promises of revelation adapted to encourage them! not only by assuring them "that He is faithful who "promised," but by pointing out "the way" by which this great ambition may be accomplished, and by which the immortal mind may advance, by his merits and by his example, to higher measures of purity and of perfection.

If the views of the Gospel are thus so beautifully accommodated to the character of Youth, it is, in general, by the presence or the absence of this early "love of excellence," that our opinions are determined with regard to the openings of human character. Of those who in early life shew this approbation of "things that are excellent," we are always disposed to think and to promise well,—it is the earnest to us of talents, as well as of virtues, beyond the reach of ordinary men. Of those, on the contrary, who shew no symptoms of this

ambition,—who seem not to distinguish what is “excellent” from what is degrading in conduct or in thought,—and who assimilate themselves with equal servility to vice or to virtue as it happens to approach them—we form no promises of honour; we turn from them with pity, if not with contempt, and leave them to be forgotten amid the crowd of vulgar and ignoble characters.

2. It is grateful to observe, in the second place, that there is, in truth, no possible situation or condition in human life, where this love of Excellence, this taste for the becoming and the honourable, may not be exerted and exemplified. In this, as in every thing else relating to human character, it is the Mind which acts, not the situation in which it acts, that determines our admiration or our contempt. And look where we will, over the world around us, we shall see examples, in this view, either to warn or to animate us.

In the situations of rank and of affluence, for instance, do we not sometimes discover men who degrade them? men, whose tastes and desires seem never to have risen above the lowest conditions of society, and in whose degenerate hands, influence and riches, and power, are employed only to render vice more gross, and folly more conspicuous? Do we not sometimes find, on the other hand, in the same situations, cha-

racters of a nobler kind?—men who seem to have been born for greatness,—who, feeling all the dignity and all the importance of their stations, support them by the steadiness of personal virtue, and who shed a new splendour over the rank they enjoy, by the grace with which they wear it?

In the-opposite conditions of life, we seldom look, perhaps, for the honourable or the becoming. The cold eye of prosperity seldom bends to examine the scenes of poverty and sorrow; and our delicacy, (as we have sometimes the impiety to call it) is hurt at the accompaniments which ever follow misery:—yet, in these low and neglected scenes, who is there that has not seen instances of the “love of things that are excellent?” who is there that has not had the blessing of witnessing, in some, the most dignified submission to the hand of chastening Heaven!—in others, the most heroick struggle with wretchedness, ere the sufferers would reveal the wants under which they laboured!—in some, the most magnanimous adherence to truth and honesty, although every thing else that was dear to them should perish!—and, in others, that silent but eloquent gratitude, which is told by actions and not by words, and which, though it never reaches the ear of man, yet nightly returns, in the midnight prayer to God!——It is the same with every

other condition or occupation of life; and whatever are the scenes upon which we look, we find always some who confer honour, and others who confer dishonour upon them,—some, who, having weighed in their secret heart, what was the “excellent and becoming” in that station to which Providence had appointed them, have attained every esteem and respect which their station could admit or bestow,—others who, insensible to every generous ambition, have suffered themselves to go on with the crowd around them, and are now content to wear out an ignoble life, without dignity, without usefulness, and without peace.

Such are the scenes which life is every day presenting for the instruction of those who are entering upon it; and happy would it be for the young, if they would early accustom themselves to look upon the world in this moral view;—not to indulge a childish ridicule, or an unmanly curiosity;—not to blame with haste, or to admire with folly;—but to make it the subject of solemn and of thoughtful observation; to consider it as the mirror in which they may see their own portraits; as shewing them, in the history of those whose situations resemble theirs, the future history of themselves; as being, in short, the great school, in which, by the fate of others, they may learn not

only the wisdom of the world, but the wisdom of immortality.

3. There is yet another consideration upon this subject, of deep importance to all, whether old or young. It is, That if “we keep not our hearts” in the “love of what is excellent,” they will inevitably fall into the love of what is base. In the great journey of human life, there is no moment of pause. If we do not advance, we must retreat;—if we do not “press on” to the “high mark to which we are called,” we must fall back to “the dust” from which we sprung. The hour in which a man should say to himself,—“I have now attained all the excellence which can be required of me; my understanding is cultivated; my affections are regulated; my conduct is pure. It is now time that I should cease from exertion, and enjoy the honours I have won.”—Such an hour, I say, would be the termination of all that was noble or virtuous in human character. The habit of exertion once broken, would soon cease to exist. The ambition of higher excellence, once banished from the heart, it would be left open to passions of which it had little suspicion, and against which it could have no defence. The pleasures of sense, ever powerful over the vacant, and ever conquered by the only active mind, would soon steal upon the ima-

gination. By slow and unsuspected steps, every weak and unworthy affection which formerly had been repressed, would waken into life and power. Every day as it passed, would take something from the vigour of character, or the purity of taste; and, at last, the once cultivated mind, would become an "unweeded garden," in which the scattered remains of former beauty would only make us more sensible to its present and its final desolation.

Wherever then we turn our eyes upon life, we may see the importance of the advice of the apostle;—we may see, that the dignity and purity of human character can only be attained and preserved by cherishing fondly and habitually in our hearts, "the love of things that are excellent;"—the love of whatever is graceful or becoming in that station of life where Providence has placed us; and that it is this strenuous "keeping of our hearts," which alone can render the issues of life honourable or happy.

The subject is important to all men; but there is one class to whom it is of singular and peculiar importance. I need not say I mean the Young,—those who are entering upon the eventful journey of time, and who are preparing their minds for the trying scenes which are inevitably to follow. If the importance of the subject can interest

their attention, they will not, I trust, withhold it, while I suggest some of the means which the bounty of Heaven has given, by which their early "love of excellence" may be cultivated and improved.

1. The first of these, is to impress their minds with a firm and unvarying sense of the dignity of their nature, and of the lofty ends for which existence was given them. These ends, if darkly shadowed out by nature, have been brought, by revelation, into the light of day. It has taught them, that though, in their mortal frame, they belonged to the animals which perish, in their minds, they belong "to angels and archangels, and to the spirits who now stand before the throne of God." It has taught them, that life was given them for the attainment of this final glory; and that the trials and the discipline of mortality, are framed only to raise them at last to this noblest condition of existence. It has taught them, still more, that every station of life is equally the road to the glories of immortality;—that over every path of man, there is One paternal eye for ever watchful;—One patient ear, which listens alike to the prayer that arises from the cottage as from the palace;—"One Father, who willeth that all his children should come to salvation; who seeth in secret, but who will one day reward openly;" and in

whose book of life are numbered the secret virtues of the humble heart, as well as the deeds which attract the admiration and gratitude of the world.—These, magnificent as they are, are yet the simple truths of the Gospel,—the truths which fall from Heaven upon every head upon which the waters of baptism have been poured; and it is with these hopes and promises in their possession, that all of them enter upon life, upon its dangers, and upon its duties.—Can there be a wiser or a better means of leading them to the love of the “true excellence” of their nature, than the remembrance of what their religion has thus taught them upon its threshold? and if these truths were fully and permanently cherished in their hearts, would not “the issue of their lives” be worthy of this beginning?

2. A second means of raising themselves to a proper sense of the things that become them, is that which the wisdom of every age has prescribed to the young,—the selection of some great or virtuous model for their own imitation. The truths of religion or morality, however convincing in themselves, are, we all know, apt to evaporate from our minds, unless they are substantiated by some actual display of them in men like ourselves; but when examples of this kind are found, we find not only the excellence of which we were in search, but

we feel, still more, the animating conviction that this excellence has actually been attained. Admiration is thus exalted into ambition; and, while the desire of excellence is awakened, the model by which imitation may be governed is obtained. It is in this secret discipline that all great and noble minds have probably been formed; and whatever may be our opinions of the follies or vices of men, the world has yet to shew us, thank God! instances of excellence in every rank and condition of society; and even under its worst aspects, the page of history is still open to display to us the virtues and the attainments of former days. To admire whatever is great, and to love whatever is good in human character, is the happy distinction of youthful years.—How much more happy would it be, if these transient feelings were condensed into habitual principle,—if the young would accustom their imagination to the contemplation of the noblest models of their intellectual and moral nature, and strain every faculty of their yet unbroken minds to the imitation of the course they admire!

Am I here to say, my brethren, how immeasurably nobler would it be, if the Christian young were to study, before all other models, the example of their Saviour? Before his divine course, every thing that is great in mortality is humbled, and

every thing that is humble is exalted; in the universality of his mercy, every path of man, however obscure or neglected by the world, is raised into the light and the observation of heaven; and whatever may be the condition in which the young are to act, if they have been taught to enter into his "spirit," while they will feel that "the same mind that was in him may be in them," they will feel also that, in this lower world, it can only be maintained by the love of those things which his gospel has made "excellent."

3. There is, however, afforded to the weakness of man, in every age, another and a more powerful means of maintaining the "love of what is excellent" in their hearts;—it is that of "constant Prayer and supplication" for the assistance of Heaven. Little, in truth, as we may practise this loftiest privilege of religion, and little as we may understand its value, there are yet situations in life when the most careless and unthinking are almost instinctively led to supplication for assistance from above; and when, what is more, every human heart feels the propriety of this supplication. In the hours of deep distress, whenever they befall us;—in the hour when the sailor is sinking in the shipwreck;—in the hour when the soldier is advancing to uncertain battle;—in that more awful

hour, when the criminal ascends the scaffold which he is never to leave alive;—in such hours, who is there that does not lift his anxious eyes to heaven, and pray for assistance, to enable him to perform his last duty, and to endure with resignation whatever the hand of God may lay upon him.—If, in such hours, devotion is becoming, my young friends, is it not also becoming in every hour of life? If, in the hours of extreme distress, the God of mercy listens to the supplications “of those that he hath made,” will he not also listen to the calmer, but more continual supplications of those who, in every hour, desire to do his will? And is there any preparation by which the mind of man can be so well fitted to enter upon the duties, either of adversity or prosperity, as this perpetual remembrance of the presence in which it acts, and this holy prostration of all its powers before the throne of Him who gave them?

And this, therefore, I also pray for you, my young brethren, that, by these and every other means, “Ye may approve the things that are excellent!—that the love of whatsoever things are pure in thought, lovely in conduct, or of good report,” among the virtuous and pious of mankind, may now glow in your youthful hearts, and finally abound in your future conduct!

and that thus, under the grace and guidance of approving Heaven, you may gradually advance to the highest excellence of your nature, that “of being filled with the fruits of righteousness,” not unto your glory alone, “but unto the glory of God,” and the good of human kind!

SERMON XII.

ON THE DANGERS OF MORAL SENTIMENT, WHEN
NOT ACCOMPANIED WITH ACTIVE VIRTUE.

ROMANS vii. 15.

“What I would, that I do not.”

UPON a former occasion, it was my wish to illustrate to the young around me, the importance of cherishing in their minds a “love of things that are excellent,” or an early taste for all that is honourable or becoming in that station of life to which they are to belong. I represented to them, that there was a Love of Excellence deeply imprinted upon human nature;—that there was no condition or occupation of life which did not afford the means of indulging it;—and that if we once suffered it to pass from our hearts, there was a danger of its being succeeded by the love of what was criminal or base. In suggesting to them the means by which this important taste might be cultivated, I particularly mentioned the following: A deep and grateful remembrance of the dignity and expectations of their being;—the selection of some actual model

of excellence for their secret imitation;—and, above all, the use of habitual supplication to the throne of God, for his assistance amid the trials or the temptations of the great journey on which they are entering.

—Every virtue, however (it is both our wisdom and our duty to remember,) has a tendency to error,—a disposition to run into excess,—and to mark the character with some features either of folly or of guilt. The highest attainable perfection of our nature consists not in the dominion of any one affection or principle, however virtuous, but in the due balance of all our affections;—in the proper mixture of intellectual and of moral attainments; and in the cultivation, not only of the contemplative, but still more of the active principles of our constitution. It is here again we shall have reason to see the profound wisdom of that advice of religion which calls upon us to “keep our hearts with all diligence;” of restraining the dominion even of the most virtuous affections; of directing them solely to the ends for which they were given, and which if they fail to reach, they must leave us “unprofitable servants” in the family of God.

The love of Excellence, amiable and honourable as it is in itself, and well as it promises of the young who feel it, let it yet

ever be remembered, is only a means to an End. It is not so much a virtue in itself, as it is a source of virtue; it is the spring only, and not the harvest, in the husbandry of the human mind. It is important, therefore, to us to consider, What is the purpose for which it is designed in our nature? and what are the consequences which may be expected to follow, when we either neglect or oppose the high design of the Almighty?

This love, then, of "things that are excellent,"—this deep sense of what is becoming or honourable in our nature, is obviously intended as a principle of Conduct,—as a source not only of enjoyment, but of activity,—as a constant spur, not only to make us think, but to make us act with dignity. When it assumes this form, accordingly, in our minds,—when the seed ripens into the fruits of virtue,—when it leads us not only to admire, but to "practise what is excellent," it has then all the effects which the wisdom of God intended it to have upon ourselves, and upon the world around us. It raises us above all that is low or base in humanity; it animates us continually to press on to higher attainments in wisdom and goodness; and, while it gives to our own minds a perpetual spring of improvement, it renders us "fellow workers" with heaven itself, in the welfare and improvement of the world.

Unfortunately, however, it is not always that these, its genuine and ultimate consequences, are produced. The love of excellence, like every other virtuous affection, is in itself a source of enjoyment; and it is hence chiefly that it unhappily is apt to become, not so much a principle of systematick action, as a source of passive and unproductive pleasure. It is pleasing to contemplate the display of genius or of virtue, to go back to the history of former days, and to rest our fancy upon the great examples which they afford of heroism or of wisdom,—or to look over the world as it at present appears, and to dwell only in imagination with those who bless, or who enlighten it. Yet all this may be done without any farther effect upon ourselves, than the pleasure of the hour of contemplation. It is a picture from which we may pass, without remembering that it has any relation to us; “a song of ancient days,” which may delight, and be forgotten. To imitate the virtues or the industry of those we admire, is a work of labour and of trouble; but simply to feel their excellence, is a matter only of sentiment and indulgence; and, what still more deceives us, it is a sentiment for which we give ourselves an unreasonable credit, and which we think an actual virtue, while it is only the passive and involuntary approbation of virtue.

From this indolent indulgence of sentiment, there are many fatal errors which follow in human life; errors too, which are still more to be deplored, as they spring from an honourable source, and affect characters destined for nobler ends.—In the great body of mankind, among those who, by the beneficent law of Providence, are destined to “earn their bread by the sweat of their brow;” among those even who fill the active and important scenes of middle life, such errors or eccentricities of imagination are seldom to be found;—an imperious law binds them to duty, to labour, and to happiness. It is in the higher ranks,—in the affluent conditions,—above all, in the highly educated classes of society, that this fatal weakness is chiefly to be found;—among those who, either being removed from the necessity of employment, are therefore more disposed to the indulgence of imagination,—or those, whose minds being early filled with visionary dreams of perfection, acquire at last a tone of delicacy and feebleness, altogether unfitted for the plain but solemn business of mortality.

Such appearances of character it is probable all of us have seen:—persons of each sex, who, born with every virtuous and generous disposition, have yet suffered their lives to pass without any virtuous or

useful purpose;—whose “love of excellence” has never ripened into the fruits of imitation;—who, ever talking of virtue, yet leave it to others to practise it;—and who, with every advantage of power, of fortune, or of knowledge, wear out an idle, a selfish, and an inglorious life, and pass at last to their graves, at once useless and unlamented.

Of the various appearances of this melancholy weakness, none is more general or more fatal to every duty or hope of the Christian, than that, where the youthful taste is exalted above the condition in which life is to be passed. The faithful parent, or the wise instructor of the young, will ever assiduously accommodate the ideas of excellence to the actual circumstances, and the probable scenes in which their future years are to be engaged; and every condition of life undoubtedly affords opportunities for the highest excellence of which our fallen nature is susceptible. If, on the other hand, these hours are neglected,—if the fancy of youth be suffered to expand into the regions of visionary perfection,—if compositions, which nourish all these chimerical opinions, are permitted to hold an undue share in the studies of the young,—if, what is far more, no employments of moral labour and intellectual activity are afforded them to correct this progressive

indolence, and give strength and energy to their opening minds, there is much danger that the seeds of irremediable evil are sown, and that the future harvest of life will be only feebleness, and contempt, and sorrow.

I. If, in the first place, it is to the common duties of life they advance, how singularly unprepared are they for their discharge! In all ranks and conditions, these duties are the same;—every where sacred in the eyes of God and man;—every where requiring activity, and firmness, and perseverance of mind;—and every where only to be fulfilled by the deep sense of religious obligation. For such scenes, however, of common trial and of universal occurrence the characters we are considering are ill prepared.—Their habits have given them no energy or activity;—their studies have enlightened their imaginations, but not warmed their hearts;—their anticipations of action have been upon a romantick theatre, not upon the humble dust of mortal life. It is the fine-drawn scenes of visionary distress to which they have been accustomed, not the plain circumstances of common wretchedness.—It is the momentary exertions of generosity or greatness which have elevated their fancy, not the long and patient struggle of pious duty.—It is before an admiring world that they have hitherto conceived themselves to act, not in solitude and

obscurity, amid the wants of poverty, the exigencies of disease, or the deep silence of domestick sorrow.—Is it wonderful that characters of this enfeebled kind should sometimes recoil from the duties to which they are called, and which appear to them in colours so unexpected?—that they should consider the world as a gross and vulgar scene, unworthy of their interest, and its common obligations, as something beneath them to perform; and that, with an affectation of proud superiority, they should wish to retire from a field in which they have the presumption to think it is fit only for vulgar minds to combat?

If these are the opinions which they form on their entrance upon the world and all its stern realities, it is the “fountain from which many waters of bitterness will flow.” Youth may pass in indolence and imagination, but life must necessarily be active; and what must be the probable character of that life which begins with disgust at the simple, but inevitable duties to which it is called, it is not difficult to determine. From hence come many classes of character with which the world presents us, in what we call its higher scenes, and which it is impossible to behold without a sentiment of pity, as well as of indignation;—in some, the perpetual affectation of sentiment, and the perpetual absence of its reality;—in

others, the warm admiration of goodness, and the cold and indignant performance of their own most sacred duties;—in some, that childish belief of their own superiour refinement, which leads them to withdraw from the common scenes of life and of business, and to distinguish themselves only by capricious opinions and fantastick manners;—and in others, of a bolder spirit, the proud rejection of all the duties and decencies which belong only to common men,—the love of that distinction in vice which they feel themselves unable to attain in virtue, and the gradual but too certain advance to the last stages of guilt, of impiety, and of wretchedness. Such are sometimes the “issues” of a once promising youth! and to these degrees of folly or of guilt, let the parents and the instructors of the young of the higher classes ever remember that those infant hearts may come, which have not been “kept with all diligence,” and early exercised in virtuous activity.

2. It is with similar effects that this indolent delicacy of taste is sometimes attended, with regard to the employment of the Understanding. The nature of every liberal education gives to the young the knowledge of all who have distinguished themselves in the paths of learning, and makes their early years acquainted with whatever is greatest or noblest in the attainments

of the human mind. If, while the love of excellence is then caught, it can be wisely directed to the ends for which it was given; if the admiration they then feel can be converted into a principle of active imitation, the first object of intellectual education is attained, and there is much reason to hope that the issue of their lives will correspond to this beginning. But, when none of these things take place,—when the heart reposes in a passive love of intellectual excellence,—when rank and affluence supersede the necessity of actual exertion,—and when no kind misfortune has called forth the latent powers of mind,—there are many examples to shew us, that all the attainments of youth may yet produce little dignity or usefulness in mature age. The fancy, captivated, as it has been, by the great and the extraordinary, but too naturally disdains to descend to the trivial and the common; and the presumption of youth leads them but too easily to conceive that their powers are suited to the leading ranks of business, or of science, not to their low and uninteresting details. To be the benefactors of nations might waken all their ambition, but they cannot descend to be the blessings of a few habitations of men. To form, at once, by their genius, an era in learning, or in science, might suit the splendour of their views, but it is un-

worthy of them to descend to the mediocrity of vulgar fame. To strike those master-strokes, in arts or in arms, by which wealth and glory are at once acquired, might accord with their habits of imagination; but they disdain to submit to the slow drudgery of ordinary wisdom. Amid these delusions of fancy, life, meanwhile, with all its plain and serious business, is passing;—their contemporaries, in every line, are starting before them in the road of honour, of fortune, or of usefulness; and nothing is now left them but to concentrate all the vigour of their minds to recover the ground which they have lost. But if this last energy be wanting, if what they “would,” they yet fail to “do,” what, alas! can be the termination of the once ardent and aspiring mind, but ignominy and disgrace!—a heart dissatisfied with mankind and with itself;—a conscience sickening at the review of what is passed;—a failing fortune;—a degraded character;—and, what I fear is ever the last and the most frantick refuge of selfish and disappointed ambition,—infidelity and despair.

It is ever painful to trace the history of human degradation, and it would even be injurious to religion and virtue to do it, if it were not at the same time to exhibit the means by which these evils may be prevented. Of the character which I have now

attempted to illustrate, the origin may be expressed in one word:—it is in the forgetfulness of Duty; in the forgetfulness that every power, and advantage, and possession of our being, are only trusts committed to us for an end, not properties which we are to dispose of at pleasure;—in the forgetfulness that all our imaginary virtues are “nothing worth,” unless they spring from the genuine and permanent source of moral and religious obligation. Wherever, indeed, we look around us upon general life, we may every where see, that nothing but the deep sense of religion can produce either consistency or virtue in human conduct. The world deceives us on one side—our imaginations on another,—our passions upon all. Nothing could save us; nothing with such materials, could hold together even the fabrick of society, but the preservation of that deep and instinctive sense of duty which the father of Nature hath mercifully given to direct and illuminate us in every relation of life; which is “none other” than his own voice; to which all our other powers, if they aim either at wisdom or at virtue, must be subservient; and which leads us, if we listen to it, to every thing for which we were called into being, either here or hereafter.

1. In all our systems of conduct, therefore, my brethren, whether for ourselves,

or for those who are to succeed us, let us ever remember, that life is not a scene of idle enjoyment, but of active obligation; a scene, of which we must never imagine ourselves to be merely spectators, but in which we all are actors; that it is the wisdom of the all-perfect Mind which has determined the parts we are to perform; and that whatever may be our talents, or whatever our situation, the only things that are "excellent" for us, are the plain and obvious duties of our station and condition.

2. Let us remember, in the second place, that the promises of immortality are held forth to none but to the laborious and the persevering. It is thus even with all the honours of mortal life. Every name that is great among men, has sprung from amid the laborious details of previous discipline. The philosopher, whose discoveries astonish the world, has toiled in silence through all the rigours of education, and given years of obscurity to patient and unwearied study. The conqueror, who blends his sanguinary name with history, and to whom every age looks up with an unhallowed admiration, was once an unnoticed soldier, and has only struggled into eminence above his fellows, by more cheerful submission to toil, and more daring insensibility to suffering. And if it be thus that human honours are alone acquired, can it be by less noble

means, or less strenuous exertions, that the honours of eternity are to be won? Is it to the weak, the indolent, or the visionary, in any rank of life, that the promises of the Gospel are held forth? And is it not "by patience and perseverance in well-doing" alone, that the voice of God teaches us, that we can at last reach "glory, and honour, and immortality?"

But last, and chief of all, let us remember the example of Him who came to save us. If it be delicacy or fastidiousness of taste which palsies all our efforts, and gives us the vain opinion of our superiority to the duties and the offices to which we are called, let us learn at least to humble ourselves before the cross of the Saviour of the world. "In him was all the fulness of the Godhead;" in him were all the treasures of moral and of mental wisdom; and yet what were the scenes to which he descended? Was it to assume the sceptre of the universe?—to bring the rulers of the world in dominion beneath his feet?—or to astonish the imaginations of mankind, by displaying before them the powers and the perfections of Heaven? It was to "heal the sick, to make the deaf hear, to give sight unto the blind, and to preach the Gospel unto the poor." "He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."—not to be followed and admired, but "to be des-

“pised and rejected of men,”—not to command but to serve,—not to triumph, but to die:—Offices, surely, as little fitted to the indolent refinements of modern taste, as they were to the gross prejudices of the ancient Jews,—but they were the offices destined to him by his Father. They were the simple but awful duties to which, “from the beginning of the world,” He was called; and from them has now arisen, “that name in which all the nations of the earth are to be blessed, and before which every thing that is in Heaven and earth is commanded to bow.”

It is fit, my brethren, that all of us, whether high or low, should bend before this high example. It is fit, that, raising ourselves above the folly and the vanity of life, we should ever pray, that “the same mind may be in us which was in Christ Jesus.” It is, lastly, fit, whenever “the morning sun summons us to kneel upon the earth,” that we should remember whose is that “Will,” the “doing of which” now constitutes the glory and the happiness of “Heaven.”

SERMON XIII.

ON THE MORAL DANGERS OF THE SOCIETY OF GREAT CITIES.

GENESIS xiii. 11.

“And they separated themselves the one from the other ;
“and Abraham dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot
“dwelt in the cities of the Plain.”

THESE are words which carry us back to the infancy of the world,—to the first separation of professions, and to the earliest institutions of social life. They are more important to us, however, my brethren, as they contain a moral lesson of no mean importance ; as they remind us of the influence of Situation upon the character and conduct of men, and exemplify to us, in the history of the patriarchs of old, the different effects of the scenes of nature and the scenes of society upon the dispositions of the human mind. “Abraham dwelt in the “land of Canaan;” amid the simplicity of nature, and the innocence of rural life ; and with him the mighty “covenant” was made, “in which all the nations of the “earth were finally to be blessed.” His

kinsman "dwelt in the cities of the plain," amid the refinements of art, and the luxury of society; and lived to witness that awful desolation with which Heaven visited the sins and the corruptions of the first congregation of men.

There is an instruction in these words, my brethren, which seems not unfitted to the circumstances in which we are now met. The inhabitants of this city are now assembling from the different corners of the land;—the annual season of education, of business, and of pleasure, is now commencing; and there is none of us who does not know, that there is at the same time commencing, a season of delusion, of trial, and of danger. If it be in the midst of cities that the most splendid exertions of talents or of virtue are made, it is there also that the most humiliating examples of vice and of depravity are seen. In the opening of such a season, it is wise in us all, therefore, to pause, that we may form the resolutions which become us as men and as Christians; and as all that hear me are equally interested in the subject, I trust it will not be considered as foreign to the duty of this place, if I solicit your attention, for a few moments, to the consideration of the dangers which surround those "who dwell "in the cities of the plain," and of the means by which they may hope to avoid, or to overcome them.

1. The first danger which awaits those who "dwell in cities," is that of losing insensibly the sentiments of Piety. In all ages, the scenes of nature have been the seat of devotion. It is there, "where day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night teacheth knowledge concerning God." The solitude which leads to meditation;—the spectacle of earth around, and Heaven above us;—the silent, but incessant movements of that mighty system, which speak the incessant providence of the Mind that guides it,—and far more, the combination of all these movements, to bless this lower world, and "to make it fruitful;"—these are circumstances which every where have prostrated the human mind before the "throne of him who sitteth above the Heavens, and who yet deigneth to remember the things that are upon the earth." It is a different scene with which we are presented when we visit the habitations of men; and we seldom make the transition, without losing, at the same time, some of the most fundamental dispositions of devotion. We leave the tranquillity of nature;—we leave the spectacle of its operations;—we leave, still more, the sublime conviction of our wants, and our dependence. From the dominion of nature, we enter at once into the dominion of Man. No sound reaches our ear

but those of his activity;—no prospect opens upon our eye, but those of his power or his pride. Amid the ruins of former greatness, as well as amid the splendours of modern refinement, we see only the workmanship of his hand; and while we hear no other tale than that of mortal glory, and see amid the thick atmosphere which surrounds us, no other agency than that of mortal wisdom, we are apt to suffer all our former impressions to subside from our minds, and begin to imagine, that we are living only in a world of human art. There is no man, I believe, who has not occasionally felt somewhat at least of this influence;—who, in removing from the scenes of nature, into the business and bustle of cities, has not experienced a kind of disturbance of his usual train of thought;—and who, (if he has not had the wisdom to resist them,) has not felt himself gradually losing the firmest impressions of his earlier days, and insensibly acquiring those lower dispositions of the world, which he once had the wisdom to lament, and to despise.

When this first step into error is made;—when, amid the scenes of human activity, the traces of divine workmanship are obscured;—and when the heart can suffer the solemn impressions of youth to be exchanged for the cold and cheerless agitations of artificial society,—the transition is not

difficult to errour of every kind;—and the mind is unhappily laid open to all those moral evils which the society of great cities, (hitherto at least,) has every where contained and diffused.

2. It is, in the first place, dangerous to morality, as it provides the means of temptation. In the tranquillity of the country, amid the innocence of rural life, the great temptations of human life seldom occur. The seductions of vice reach not there; and if they do appear, it is under forms which cannot be mistaken, and which, therefore, seldom betray. But amid the promiscuous society of great cities,—in the selfish and artificial passions they create,—in the unhallowed struggle for wealth and for distinction which prevails,—every thing which can seduce the innocence of youth, or confirm the errours of maturity, is to be found, and to be purchased. It is there, that ambition holds out its promises, and profit its temptations, and pleasure its lures. Whatever may be the “sins which most powerfully beset us,” whether the selfishness of pride, the sordidness of interest, or the infamy of sensual pleasure, all *there* find their temptations and their ministers; not, indeed, under their real and characteristick forms, but under the masks of spirit, of fashion, and of liberality; under semblances well constructed to deceive, and still better

constructed to betray. What the effects of such temptations have been, when thus so artfully brought home to the unsuspecting heart;—what, by these means, the influence of great cities has been in the corruption of the manners of mankind, there are none of us who have not learnt in history, and few of us, I fear, who have not known in our own experience.

2. While the great scenes of society are thus replete with temptations, they are, in the second place, dangerous, as containing both **Examples** and **Authority** in vice.—It is the character of the earliest stages of error, to be diffident,—to be conscious of its own unworthiness,—and to dread the eye which marks and reproaches it. It is thus that Nature checks, in mercy, the first beginnings of sin, and recalls the heart which begins to wander, into the path that was designed for it. The society of great cities tends but too powerfully to counteract this salutary restraint. It is there that every class and description of guilt finds its companions and defenders;—that the ambitious assemble, the sordid combine, the profligate associate.—It is there that fashion misleads, in the higher conditions of life, and example seduces in the lower;—that the consciousness of individual guilt is lost amid the guilt of the multitude who share in it;—and that sophistry prepares its arguments.

to harden the yet repenting heart against the return of its first and best impressions. What is the full and final influence of this species of "evil communication," we do not learn indeed in the general scenes and appearances of society. We must seek for them in the closet of the wretched,—in the deathbed of the guilty,—in the cell of the criminal;—and we shall then learn, that it is not the native corruption of the heart which is so much the source of all this wretchedness, as the society of the vicious; the strength which every passion acquires when it is sanctioned by example; and the boldness which guilt learns to assume, when it is supported by the applause of its associates.

3. There is yet another danger which it is wise in us to remember. It is in the nature of every great assembly of men,—in the obscurity which is produced to the individual, when he mingles in the multitude of society. Amid the solitude of rural life, every man is an object of observation; his vices as well as his virtues are prominent; and whatever be the path he takes, he is followed by the eyes of all who surround him. When he enters, on the other hand, into the society of populous cities, he is lost in some measure in the multitude. No eye follows him with interest or affection;—no well known countenance marks, in ev-

ery hour, by its expression, the joy or the sorrow his conduct may occasion. Removed from the observation of others, he is too apt to think himself removed from his own; to yield to temptations where they are known only to himself, and to associate with companions whom he would yet blush to consider as his friends. It is thus, but too frequently, that the first steps into error and into guilt are made; that the original purity of the mind is gradually diminished;—that habits of thought and of society are acquired, before their influence is suspected;—that falsehood and deceit are resorted to, to conceal the secrets “which weigh upon the heart;”—and that the once candid and innocent mind, advances at last, but too surely, into the path of guilt, of dishonour, and of wretchedness. I doubt, my elder brethren, whether there be any of us who have not had the misfortune to witness, in some period of our lives, this melancholy progress.

—Whatever, then, may be the advantages of the society of great cities,—whatever may be the facilities which they give to the education of youth, or the encouragements which they afford to the talents and energy of maturity, let it never be forgotten, that they carry with them to all, correspondent dangers; that if they exhibit our nature in its highest, they exhibit it

also in its darkest and most degrading forms; and that in every season, whether we are to lose or to gain by its passing, depends upon the wisdom with which we choose the path of Gospel obedience, and the firmness with which we pursue it.

I pray, indeed, the Father of wisdom, that to all who are here assembled, the coming season may pass, so as to make them wiser and better;—yet, amid the numbers who are now assembling into the metropolis of their country, it is impossible not to think, that there are some too surely coming, who are to know only shame and sorrow,—who are to resign all the innocence and happiness of their former lives,—who are to yield to the various deceitfulness of sin,—to know “that secret bitterness of the heart,” to which before they were strangers;—and never again to enter beneath the sacred roof which witnessed the joys of their innocence and their youth! May such prospects belong to none of either sex, or any age, who now hear me!—Yet to each sex, and to every age, the dangers of society belong,—and ere you yet enter, my brethren, and, above all, my young brethren, upon the season which may be eventful to all, suffer me to suggest the remedies which the voice of Reason and of Revelation equally prescribes.

1. The first is, to hold regular communion with yourselves,—to appropriate (and

solemnly to appropriate) some regular hours for thought and meditation.—If it be in society that are your dangers, it is in occasionally withdrawing from it, that you can find your safety. “The beginnings of sin are like the letting out of waters,” unperceived in their origin, and insignificant in their effects; but silently proceeding onwards to that plenitude of strength, when they mock all the struggles and opposition of man. Ere you trust yourselves, then, to the stream of the world, accustom yourselves to contemplate its progress,—to mark the shipwrecks it exhibits, and to anticipate the deep to which it hastens. Ask yourselves (and that frequently) whether this be the course which corresponds to all the first and profoundest impressions of your being!—whether these are the ends for which “man was created in the image of God,” and for which the “inspiration of the Almighty gave him understanding,”—and whether the stream of life is conducting you, or withdrawing you from “that glory, and honour, and immortality,” which the Son of God died to purchase for you.

2. If in such meditations upon the world around you, you feel the weakness of your heart, and the faintness of your resistance, accustom yourselves, in the second place, to regularity in communion with God,—to regularity in the highest prerogative which

man enjoys, that of imploring the assistance of Heaven. Many are the promises which Scripture gives to earnest prayer; and much, we may all know, is the strength and consolation which it affords. It is then we best discover that we belong to a greater being; it is then that, escaping from the eye of the world which fascinates us, we feel ourselves in the presence of Him "who inhabiteth eternity," and, removed from the voice of earthly passion, that we listen to the voice of "Him who comes to seek, and suffers to save us." It is in such exercises that the religious mind finds all its rewards!—that, under the influence of the ever near, and assisting spirit, it throws off the stains and the impurities which it had acquired;—that it returns to the purity of all its original impressions;—that higher sentiments awaken, and holier desires are felt;—and that it goes back again into the world "not as unto a continuing city," but with the lofty conviction, that it leads only "to one that is to come."

3. Amid your necessary communion with the world, let me lastly recommend to you, my brethren, to accustom yourselves to regular communion with the faithful of your people, "in the temple of God." "Wherever two or three are met together in my name," says the Saviour of the world, "there am I

“in the midst of them.” It is a promise of which, I trust, every one of us have in some degree known the completion. Whenever a Christian congregation assembles,—whenever on the day dedicated to God, or upon those more solemn occasions which remind them of more special mercies, they come together, from all the various conditions of life, to hear the same precepts,—to kneel in the same faith,—to receive the same consolations,—and to look forward to the same hopes, it is a service in which no human soul can share, without being made wiser and better. For one solemn hour, the world is thrown behind them. The delusions of society cease, and the pulse of passion is still. In the wilderness of life, a resting place is afforded, where the traveller may take account of his progress; where the examples of all the wise and good around him, confirm him in the sentiments he feels, and the resolutions he adopts; where the song of thanksgiving renovates his feelings of piety, and the voice of prayer renews his purposes of obedience. From such a service, every Christian mind returns purified and strengthened; conscious, indeed, of its errors, but conscious of them for amendment; and fitted with that armour, which may enable it to overcome both the dangers and the temptations of the world on which it is to re-enter.

—Suffer me to add, my brethren, only one farther reflection. While the season is opening which justifies the preparation I have suggested to you; while the scenes of business and of pleasure in this city are commencing, let me remind you, that there are scenes of another kind which at this time also are commencing;—that, while you are sharing in all the bounties of nature, there are many, alas! who are to know want and poverty; and that, if, among your assemblies, “the voice of joy and gladness” is to be heard, there are other scenes surrounding you, where no other voice will be heard than that of “mourning and sorrow.” In the beginning of such a season, it becomes us to accommodate the temper of our minds to the real condition of human life; to restrain the hand of profusion, that it may become the hand of charity; to begin that heroick economy which may be profuse at last in beneficence; and to be ready to surrender even the most innocent of our pleasures, whenever they interfere with the wants or with the claims of the wretched. It becomes us still more, my brethren, who are preparing ourselves to celebrate the nativity of Him who descended from heaven to save us,—to fashion the dispositions of our minds “that they may be like unto him,”—to prepare our-

selves, in our humbler spheres, to be also "saviours one to another,"—and to remember, that, in the decisive hour of nature, they only can plead for mercy, who, in the hours of trial, have shewn mercy to their brethren.

SERMON XIV.

UPON THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS EXAMPLE.*

ECCLESIASTES xii. 1.

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth;
“while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh,
“when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.”

THE year opened upon us with scenes of disorder and of guilt very different from the usual character of this country.—A few weeks only have passed, my brethren, and “we have seen the awful end of these “things.” Of the unhappy actors in these scenes of guilt, some have left the land which they had dishonoured, to seek, amid fields of danger, the reputation they had lost; some have been exiled to distant shores, to know no more the affections of kindred and of home, and to weep, amid ignominy and bondage, the loss of that liberty which they had abused. Three,—(three,

* This Sermon was preached on the Sunday after the melancholy and unexampled occurrence of the execution of three young men, (all of them under the age of twenty,) for robbery and murder, on the night of the first of January, 1812.

alas! while yet in the spring of their age, and while their years had not even ripened into manhood,) have perished, to satisfy the justice of their country. The awful deed of death has been performed in the sight of thousands; and that life which God had given, has been seen, in dread silence, taken away by the just and commissioned hand of man. It is thus, my brethren, that God teaches us his providence. In such awful events, his voice says to our hearts, as strongly as it said to the ears of his people, "Thou shalt do no murder;" and the stroke of human justice repeats now whenever it falls, the words of the eternal decree:—"whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."

There are few of us, of whatever age or condition, which this sad event has not affected. Amid all the anxieties of publick or of private life, the predominant interest of this week has arisen from its melancholy occurrence. The aged man lifts up his feeble hands in wonder and in prayer; and even the infant, incapable of learning what it means, has felt, in the grief and consternation of every eye around it; that some general calamity has taken place. The bitterest tears which nature can shed have fallen, and they are made not to fall unnoticed, but to sink into the hearts and the memories of mankind. I trust, therefore, you will not

consider it as any deviation from the duty of this place, if I offer you, in these moments, a few reflections upon this sad event;—such as seem to me most fitting for our common improvement, and are best adapted to the situation and condition of this congregation.

1. The first reflection, which, I believe, has occurred to every one, is with regard to the character of these unhappy men. They were not aged and practised sinners;—men inured to disorder, and hardened in the commission of crime. They were all, on the contrary, young and inexperienced; at the age when in general nature is timid, even in error; and when thoughts of cruelty or of blood are most foreign to the human heart. They were not, in the next place, ignorant or uneducated;—men sunk beneath the level of others by the want of education, and doomed therefore to associate with whatever is base or profligate in human society. They were, on the contrary, all possessed of the common education of their country; in no situation of original inferiority to their companions around them, and entitled to look to the usual rewards of good conduct in future life. They were not, in the last place, idle, and in want; men who refused to labour, and whose hearts wretchedness and poverty had wrung to every unhallowed pur-

posé. They were, on the contrary, most of them laborious and employed, earning by their industry a supply for all their reasonable wants, and going forward, as might be supposed, to credit and usefulness in their future days.

It is a consideration fitted to excite in all much serious thought and reflection. It is to the wise among us a subject of more than curiosity, to examine what are the circumstances, in the present times, or in the constitution of society, which can have produced effects so different from all we have commonly known of the causes or progress of human guilt; and the good will hasten to inquire, what are the remedies which human wisdom can apply to an evil which disturbs all our calculations of national improvement, and checks, in their bud, all our hopes of national prosperity. To such inquiries (important as they are) we are not called in this place; but there are other observations of a higher kind which become us, and there are lessons which this peculiarity affords, in which all are concerned.—It is a lesson to the young, to teach them, by the most terrible of all proofs, how soon innocence can be lost; how rapid the progress of guilt is in the soul which has once admitted it, and to what atrocity of crime even the youthful heart may arrive, when it has once surren-

dered itself to the dominion of any sin.—It is a lesson to the instructed and the educated among us, to teach them, that knowledge and accomplishments alone are vain;—that the understanding may be improved while the heart remains barren and unprofitable;—and that, unless the master-spring of religion is awakened into activity, the acquisitions of learning and of knowledge may only add strength to guilt, and malignity to crime.—It is a lesson, lastly, to the laborious and the active among us, to teach them, that something more is wanting than the mere wisdom of the world, to give either usefulness or honour to the character of man; that if the ambition of the soul be confined to time alone, no lofty views; no generous virtues, will ever spring in it; and that it is possible for the men of the world to “rejoice in their youth,” while all the honours of time, and all the hopes of immortality are lost for ever.

These are the lessons which this sad event teaches to us all; but they are distant and general. Let us approach nearer to the melancholy spectacle. The hour of death is past;—the scaffold and all its awful accompaniments are gone, and nothing will meet us but those remembrances and reflections which rest around these untimely graves, and which rest there, that we may apply “our hearts unto wisdom.”

Our deepest anxiety must be to know what has been the origin of all this misery? and every thing around us will answer, that its first origin has been in the want, or in the neglect of religious education;—of religious education, as distinguished from every other species of education, and without which, man never can know what he ought to be, and what, in the final hour of nature, he must be.

There was a time, my brethren, in the history of this country, when religion formed its characteristick feature, and when its promises and its hopes were the favourite subjects of national thought;—a time, when every house was a temple dedicated to God;—when every father was a priest, who brought up his children and his family in “the nurture and admonition of the Lord;” and when no Sabbath day ever passed without raising from beneath the thatch of the lowest cottage, the voice of prayer and the praises of the Most High. It was then that the character of our country arose;—that character for order, for knowledge, for wisdom, and for piety, which has so nobly distinguished us among every other people, and which has laid the foundation of all our progress in arts, and all our prowess in arms. That time has passed, and with it, I fear, much of the lofty character that distinguished it. The gain-

ful pursuits of the world have withdrawn the hearts of our people from the things that are beyond it. In parting with the thoughts of religion, they have parted (as all men must do) with the profoundest incentives to moral duty. The father has ceased (at least in our populous towns) to be the priest of his family. The prayer and the psalm arise no more from the poor man's dwelling. The Sabbath returns, but the young are not led into the house of God; and time and eternity open upon them, with little moral preparation for the one, and less religious instruction for the other.

Do you lament, my brethren, this melancholy change? and do you wish again to see the piety and the purity of our national character return? Then suffer me to remind you, that it is from you, and from those who fill the stations in society like yours,—that it must come;—that it is your opinions and manners which govern the minds of those beneath you;—and that the same Providence which has given you rank, and affluence, and knowledge, has made you the guardians of the religion and morality of your country, and will, one day, “require an account” of the talents which have been given you to employ. It is this which is the great instruction which this melancholy day has to give to the great and the

affluent of this country. Let them but take the high determination of the leader of Israel;—let them but say with Joshua, “Choose ye whom ye will serve, but as for us and for our houses, we will serve the Lord,” and the choice of the world beneath them will be made. Let them but use their authority in the discouragement of vice, and their influence in the approbation and reward of piety;—let them but look to the regulation of their own houses, and be the patterns of domestick religion;—let them but suffer the ears of the poor to hear the voice of prayer and of praise from their mansions, and their eyes to follow them on the Sabbath into the house of God; and these calamitiēs, and these apprehensions will cease. The better days of our country will yet return;—the religious faith, the moral simplicity of “our fathers and the old time before them” will revive;—the affluent and the great will become the ministers of salvation to those whom the providence of God hath placed beneath their care; and that genuine glory will await them, with which Heaven irradiates the heads of those who lead their people in “the way of righteousness.”

2. The second source of the melancholy events which we have witnessed, has been “in evil communication;” in that evil communication of which populous towns have

unfortunately ever been so profuse; and which, falling upon minds unstrengthened by religious thought, and unfortified by religious faith or instruction, leads but too rapidly to guilt and to ruin. It is this, my younger brethren, that is the peculiar instruction which this day has to you. The advices of the elder,—the warnings of the thoughtful,—you are sometimes perhaps apt to consider as the prejudices of age, or the exaggerations of unfeeling severity. The facts you have so lately witnessed, are incapable either of softening or of exaggeration. The progress and the period of guilt has been marked to you with a hand of blood; and life, I trust, will never again exhibit to you, so irrefragable a proof of the dangers of “evil communication,” or the short distance which God hath established between sin and misery.

Yet there is one delusion, my young brethren, which may prevent you from applying all the moral of this tragedy to yourselves. You may think, that such dangers belong only to the lowest classes of society;—that no such communications await your more elevated rank;—and that your stations or your education, exempt you from the influence of such vulgar seduction. I implore you not to suffer yourselves to be deceived by so weak a delusion. The powers and the arts of vice are the same in

all situations;—they are addressed to the common passions and the common appetites in which all men share; and the youth of the noblest rank is exposed to the very same seductions which these unhappy young men have known, and by which they have been lost.—It is but a short time ago, when they were innocent and pure; and the arts by which they have since been misled, are no other than the arts which are in wait to be employed upon you. To them, the path of sin was, as to all, studiously covered with flowers;—to them, the mature in vice came and flattered them with the names of spirit, and generosity, and courage; and mocked at the slow rewards of labour and sober industry; and promised quicker profits, which were to be won by higher talents, and to be spent in higher joys. To them, too, the voice of female treachery came, and laughed at the innocence of their early days;—and won them to confidence in their hollow faith,—and severed from their “youthful brows,” “all the honours which God had shed upon them;—and delivered them at last “into “the hands of their enemies” to be made a publick spectacle of the weakness of youth, and “of the deceitfulness of sin.” These were the arts by which they were betrayed; and where is the rank or station in which vice employs not the same? and

what is the dread moral which now rises to you from their early graves, but that which ancient and experienced wisdom has given; —“keep thy heart with all diligence, for “out of it are all the issues of life?”

Nor think, my young brethren, in another view, that the sad fate which they have met, extends not to the vices of your rank or condition. It is true, indeed, that every vice is not terminated by the scaffold; yet forget not that there are things in nature more awful even than publick punishment;—forget not (amid all the pride or exaltation of affluence or of rank,) that there are such things as publick ignominy, and publick scorn;—that there are such things as the altered eye of youthful friendship, “and the gray hairs of parents “descending in sorrow to the grave;”—that there are such things as secret agony, and conscious fear, and an offended God;—and that, dark as the course of every guilty life is, it may end at last in a death unprepared, and incapable of the repentance and the hopes, which, it is our only consolation to know, the minds of these unhappy young men so mercifully had felt and known.

3. There is yet one farther instruction, my younger brethren, which this awful example has to you. The characters and manners of the great body of a country,

are determined by the character and the manners of those of rank, of education, and of condition; but the manners and character of the youthful world are determined by yours;—by the influence which your conduct produces, and the example which your lives afford. Is there not something in this reflection, which at this solemn hour becomes you?—and when you see the awful termination to which the young of inferior condition may come, is it not a call upon you “to call your ways to remembrance.”

You are raised, my brethren, above the ordinary level of your countrymen; and the youthful world around you pay you a ready respect and a willing homage. Is there nothing then, that is due from you to your country,—nothing by which you may vindicate your claims to this fortunate superiority? If it be your influence and example which is to determine the manners and the morals of the young beneath you, is there not some wisdom necessary to use this lofty influence, and some virtue required to afford this important example? Was it by low vices, or by sordid dissipation, that the honours or the affluence which your forefathers have left you were acquired? And while so many of your young fellow-citizens are at this moment braving all the hazards of war, and all the

dangers of the ocean, in the service of their country, would you not blush to think, that you were remaining ingloriously at home, in pursuit of nothing higher than selfish indulgence and poisoning the morals of that land which they are bleeding to defend?

You are distinguished, my brethren, in a higher view, by the greatest blessings which a beneficent Providence can bestow; by education,—by religious knowledge,—by power which enables you to be the patrons of the virtuous, and wealth which empowers you to be the instructors of the ignorant and the poor. “Of those to whom “so much is given,” is it not just “that much also will be required?” and when you think of the glories which are promised to those “who lead others in the ways “of righteousness,” can you forget the miseries which, in the same righteous system, must await those who lead others in the ways of wickedness? Does not every noble and every generous principle of your nature awaken, when you think of the high commission of usefulness with which Providence has invested you? Is there one folly, or one indulgence which can be dear to you, when you think that it may mislead the young around you into guilt and woe; and would you not tremble, even to imagine, that the example of your vices has

led others to the prison and the scaffold, and buried many families of your fellow countrymen in hopeless grief and indelible dishonour.

—Such are the reflections, my brethren, which seem to me best fitted for our consideration upon this melancholy day. Let us all, whether young or old, lay them to our own hearts.—Let us return to our homes in silence and meditation ; with the feelings of men whose country and whose religion have received a stain, but with the feelings also of men who make it their wish and their duty to remove it. Let us assemble our children and our families around us ; and go over again the instructive story ; and conjure them to write its awful moral upon their hearts ; and pray that the eyes of our country may never again witness so dread a spectacle, nor pour such bitter tears.

From these dark prospects of the world, let us, lastly, lift our eyes in thankfulness to HEAVEN, for that dispensation of mercy, which reaches even to the prison and the cell ; and which is able to create a “ new heart and a right spirit,” even beneath the fetters of sin. Let us bless that holy Spirit which moves upon the troubled waters of the human soul, for that repentance with which he so powerfully had touched the

hearts of those youthful sufferers, and for that humble resignation with which he enabled them to bear all the wretchedness to which they were doomed. And let us hope, that that divine and compassionate Voice, which we all pray may one day plead for us, hath now also pled for them!

SERMON XV.

OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EDUCATION OF THE
POOR.*

LUKE X. 21.

“ In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father! Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.”

WHEN these words were spoken, our Saviour's ministry had for some time begun. He had announced himself to the Jewish people as the Messiah who was so long predicted. The twelve Apostles had been chosen, and (as we read in the beginning of this chapter,) “ he had appointed other seventy also, and sent them, before his face, unto every city and place where he himself would come,” commissioned to go forth in his name, and to proclaim unto whatsoever city or place

* Preached December 26, 1813, when a general collection was made in all the churches of Edinburgh, for the institution of publick schools, upon the principles of the British Society for Education.

they entered, "that the kingdom of God was come nigh unto them." In the verses immediately previous to the text, we are informed of the return of the disciples. Their embassy had been successful. The cities and places which they had entered, had received them with gladness, and they had been able to excite in them an earnest expectation of the great teacher whom they had announced. "And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the evil spirits are subject to us through thy name." It was then that the words of the text were pronounced. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father! Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."

In these remarkable words, there is an idea given us of our Saviour's character, which cannot be too often contemplated; and there are some reflections that arise from it, which seem applicable both to the sacred season we are observing, and the circumstances in which we are now assembled.

1. The first impression which they give us, is that of the divine Magnanimity of our Saviour's mind. You cannot but perceive, my brethren, that the hour in which

these words were spoken was an hour of no common interest or importance. He had sent the disciples to announce every where his intended appearance, and their return informed him that he was every where expected. It was the hour, therefore, in which his great mission was now peculiarly to begin; in which the pledge he had given was to be redeemed; and in which all the difficulties or dangers of his career must, most fully, have pressed themselves upon his view. What these dangers were, he well knew, and prophecy had long foretold; and you cannot forget, my brethren, what the images were which composed the dark perspective before him, which presented no scenes but those of ignominy and suffering, and which were to be closed by the cross and the tomb. It was the hour doubtless in which every thing that was weak or selfish in *human* nature must have trembled. It was "in that hour," accordingly, that "Jesus rejoiced in spirit;" that he threw off all the fears and all the weakness which hang around mortality; and that he welcomed the approach of sufferings, at the record of which nature turns pale, and when "there was no sorrow like unto his sorrow."

2. A second impression which the words must naturally make upon us, is that of the divine Benevolence of our Saviour's charac-

ter. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit;" but why was it that he rejoiced? What was the mighty reward which was to compensate to him for all the sufferings which he himself was to undergo? It was, that the great truths of religion were now to be "revealed unto babes;" that the knowledge of God was no longer to be "detained in unrighteousness," amid the "prudent and the wise," but to be spread abroad like the sunshine of heaven, over the lowliest abodes of men; that he himself was the destined messenger who was to preach all the "glad tidings of the Gospel unto the poor;" and that his suffering was to form the great atonement, by which the whole human race were to be reconciled unto God.

"In that hour," indeed, began the loftiest era in the history of human kind; and you cannot, my brethren, but conceive, what were the images which then must have arisen before the godlike Benevolence of our Saviour. While "the wise and prudent" of the world saw in him only the humble teacher of the poor,—from this unheeded fountain his divine eye saw the progress of that "living" stream which was to fertilize the future world. He saw the downfall of those dark fabricks of superstition, which so long had hid the radiance of Heaven from human eyes, and the trembling

votaries let loose to “worship God in spirit and in truth.” He saw the chains of slavery falling from the hands of nations, and new forms of society arising, in which the waters of baptism were to shed upon the poorest head upon which they fell, the sign and the energy of freedom. He saw the whole moral world brightening beneath the “tender mercies” of the God whom he revealed unto them, “and the day star from “on high,” visiting the lowliest abodes of men, “to give light to them that sat in darkness, and in the shadow of death,” and guiding all the equal children of men into “the way of eternal peace.” These were the images which, “in that hour,” rose before the mind of Jesus,—which composed the “new covenant which he was to establish between earth and heaven,”—and to which he advanced with the majestick gait of the sun, when he ascends through the clouds and darkness that oppose him, that he may give light and life to a benighted world.

3. Another impression which the words are fitted to make upon us, is that of the sublime Piety of our Saviour’s character. In that hour,—in that triumphant hour, when all the weakness of human nature was conquered, and all the blessings he was to bestow upon time and upon eternity, were rising in bright succession before him,

no thought is seen to dwell upon himself;—no hope of reward,—no consciousness of greatness,—no anticipation of glory. It is his Father only who fills his mind. It is His will only that he is pleased to perform. It is Him to whom he gives “thanks,” that he hath sent him upon this path of suffering and trial, and accepted his blood as the ransom of the world.—Nothing that the world has ever seen, my brethren, is comparable, in all its views, to the grandeur of this hour;—and though, in contemplating it, we must feel, as in the hour of his transfiguration, that he is elevated far above the dust on which we tread, yet there is sanctity in the very contemplation; and while we fall with our faces upon the earth, we feel with the grateful disciple, “it is good “for us to be here.”

Exalted, however, as are all the qualities of our Saviour’s mind, they are not presented to us merely as the subjects of barren admiration. They were called forth amid the common business of human life,—they were exemplified in the scenes of ordinary nature. It was one great purpose of his descent from Heaven, “that he might “leave us an example that we might follow his steps;” and there is not, in truth, an hour of our lives, in which we may not shew that the same “mind may be in us “which was in Christ Jesus.”

Within these few hours we have arisen from his altar,—from that holy communion with him,—where we have professed to take him for our Master in time, and for our Saviour in immortality. From this high service, we have again descended into the ordinary scene of the world; and the providence of Heaven offers us, in the first moments of our return, an opportunity of testifying the sincerity of our professions. The babes whom He came to instruct; the “little children” of affliction and of poverty, whom he has left to our care, are now before us; and their infant voices seem to supplicate us to lead them to their Saviour and their God. In this congregation, I know well how their supplication will be received; I know that the professions of yesterday will not be forgotten to-day. But, in the commencement of the institution which now solicits your assistance, I feel it my duty to lay before you some slight views of its importance and utility, that I may justify the generosity which, I am persuaded, this day will prove.

1. You are called then, in this hour, not to the relief of some momentary distress, or the exercise of some occasional charity, but to an act of permanent usefulness,—to patronize the most important improvement which has ever been made in the art and system of Education. It is an improvement

founded upon a deep knowledge of the infant character, and calculated in a singular degree to call forth the capacities of the infant mind. It abridges, in the first place, the time and the expense of education, and thus brings it within the reach of a far greater number of the lower classes of mankind. It is fitted, in another view, to give an early exercise to the powers of infant attention; to mingle activity with instruction, and, by the means of continued emulation, to prevent that languor, which, in common systems, so often counteracts all the benefits of education. It is fitted, in the last place, to accustom the minds of the young not only to obedience, but to willing obedience,—to give them not only the habit, but the love of order; and, by associating them in the conduct of the system, to make them feel not only the necessity, but the propriety of obedience and of discipline. Its peculiar object is to bring into exercise as early as possible the various powers of the infant mind, and to send those whom it hath taught into life, not only with the benefits of education, but with the love of order, and the habits of mental activity.

Nor are these advantages merely theoretical and imaginary. They have been verified for several years past in every part of the nation. There is scarcely a

province of England in which institutions of this kind have not been established ; and wherever they have been established, the results have been the same, not only in improving the education, but in improving the manners and the conduct of the young. They are not now confined to ourselves,—they have passed, like all real and practical improvements, into foreign lands ; and the inhabitants of distant shores, even in the midst of war, are now paying another and a willing tribute of gratitude to this Country, for the lead she has ever taken in the extension and in the dissemination of knowledge.

Were there no other arguments for the generosity of this day, I should rest it confidently upon these grounds.—I should trust to your experience of the benefits which education has conferred upon the people of your own country, that you would support every institution by which these benefits may be extended and improved. I should trust to your patriotism and your pride, that you would not suffer any other people to go before you in a path of glory which is so peculiarly your own, and which has conferred upon this northern land a moral splendour, which more than compensates for all that nature has denied it.

But there is an argument of another kind, which better suits the sanctity of this

place, and of these hours ; and there are consequences which the generosity of this day may have upon the moral and religious character of our people, which I should much rather wish to suggest to you.

Whoever has attended to that progress of knowledge in which all Christian nations are so disposed, and so justly disposed to pride themselves, must, at the same time, have observed with regret, that the benefits of it hitherto have been limited ;—that they have been confined to the higher classes of society alone ;—and (what is the important circumstance to which I am now to draw your attention,) that, in the same proportion in which they have increased their enjoyments and their power, they have increased the distance, and deepened the degradation of the Poor. The great and the permanent distinction in truth at present in all civilized countries, is that between the *educated* and the *uneducated* ;—all other distinctions which pride or policy have established, may be, and (as we every day see) are overcome. But the want of education is a barrier which nothing but the most uncommon powers can pass ; and the great mass of the people are therefore, in every country, doomed to pass their lives in the lowest cast, and the most cheerless condition of society. These melancholy effects have been hitherto the effects of improve-

ment itself; and it is chiefly to these, I apprehend, that the wise man looks, when he says, in emphatick words, “that the destruction of the poor man, is his poverty.”

It tends to destroy, in the first place, all the moral dignity of his nature, by checking the natural energies and ambition of his mind;—by confining him to a rank from which he feels he cannot emerge;—and by throwing him down into that lowest level of society, where vice and profligacy have ever found their last and hopeless abode.

It destroys, in the second place, in his mind, all those feelings which we properly call Patriotism, or the love of country. In the order and prosperity of their country, the great and the educated classes of society both rejoice and assist, because all their hopes and interests are blended with it. But in this prosperity, what can the uneducated man see, but wealth of which he must never partake, and power which he must never share? Or, what in its order, but the stern severity of oppression, which found him in his cradle, and which will follow him to his grave? And how natural is it for his diseased and irritated imagination, to look forward to scenes of another kind,—to scenes of anarchy and confusion;—to scenes where he may gain while he cannot lose, and where his injured spirit may revenge itself upon all who formerly had oppressed him.

But the most fatal effect of the want of education, is in its destruction of the religious principles of the human mind. The poor man, in such circumstances, is not only removed from instruction, but, still more, removed from the society of those who might instruct him. The God whom he recognizes, is a "God that hideth himself,"—who has been known to his infant mind by no associations of parental tenderness,—and to his maturer years, by no employment of his own research. The Gospel of his Lord, "he hath indeed heard "of by the hearing of the ear, but he hath "not seen it with his eyes;" and who can wonder if, in such deep and hopeless darkness, he "followeth all unrighteousness "with greediness, and liveth altogether "without God in the world?" Of the truth of this melancholy picture, the history of the world affords but too uniform a proof. The most certain and the most universal fact in the annals of human nature is, that of the inseparable connexion between ignorance and vice; and the most melancholy reflection which can fall upon the Christian heart is, that even in these days, in the days that we call so enlightened, there is yet so great a proportion of the people of every Christian country "who "sit in darkness, and in the" unpierced "shadow of moral death."

It is this, therefore, my brethren, that I would offer you as the great, and (in my apprehension) the unanswerable argument for the generosity of this day. In patronizing this institution, you are patronizing the only remedy that is adequate to this deep and radical evil. You are supporting a system which is able to convey education to the poorest cottage in which misery can hide itself; and which (if befriended, as I trust it will) will, in a few years, not leave one little child, of this great country, without the knowledge of its God, its Saviour, and its duties. Compared with such prospects, all the other aims, all the other hopes of charity, are narrow. It is giving men to society, citizens to your country, and servants to your God. It is raising human nature itself one step higher in the scale of existence, and approaching it still nearer to him, "who came to seek, and died to save them."

And this it is (my brethren,) and this alone it is, which has excited the unexampled ardour which has been shewn (and so nobly shewn) in the support of this institution. In the list of its friends you will find every name that you have been accustomed to respect, either for the benevolence of private life, or the dignity of public virtue. You will find the names of the good of every station,—of the great of every rank,—of the pious of every per-

suasion. But first and foremost in that list you will find the name of your Sovereign, —of that venerable Sovereign, who, though removed by the hand of Heaven from the Throne, has not ceased to reign in the hearts of his people. His paternal eye at once perceived the blessings which this institution was fitted to bestow upon the poor and the low of his land; and he looked forward with exultation to the day, (according to his own memorable expression) when there would not be one of his subjects who would not be able to read his Bible.

—That day, indeed, he will not see. But the words will not be forgotten either in earth, or Heaven; and another day is coming when deeds like these will place upon his gray hairs a crown of more than mortal glory.

In this hour, therefore, my brethren, in an hour when, in humble imitation of your Saviour, you are studying to reveal the words of life to the young, and to the ignorant, you also may “rejoice in spirit;” ye may rejoice in the new light which is now arising upon the benighted of your land; in the accession which it promises to the long-established honours of your country; in the new path it opens to the virtuous ambition of your people, and which may lead them not only to the happiness of time, but to the glories of immortality.

In such an hour you also may "give thanks unto the Father." You may thank him that He has made you, in your short day, the instruments of his eternal mercy; that He hath associated you with himself, as "fellow workers" in the salvation of the world; that He hath enabled you "to make the wilderness and the solitary place be glad," and the "desert" of human life "to blossom like the rose."

And ye, my Younger brethren!—ye whom the Providence of heaven has already distinguished by affluence and by power, and who are now preparing yourselves for the great duties which your country is to demand of you, is it not fit that you should prepare yourselves for this duty also? and is there not something in the subject sufficient to awaken every generous energy of your hearts?

You have known the blessings of education; and is there any way you can so well testify your thankfulness to the Providence that gave them, as by diffusing the light of knowledge over the habitations of the lowly and the poor, and pouring its animating radiance upon every infant eye that looks up to you for protection or support.

You wish for the glory and the prosperity of your Country; and is there any way you can so securely hope to maintain or to extend them, as by opening to the lowest citizen, the gates of independence and of

honour? as by presenting to the energy of youthful ambition, all the hopes of virtuous distinction which the freedom of his country affords him, and by breaking down the only barrier which remains to prevent him from sharing in its prosperity or its glory?

You pray, still farther, with the sublime charity of the Gospel, for the final salvation of all, whether poor or rich, who are now entering upon the eventful path of time. Is there then any method in which you can so certainly co-operate in the gracious designs of "the Father of Heaven and earth," as in freely giving what ye have so freely received? as in conveying the Gospel unto the poor!—as in conducting their infant steps to Him, "who calls them to come unto him," and who is able to lead them "to glory, to honour, and to immortality!"

May He, who is ever in the midst of all those who are met in his name, accept your offering of this day! May his spirit go along with that institution of mercy which you have this day begun! and, in the last and decisive day of nature, may you all know and prove what is meant in these words of high, and as yet uncomprehended promise:—"He that receiveth one of these little ones, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth Him that sent me!"

SERMON XVI.

ON INSTABILITY OF CHARACTER.

GENESIS xlix. 4.

“ Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.”

WHEN the venerable patriarch Jacob was on the bed of death, we read in this chapter, that he called unto him his sons, and said, “ Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days.” He had watched, we may believe, with paternal solicitude, the growth of their different characters and dispositions, and now, in his departing hour, he wishes to give them a last instruction, by pointing out to them what were the consequences they had to expect from the dispositions and habits they had indulged. “ Reuben,” saith he, “ thou art my first-born, my might, and the beginning of my strength; but, unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.”

The character which the patriarch thus gives of his son, and from which he predicts so inglorious an issue, is one frequently to be met with in common life. It is that

of unsteadiness or Instability. Wherever we turn our eyes upon the world, we meet with men of this unhappy disposition; men, who seem never to have formed to themselves any fixed plan either of intellectual or moral pursuit, and who suffer themselves to be led by no other principles than those of constitutional humour or casual caprice. Even with excellent powers of understanding, they are ever changing their studies and their designs; attracted by what is new in knowledge, rather than by what is useful, and seemingly unconscious of any other ends of science or of learning, than to amuse the passing hour. They are, still more frequently, inconstant and unstable in their affections; perpetually changing their connexions, their companions, and their friendships, and violating often the finest as well as the most sacred ties of life, less from violence of passion, than from mere levity and fickleness of mind. Their time, their talents, their advantages, whether of power or of wealth, are all consumed rather than employed; and life at last often closes upon them before they are conscious either for what it was given, or what will be required.

A character of this kind, when it is displayed in trifling or unimportant scenes, is frequently an object of ridicule to the satirist, or of pity to the good. In this place,

it merits to be considered in a more serious and solemn manner, as laying the foundation of much folly, and of many vices; as contrary to the first principles of the Christian character; and, in certain conditions of society, as affecting, in no inconsiderable degree, the whole honour and happiness of human life. The importance of the subject, will, I trust, justify me in submitting to you a few observations on the Causes which usually produce this unhappy character, and on the Consequences which but too justly may be expected to follow from it.

I must, however, previously observe, that it is a character not usually to be found among the lower and the humbler ranks of life. The necessities of nature (whatever the idle and the querulous may think,) are ever friendly to human character, and almost unavoidably produce some degree of steadiness of purpose, and energy of pursuit. They, whose labour is every day to provide for the day that is passing, have an object from which they are not permitted to deviate, which summons their powers into continual activity, and which insensibly gives to their general character the same features of steadiness and of energy. Even in the middle conditions of life, among those who, in the various professions and occupations which cultivated society creates, are providing for themselves and

for their families, this character of instability is seldom found. The virtuous and important purpose they have in view,—the habits of foresight and activity which are demanded,—the rivalry with their fellow candidates for profit or for praise,—all tend to form them to some strength and energy of mind; and whatever may be the other failings to which they are exposed, at least to save them from caprice and instability.

It is in the higher ranks, and most polished classes of society,—among those to whom fortune and education have given every means to improve, and every power to bless humanity, that this character of weakness is, unhappily, most frequently, to be found. It was thus also we read in the early days of the Patriarch. It was to “Reuben, his first-born, his might,” and, as he had perhaps fondly hoped, “the beginning of his strength,” that the melancholy prediction was made, “unstable as water, Thou shalt not excel.”

1. It is a character then, in the first place, which the possession of rank and wealth has but too natural a tendency to produce. They who, in their early years, have never felt the necessities of life,—to whom “to-morrow has always been as to-day, and yet more abundant,”—and who see themselves at once in possession of all that other men are struggling to acquire.

are raised above the influence of those motives which animate the activity of the generality of men. The pressure is removed which usually hardens the human character into any degree of consistence and solidity. It may be right in others, they think, to labour;—it is right in them to enjoy. Others are bound to direct all their talents to one purpose or end;—they are happily free from the thralldom,—and the whole circle of human pleasures and pursuits is thrown open to them, in which they may range at will. It may be honourable in humbler men, they imagine, to devote themselves to the sober path of duty. In them, on the contrary, it is honourable to avail themselves of the advantages which nature has given them; and, in a gay exemption from all serious pursuits, to exhibit to a lower world the envied privilege of their rank.—Amid such impressions, the first foundations of this fatal weakness of character are laid. While neither necessity nor duty seem as yet to compel them to form any settled plans of pursuit or of conduct, they naturally yield themselves to the more pleasing guidance of imagination; and the character of their understanding soon marks the incompetence of the guide. The regular paths of science seem too laborious and too tedious for their attempt. They satisfy themselves, therefore,

with the acquisition of some loose and superficial knowledge. The sober details of business seem beneath their regard, and can always be devolved upon some inferiour or friend; and even in the acquisitions which are made, it is the new, the splendid, or the fashionable that is sought, instead of the solid or the useful.—The habits of levity and caprice, thus too naturally begun, gain insensibly a progressive influence over their minds; and thus youth, and the irrecoverable years of youth, are often passed, not in vice perhaps, but in frivolous amusements, or, what is worse than these, in frivolous and unmanly pursuits.

2. It is in a similar manner, that the early possession of rank and opulence has a tendency to produce unsteadiness in the affections and dispositions of the Heart. In no respect, perhaps, are the necessities of life so favourable to human character, as in the warmth and animation which they give to the social, and especially to the domestick affections. The poor man's children, who waken into life in the midst of poverty and suffering, feel themselves the members of a little society, for ever dependent upon each other, and in which the conduct of each, determines the happiness of all. It is by common labour that their wants can be supplied,—by common fortitude that their hardships can be borne,—by mutual kind-

ness that their simple happiness can be maintained. Their affections become thus, as it were, concentrated to one end. The fewer the objects on which they are placed, the more intensely they burn; and the poor home, and the narrow circle in which they were born, awaken them to sentiments of indelible attachment, and often to the exertion of the most heroick gratitude and generosity. It is far otherwise with those in the higher ranks of life. No labour of the parent is there seen, by which their infancy is reared, and their education purchased;—no necessities occur in which the young find that they contribute to the welfare of home. A sort of chill independence seems to reign over the whole of this earliest scene; their attachments are awakened by no trials of suffering or hardship; and the kind hearts of the young naturally look abroad for other objects on whom their ripening affections may repose. In this pursuit, the undue influence which imagination has been suffered to acquire, displays again its power. Their attachments are warm, but fanciful. Friendships are formed in haste, and as hastily dissolved. New attachments supplant the old, merely because they are new; and the old and faithful friends of infancy and youth are often unfeelingly sacrificed for the ever-changing votaries of gayety and fashion.

Thus the habits of levity and inconstancy are begun; and many a youthful heart at last enters upon life and all its serious duties, with no other preparation than a selfish heart, and an enfeebled understanding.

It happens, indeed, sometimes, in the merciful providence of God, that events arise which prevent the evils that might otherwise ensue;—that some stroke of adversity comes, which restores the mind to its proper tone;—or that some great occasion arrives which kindles a nobler ambition, and, in the discharge of some signal duty, calls forth all the latent powers of the understanding, and all the generosity of the heart. But if such events do not occur,—if health, and power, and affluence be continued, there is much danger of the character finally ending in individual wretchedness and publick disgrace. What these dangers are, permit me, in a few words, to point out.

II. 1. This disposition of mind, in the first place, unfits men, in a singular manner, for the performance of their parts in social life. Whatever may be the opinions of youth, life cannot proceed far without bringing with it many serious duties to all;—scenes, where labour, perseverance, and self-denial, must be exerted, and where the character is brought to a severe and unsparing trial. From these scenes of trial the high-

er ranks of society are by no means exempt. They are, on the contrary, still more summoned to exertion, and still more exposed to remark. They are acting on an elevated theatre, to which the eyes of all are directed, and on which greater dignity of deportment is demanded, than on the humbler stage of common life. To such expectations, the men of the unstable character we are considering are, unhappily, little fitted. They want all the habits of thought and of activity which are requisite for honour and success. It is "an armour which they have not proved;" and they thus enter upon the eventful field of life, with all its private and publick duties, unarmed for the rude struggle which is every where prepared for them. They begin then, perhaps, to lament the levity and thoughtlessness of their former days; but youth and all its invaluable hours are gone. Habits have acquired dominion;—others of a lower rank are passing them in the road of fame and honour;—and, shrinking from a contest in which they no longer dare hope for success, they finally retire to hide their disgrace in indolence and obscurity. From this melancholy period the character sinks every day more deeply down into insignificance and uselessness. The poor remainder of life is given to frivolous pursuits or capricious amusements;

and not unfrequently their gray hairs are disgraced, by vainly imitating the follies and the levities of youth.

2. It is with still more fatal consequences that this disposition is attended in respect to Moral excellence. In a world such as this, in which the beneficence of the Almighty hath opened so many sources of enjoyment, it requires, in every situation, the steady employment of faith and of fortitude to withstand their assault; and no discipline can ever lead to honour and to virtue, but that which inspires resolution, and habituates to self-command. In this respect, too, the men of this unstable character come singularly unprepared for the combat. The scenes in which they have been engaged, have nurtured no firmness or energy of mind. Exempted from common labour, no great objects of pursuit have opened upon them which might animate voluntary exertion; and, what is perhaps of more consequence, in the same proportion in which the active powers of their minds have been unemployed, their passive sensibilities to pleasure have been increased. To dispositions thus diseased, the simple pleasures, and the sober tranquillities of domestick virtue, are ill adapted. Their habits have accustomed them to freedom of pursuit, and variety of indulgence; and they tire in the midst of happiness,

merely from the sameness of possession. Other amusements are looked for;—gayer associates are soon found;—and vice, ever in the rear of folly, begins, by unmarked steps, to take final possession of the heart. It is at this fatal period, that the sad effects of this disposition upon the happiness of social life begin to display themselves; and that all the sacred duties of domestick life are sometimes seen to be sacrificed without remorse.—It is from hence come the faithless husband, and the treacherous wife;—the cruel and careless parent who wastes the inheritance of his children upon the baseness of his own indulgences; and, last in the catalogue of private crime, the infuriate gamester, who, with gigantick guilt, scatters in a moment the possessions of his ancestors, and the provision for all who are dear to him, among the lowest and most sordid brood of vice.

God forbid that such examples should ever be common! But who alas! can say, that they do not exist. And when the thoughtful eye looks round upon those who are now entering the enchanted ground of youth and opulence, it is dimmed by the apprehension, that among them will be found hereafter some victims of early folly, —some hearts, now innocent and gay, to whom those days of shame and sorrow will come, “when they will say, they have no pleasure in them.”

3. It is almost unnecessary, I feel, to add, that this instability of character is equally fatal to human happiness. If it be in such vices as have been described, that the character finally ends, it were a treachery to nature and to virtue, to speak of happiness along with them. Even upon the most favourable supposition, though nothing more than weakness and indolence should be the result, there are still considerations which it is hard to bear. Every man has some sense of what God and the world require of him;—some consciousness, however indistinct, of the purposes for which the mighty advantages of nature and fortune were given: and to every man, Time as it passes, has a voice which no mortal heart can forget. It seems to ask us, What we have done? and what we are doing? and, in every periodical return, it leaves inevitably, “that bitterness of joy which the heart alone knoweth.” It is painful to us all, we know, to lie down at night, and think that the duties of the day have not been done.—It is more painful to close the year, and to think that it has been wasted in idleness and folly. But what, alas! must be the feelings of those who lie down at last upon the bed of death, and look back upon their past lives with no remembrances of goodness;—who can recall only riches wasted, and power abused,

and talents misemployed,—and see that grave opening to receive them, upon which no tear will be shed, and no memorial of virtue raised.

In what I have now said, with respect to this unhappy species of character, I have considered its consequences only as they relate to present life, and as they affect the honour and happiness of present time. To us, my Christian brethren, there are greater things, and there are considerations applicable to us of a deeper and a nobler kind. There is an hour, we know, which must arrive to all,—to high as well as low,—to rich as well as poor,—that important hour, “when the silver cord must be loos-
“ed, and the golden bowl broken; and
“when the spirit must return to the God
“who gave it.” Over this scene, indeed, there is drawn in mercy an impenetrable veil; yet it is sad to think of those who enter it without any preparation;—to whom all the good things of time have been given to no purpose;—and who, of the many talents which they have received, have put none to use. It is solemn to read the sentence of the “unprofitable servant;” and to hear from Heaven the great and equitable truth pronounced, “that of them to
“whom much is given, much also will be
“required.”

Let it then be remembered, even in the midst of youth and of prosperity, that life hath its duties as well as its pleasures; and that no situation can exempt the Christian from the obligations of labour and of exertion. Let it be remembered, that weakness is ever the parent of vice; and that it is in the genial hours of youth, that all those habits of thought and of conduct are required, which determine the happiness or the misery of future days. Let it lastly be remembered, that all the honours of time and of eternity belong only to wisdom and perseverance; that it is by their fruits alone that the real followers of the Saviour of mankind are to be known; and that they who are to inherit the mighty promises of his Gospel, are those alone who, in every different condition of mortal life, "have pressed forward," with firm step, "to the prize of their high calling, and who have continued patiently in doing well."

SERMON XVII.

ON STABILITY OF CHARACTER.

LUKE XIX. 16, 17.

“ Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained
“ ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good
“ servant, because thou hast been faithful in a very
“ little, have thou authority over ten cities.”

THE words of the text describe a Character of a very important and a very noble kind. They represent the character of firmness and stability, the character of one who, having formed to himself a decided plan of religious obedience, pursues it with steady and intrepid steps; and who, in silent magnanimity, brings all the powers of his mind to bear upon the lofty end he has in view. They represent still farther, and in a manner the most striking, the consequences of this steadiness of mind, in the success and the honours which it attains.

The parable itself is a strict and solemn representation of the important scene of human life. It places it in that familiar point of view, so peculiar to the instructions of our Lord, which every rank and condi-

tion of men may understand. The servants in the parable are all the various race of men;—the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the prince and the peasant, the labourer and the philosopher, the fathers of families and the rulers of nations. To all these, and to every condition of life, some great and prominent duty is attached, some peculiar trust committed to their care, and which is the confided “talent” they are to employ. The lesson of the parable is, that this great duty can never be fulfilled in any condition of life, but by firmness and steadiness of obedience; and that all the success, and honour, and happiness which man can acquire, are to be acquired only by this strenuous and unyielding energy of mind.

Of this truth, so important to Christian character. I shall presume to offer at present to the young around me a few illustrations.

1. The character of stability is, in the first place, in all pursuits the surest foundation of success. It is a common error of the indolent and the imprudent, to attribute the success of others to some peculiar talents, or original superiority of mind, which is not to be found in the generality of men. Of the falseness of this opinion, the slightest observation of human life may satisfy us. The difference of talents

indeed, and the varieties of original character, may produce a difference in the aims, and in the designs of men, and superiour minds will naturally form to themselves superiour objects of ambition. But the attainment of these ends, the accomplishment of these designs, is, in all cases, the consequence of one means alone, that of steadfastness and perseverance in pursuit. “It is the hand of the diligent,” saith the wise man, “that maketh rich.” It is the same diligence, when directed to other ends, that maketh great. Every thing which we see with admiration in the world around us, or of which we read with delight in the annals of history, the acquisitions of knowledge, the discoveries of science, the powers of art, the glories of arms, the dignities of private, or the splendours of publick virtue,—all have sprung from the same fountain of mind,—from that steady but unseen perseverance which has been exerted in their pursuit. The possession of genius alone, is, alas! no certain herald of success; and how many melancholy instances has the world afforded to us all, of how little avail mere natural talents are to the prosperity of their possessors, and of the frequency with which they have led to ruin and disgrace, when unaccompanied with firmness and energy of mind!

2. This stability of character is, in the second place, the surest promise of Honour. It supposes, indeed, all the qualities of mind that are regarded by the world with respect; and which constitute the honourable and dignified in human character. It supposes that profound sense of duty which we every where look for as the foundation of virtue, and for the want of which no other attainments can ever compensate. It supposes a chastened and regulated imagination, which looks ever to "the things that are excellent," and which is incapable of being divested from their pursuit, either by the intoxications of prosperous, or the depressions of adverse fortune. It supposes, still more, a firm and intrepid heart, which neither pleasure has been able to seduce, nor indolence to enervate, nor danger to intimidate; and which, in many a scene of trial, and under many severities of discipline, has hardened itself at last into the firmness and consistency of virtue.—A character of this kind can never be looked upon without admiration; and, wherever we meet it, whether amid the splendours of prosperity, or the severities of adversity, we feel ourselves disposed to pay it a pure and an unbidden homage. The display of wild and unregulated talents, may sometimes, indeed, excite a temporary admiration,—but it is the admira-

tion we pay to the useless glare of the meteor, which is extinguished while it is beheld; while the sentiment we feel for the steady course of principled virtue, is the admiration with which we regard the majestic path of the sun, as he slowly pursues his way, to give light and life to nature.

3. This stability of character, is, in another view, the surest foundation of Happiness. There are, doubtless, many ways in which our happiness is dependent upon the conduct and the sentiments of others; but the great and perennial source of every man's happiness is in his own bosom,—in that secret fountain of the heart, from which the “waters of joy or of bitterness” perpetually flow.

It is from this source, the man of steadfast and persevering virtue derives his peculiar happiness; and the slightest recurrence to our own experience can tell us both its nature and its degree. It is pleasing, we all know, to review the day that is past, and to think that its duties have been done; to think that the purpose with which we rose has been accomplished; that in the busy scene which surrounds us, we have done our part, and that no temptation has been able to subdue our firmness and our resolution. Such are the sentiments with which, in every year of life, and still more

in that solemn moment when life is drawing to its close, the man of persevering virtue is able to review the time that is past.—It lies before him as it were in order and regularity; and while he travels over again the various stages of his progress, memory restores to him many images to soothe and to animate his heart. The days of trial are past; the hardships he has suffered, the labours he has undergone, are remembered no more; but his good deeds remain,—and from the grave of time seem to rise up again to bless him, and to speak to him of peace and hope. Such are, then, the consequences of firmness and stability of character; and such the rewards which he may look for, who, solemnly devoting himself to the discharge of the duties of that station or condition which Providence has assigned him, pursues them with steady and undeviating labour. It is the character which unites all that is valuable or noble in human life,—the tranquillity of conscience, the honours of wisdom, and the dignity of virtue.

II. There is, however, let us thank God, my brethren, another and a sublimer view of the subject. Morality teaches us the wisdom of present life; but the Gospel teaches us the wisdom of eternity. It opens to us the gates of a greater world; and connects the transitory “things which now

“are,” with “those that must be here-
“after.”

Every religion, however rude or barbarous, hath yet touched this master-string of the human heart. In every system of faith which hath appeared among men, it has been believed, that the fate of futurity depends upon the conduct of present time;—that there are virtues and attainments which will survive the grave;—and that in those mysterious regions which lie before us, while it will be well with the good, “it will not be well with the wicked.”

The religion of our Lord not only confirms these hopes, and substantiates those expectations, but, according to the magnificent language of the apostle, “it hath brought immortality to light.” It discloses to us the mighty secret, why we were brought into being, and what is the final destiny to which, under “the banner of love which is over us,” we may finally aspire. It raises us from the dust, to place us upon that summit of prophetick vision, from which we may descry both time and eternity, and contemplate those future scenes of glory, in which it is the will of God, that the souls of the faithful and the good should at last repose.

Among those passages of Revelation which convey to us these majestick truths, there is none more remarkable than the

words of the text. "And he said, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant, because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities." Let me entreat you to pause for a moment, my brethren, on these remarkable words, and to consider what they import:—"Because thou hast been faithful in a very little." Such is the picture which our Saviour himself gives of human life. The person to whom the words were addressed, was the favoured servant,—he to whom the greatest trust was committed; and yet the opinion of his master was, that all he possessed was yet "very little." It is impossible to exhibit a more striking picture of the dignity of the human soul, or of the magnificence of the final ends for which it was destined. All that is great in present life;—all that excites the ambition, or inflames the pride of men, in the estimation of our Saviour, is yet "very little;"—inadequate to the capacities, and disproportioned to the ultimate attainments of our souls. And life itself, amid its proudest scenes, is yet, when compared with eternity, only that infant school in which "little" things are learnt, and "little" distinctions are found.

2. If it be in this light the words of the text teach us to consider the "things that

“are,” let it be remembered, in the second place, what is the doctrine they teach us with respect to the things that are “to be hereafter.”—“Because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten Cities.”—“Thou hast been faithful” (as we may dare to interpret the words) “in that lower rank of being in which I first placed thee.—Thou hast fulfilled the duties, and improved the powers, and exerted the capacities of that humble condition of my family through which thou hast passed. It is fit that thou should now enter upon a nobler existence. —It is fit that the faithfulness which thou hast exemplified,—the talents which thou hast cultivated,—the habits which thou hast acquired, should now find greater objects upon which they may be employed.—‘Enter then into the joy of thy Lord.’ And since, in the little trust of mortality, thou hast proved thy fidelity, receive now a higher commission in nature, and ‘have authority,’ that thou mayest dispense wider blessings, and perform loftier duties, and feel sublimer joy.”

Such is the magnificent representation which our Saviour himself hath given of “the recompense of the just.” The fidelity of the servant was tried in a very little, in the employment of “one pound;” but the reward of this trial was the authority

over "ten cities." The conduct of the parable is simple, and its language is suited to every capacity; but under these simple words is conveyed the greatest revelation which humanity can receive; and in the very disproportion of the reward to the service;—in the striking inequality between authority over "ten cities" and the employment of one pound, is shadowed out to us a hope to which nature alone durst not approach, but which comes to us in every page of the Gospel,—the hope of some unknown and unimagined "excellence of Reward," and of some final and mysterious happiness, which the "imagination of man" is not at present able even "to conceive."

3. While the parable offers to us all these majestick prospects, let it be remembered, in the last place, that it teaches, as its great lesson, the means by which alone they can be obtained. "Well, thou good servant, because thou hast been faithful."—It is upon this, and this only, that the fate of time and of eternity depend. All who live are the servants of the parable; all have their peculiar duties to perform; and that performance every where depends upon firmness and steadiness of mind. May He, who created us for immortality, grant to all our prayers, in all our different situations, this first possession! Yet let us not

forget the awful sequel, in the sentence of the “unprofitable servant,” to awaken and to invigorate our hearts,—“Bind him hand and foot:”—deprive him of all those powers which were once given him that he might be useful, and which he has never employed. “Cast him out into outer darkness:”—banish him from the faithful family of God,—from that family which exists only in obedience and in beneficence, and “into the joy” of which he is unworthy to enter. “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth:”—there shall be remorse, and shame, and bitterness of heart; the memory of grace resisted, and duty forgot; of riches wasted, and talents misemployed; of power and of influence devoted only to strengthen folly, and to disseminate vice.

Let the Christian, then, never forget the importance of the scene in which he is at present called to act. If it be in the humblest life,—if it be only in the discharge of family duties and of domestick charity that he is employed to serve, let him remember the “high rewards” which are promised to follow these “little things;” and that, in the equal eye of God, his service is as important as that of those to whom many talents are given. If, on the other hand, it be in the higher stations, and the more commanding circumstances of life that he is

placed, let the words of his Lord teach him in what estimation all mortal advantages are to be held. These things are great in the eyes of man. Let him remember that, in the eyes of his God and his Saviour, there are "greater things than these," and that the future and the final happiness of his being depends not upon the "good things" he now has, but upon the use to which they are employed, and the fidelity with which they are administered. Let him remember, that, in every condition of life, to "the unprofitable servant" God "giveth travail to gather and to keep up;" but that, "to those who are good in his sight, he giveth," both here and hereafter, "knowledge, and wisdom, and joy." Let him lastly remember, that the same redeeming voice, which once spoke the words of this parable for his instruction upon earth, is that which, when every thing that is earthly is dissolved, can alone say, "Enter thou into thy Master's joy."

SERMON XVIII.

ON THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON.*

LUKE XV. 11.

“And he said, A certain man had two sons.”——

OF the various seasons of devotion which our religion prescribes, the season of Lent is at once the most solemn and the most salutary. From the dangers and the temptations of the world, it summons us to solitude and meditation, and from the deluding voice of man, to listen to the voice of God. Over the wide extent of the Christian world, it reminds us that all the holy and the good are engaged in the same purifying work of self-examination; and while we “commune with our hearts in our chambers,” and are still, “the Son of God seems again to descend from heaven, to seek and to save those that are lost.”

Upon such a season, my Christian brethren, we have now entered. The voice of our religion invites us, with a tone which has in it more of tenderness than of com-

* Preached in Lent.

mand, to thought and recollection. It tells us, that things more valuable than all that time includes, are now at stake. It reminds us that years are passing, and that we are all passing to our graves;—that the seasons which are given may never return;—that “now” to all of us may be the time accepted by heaven: And there are none of us, I am sure, who do not feel, that were such a season devoted to its genuine ends, we should close it by being wiser, and happier, and better.

The great duty of this season is that of Repentance, the first duty of every fallen being; and, to all of us, the first and indispensable condition of that pardon which the Son of God hath purchased for mankind. It is for the excitement and encouragement of this momentous duty, that all the services of our church are at this time adapted; and it is upon the supposition of its sincerity (a supposition which your own hearts alone can justify,) that the great solemnity of the season is properly and effectually to close. “Judge, therefore, yourselves,” my brethren, “for He who alone can justify “is that Lord to whom all hearts are open, “all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid.”

Upon the subject of repentance, you know, however, my brethren, that there have been many mistakes; and there are

weaknesses incident to human nature, which will ever continue those mistakes, unless the individual has the strength and purity of mind to remedy them for himself. The men of this world will ever be willing to exchange repentance for penance, and to substitute temporary mortification for actual amendment. The visionary and the enthusiastick, on the other hand, will ever be willing to believe that "faith" is more important than "obedience;" and that all the duties of life may be neglected, provided "the one thing needful" for themselves be secured.

Between these errors, all of us, my brethren, are placed;—our constitution, our education, our systems of thought, our habits of society, give us an early bias to one or other, which nothing but serious and continued reflection can correct. And in the present moment, therefore, I know not that I can more usefully occupy your attention, than in leading you from the errors of men to the Fountain of Truth;—in leading you to see the great doctrine of repentance in the light in which our Saviour has himself placed it, in that ever memorable parable of the Prodigal Son, of which the words of the text are the beginning; and which, therefore, ought ever to be present to our minds, whenever we think or pray for forgiveness. The parable itself must

be familiar to all; it is intelligible to the lowest of the human race, while it contains a doctrine of comfort and of animation to which the human race itself could never attain; and, on subjects so solemn, it is wise in us to follow, not the opinions of men, but the simple revelations of the blessed Saviour of the world.

There are, then, three great views which this parable seems to me to involve, and which are peculiarly fitted for our meditation at this season.

1. The first is, the Character of human nature, and the consequent necessity of repentance.

2. The second is, the Character of the great Father of existence, and the purposes of moral punishment.

3. The third is, the nature of genuine repentance, and the rewards which are promised to it.

— It is upon the first of these subjects that I am at this time to offer you some very plain and familiar observations.

The parable itself is a picture of human life,—it is a representation which has been verified in every age since the hour when it was spoken; and there are none of us, in the present moment, but must feel that its story is, in some degree, our own.

It opens with the uniform opening of human life,—“A certain man had two sons.”

It is the picture of that scene in which we all at first wakened upon existence,—the scene of obscurity, of innocence, and of protection,—the sacred cradle in which all our wants were supplied, and all our wishes gratified, by means of which we were unconscious,—and when no desire or passion had as yet occurred to disturb the purity and happiness of the infant spring of being. To the character of this earliest age, our Saviour himself frequently and fondly recurs;—of such he always says, is the “kingdom of Heaven;” and in one memorable passage, when his disciples asked “him who is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?” he called “a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily, I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.” To the character of this earliest age, accordingly, there is, as I have often observed to you, a strong tendency of our imagination to return; nor is it without an important end,—for it is thus we are made to compare the past with the present,—the progress of our being with its spring,—the attainments of our “own inventions,” with the simple instincts of nature when we had no inventions. It is the characteristick of man to look to the past and to the future; and I know not,

therefore, my brethren, that there is one subject of meditation more fit or more useful for us all at this time, than to go back to the years of our infancy,—to remember what then constituted our happiness and our gayety,—to weigh, whether life has brought us any purer or more heartfelt enjoyment; and (if we find it has not) to consider well what are the causes, that the progress of time has not corresponded to its beginning.

“ And the younger son said unto his father, Father give me the portion of goods that falleth to me : And he divided unto them his living.” In the desire which these words express, is described the first beginning of all human sin and error. Out of the secure and innocent cradle of infancy, the youth of man gradually arises with new powers and new desires ;—ardent for enjoyment, confident in its own wisdom, and disdaining the sober advices of the Father, which tells them, that they are going “ into a stranger land.”—Upon this dawn of moral nature how many are the “ goods” which the profusion of the Universal Father pours ! Upon all, life, and hope, and health, and gay spirits, and generous hearts, and minds unconscious yet of actual wrong ;—upon others, in addition to all these, the name of their fathers, the inheritance of wealth, the possession of pow-

er, the acquisitions of learning, or all the immeasurable advantages of intellectual and moral capacity. These are the goods which the bounty of our heavenly Father pours even upon his "younger sons." The first error of the youth of man is, that they are considered as things which "fall unto them;"—as things which flow from chance and time, and not from the kindness of a parent;—as goods which they are entitled to use for their own selfish pleasure,—which are subservient to their will,—and for which they wish to think themselves not accountable. It was thus with the young man in the parable;—and it is thus, my brethren, with the first commencement of every guilt of our nature.—Youth urges, and hope flatters; and all the capacities and powers which Heaven gives, are considered as goods which fall to us exclusively;—which have no end but our own individual happiness;—and which are to be employed, not as the gifts of a parent, but as the rightful possessions of the child. There may be "an elder son" who feels better, and who is wise enough to know his happiness in submission to his father, and in executing his father's will; but it is "the younger son" in general who is the emblem of human nature;—the emblem of the vanity of youthful powers, and the selfishness of youthful desires;—of that thought-

less haste for enjoyment, which disregards alike the advices of the parent, and the interests of all with whom they are connected.

“ And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance in riotous living.”—It is in these simple words, that we see the first consequence of that presumption and selfishness in human nature, in which every sin has its source. In the case of the young man in the parable, it was in the forgetfulness of all the wisdom and all the goodness of his father;—in the forgetfulness of all the duties he owed him, that he might indulge his own base and selfish desires;—in the frantick imagination, that, in “ a far country,” he might be relieved from what he thought the strictness of a father’s eye. Is it not thus still, my brethren, that the sad history of sin every where proceeds in its progress? And is there any sin which can beset our nature, which may not read in these words the traces of its career?

Is not the first step of every vicious character, the belief, that the goods which he possesses are not a trust, but a property;—a treasure which is given for no use, and for the disposal of which he is amenable to no law?—Is not the second step, the em-

ployment of them only for his own purposes, for the indulgence of his own passions, the gratification of his own pride, or the increase of his own power? And, in the progress of this base and selfish career, does he not industriously remove himself as far as he can from the remembrance of the paternal roof where he was educated under a nobler discipline, and where he felt more generous joy?

It is thus every where, my brethren, that the "substance" which the universal Father has given;—that the powers and capacities of the human soul are wasted in the progress of sin;—that health is lost in profligacy, and time in idleness, and beauty in depravity;—that rank and affluence are made the ministers of folly or of vice;—that learning is abused to the purposes of sophistry and skepticism;—and that the mighty minds which Heaven seems at times to have created for the moral or intellectual progress of human kind, stoop to the momentary ends of conquest and ambition; and, for the indulgence of their own hour of fame, purchase the everlasting execration of mankind. These are the prominent vices of the world;—but let us look to it where we will, we shall ever find that its beginning is like that of the younger son of the parable—in leaving the guidance and the counsels of our father;—in believing that

the goods we inherit are possessions, and not gifts;—and in conceiving that life itself is a scene of enjoyment, and not of moral and religious duty.

“And when he had spent all, there arose a famine in that land, and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine: And no man gave unto him.” Such is the termination of the thoughtless, the arrogant, and the selfish course of the young man of the parable. It is sad,—but it is not unexpected. What is far more, my brethren, it is what our own hearts desire. Upon this subject,—upon the indelible authority of conscience, and its correspondence to the established laws of God, many important observations press upon our notice. I can stop only at present, my brethren, to say, that the experience of the younger son is your own experience; that no human being has lived, who, in some degree at least, has not felt what he was doomed to feel; and that the same eternal laws which left him desolate and abandoned, extend now to us, and will extend to our children. Whatever may be the “sin that most easily besets us,”—whatever the moral error we indulge, its termination is unalterably the same. Prodigal as we may be of health, of power, of riches, of learning, or

of genius,—if they are employed only for our own gratification,—if no sense of the will of the Giver, or of the ends for which they were given, has directed us, they are all, with regard to us, the “wasted” goods of the parable. The “harp and the viol” may be in the society of youth; and there may also be a “riotous living” of the heart and of the understanding, as well as of the senses; but the time must arrive when we shall, like him, come “unto ourselves;”—a time when we shall feel ourselves in “a far country,”—far from the protection,—far from the wisdom,—and still farther from the love of our Father; when all the flatterers and all the ministers of our vices have left and abandoned us to our secret sorrow; when the wise and the good remove themselves from us; and when, amid all our variety of wretchedness, “no man will give unto us.”

Such is the history, not of vice in general only, but of every particular vice. Wherever it is indulged, it leads to three consequences which no human art nor genius can avert,—to the contempt or detestation of mankind,—to the consciousness of baseness and unworthiness in ourselves,—to the indelible expectation of punishment, sometime or other to arrive. It is then (even while the world may think us happy, and when we may affect too the ap-

pearance of happiness,) that we find ourselves in “a far country;” that we find all the original treasures of our being wasted; that men give not, and cannot give to us the deep relief which our hearts require; and that, in the secret hours which fall upon guilt, we sit down and look back upon the scene of our early and our innocent days, with a feeling of shame, of anguish, and of terror, which no tongue but that of guilt itself can describe.

—Is this then the final termination of our weak and fallen nature?—Is the immortal mind of man so soon to lose all its hopes of glory and of honour?—In that feeble fountain of life, which scarcely has begun to flow, are the impurities it contracts so indelible that they never can be deposited?—and is its stream to pass on into the dark deep of eternity without the hope of yet purifying its waters, and yet again reflecting in its bosom the sunshine and serenity of Heaven? No, my brethren, there is a Father in the parable;—there are designs of mercy in the counsels of Heaven;—there is a method by which all these evils may be conquered,—by which all that is lost may be regained,—by which the human prodigal may again be led by a diviner hand back to his happiness and to his home.

“And when he came to himself, he said, “I will arise and go unto my father, and “say unto him, Father, I have sinned “against heaven, and before thee, and am “no more worthy to be called thy son.” —These words reveal the secret workings of every human heart. Whatever may have been the nature or the degree of our transgressions, it is in these words that the “Spirit from above,” the “holy “Spirit that worketh unto salvation,” speaks unto us all. It says, “ARISE,”—arise at once from sin and from wretchedness;—from a condition foreign to your nature, and destructive of your hopes;—from your slavery in “a far country,” where there is only famine from Heaven, and cruelty from men. Return to the home in which you were born,—to that household where even the “hired servants of your “father have bread enough and to spare;” and where, under his protecting arms, you may still return to peace, to usefulness, and to happiness.—

—What are the purposes of these moral punishments in the administration of the Almighty, and what are the promises which the Gospel gives to genuine penitence, we shall afterwards have an opportunity of considering. In the meantime, my brethren, let us pause, with seriousness, upon the history which we have now reviewed.

It is the history (in some degree or other,) of every human soul. Wherever guilt begins, it begins like the young man in the parable, with the abuse of the goods which the wisdom of the great Father of the universe hath divided unto us; and whatever may be its course, it uniformly ends like his, in the consciousness of moral want, and in the feeling of religious wretchedness.

Let the young pause upon it; and while life is that "far country" into which they are so willing to travel, let them consider well the example which is here presented in mercy to their inexperienced eye.—Let them learn what it is to conceive all the goods which Providence bestows upon them to be their own; and where it is to which the vain, and the arrogant, and the selfish mind must come, when it forgets alike the paternal hand which gave, and the beneficent purposes for which they were given.

Let the gay, and the busy, and the active, pause in the midst of their career; and, in these hours at least, ask themselves whether their course resembles that which we have seen. If it does, if they too are wasting for their own base or selfish ends, the goods which were committed to their care, let them not hope that the laws of the Eternal will change for them.—Let

them believe that there is one process alone which can purify the waters which are hastening to eternity;—and let them consider that it is only while the mind retains its strength, and the soul its vigour, that the prodigal child of nature can arise from the dust into which he has fallen, and retrace the journey which has separated him from his Father.

—Upon this, and upon every congregation who are met in these solemn hours in the name of Jesus Christ, may the spirit of genuine repentance descend “with healing upon its wings!”—May seasons as they pass, tell us that they are passing;—and may we all so employ them, that they may become to us, “the appointed time,”—that they may prove to us “the day of salvation!”

SERMON XIX.

ON THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON.

LUKE XV. 11.

“ And he said, A certain man had two sons.”—

WHEN we were last assembled, my brethren, I submitted to you some observations upon the memorable parable of the Prodigal Son, which contains to every feeling bosom, lessons at once of humility, of hope, and of animation. In soliciting your attention to the history of the younger son of the parable, it was my object to shew you, that it was the universal history of man;—that all have left, in some way or other, the house of their father;—that the passions and imagination of youth too naturally wish to stray into “a far country;”—and that all of us, in the course of life, have felt, in some degree, that moral selfishness which leads us to consider “the goods which fall unto us” as our own, and to forget, in the pursuit of our own inventions, alike the designs of our Father, and the interests of our brethren.

What the results of this weakness or selfishness of our nature are, you have seen in the exquisite painting of the parable ;—you have seen its first consequence to be in the wasting of the very goods which had occasioned it ;—its last consequence you have seen to be in the contempt and disapprobation of mankind ;—in the internal consciousness of shame and of unworthiness ; and in the indelible belief, that punishment must some time or other arrive. Such were the results of the sins of this youthful prodigal ; and such are the results to which every sin must look ; the unalterable laws of the divine administration, which no human presumption can dare to hope will be suspended for them.

Sad, however, and awful as this termination of error must appear, the parable we are considering is not completed. Its final consequence, its animating end is not yet produced ; and it is to this end that I now wish to draw your attention ;—to shew you, in imperfect words, (and in the illustration of this parable what human words must not be imperfect ?) the magnificent purposes which moral punishment serves in the administration of the universe ; and the grateful light which the mercy of the Gospel throws upon the darkest scene of our imperfect nature.

We have seen the termination of the errors of the young man in the parable.— We have witnessed all the natural succession of evils which his sins have brought upon him; and we have heard him pronounce the words which form the crisis of his fate: “ I will arise and go to my father, “ and say unto him, Father, I have sinned “ against Heaven, and before thee, and am “ no more worthy to be called thy son.”

—We are now to return to a nobler scene, to the original scene from which the wanderings of the prodigal son had misled us;—to behold that Father whom he had left;—to mark the sentiments with which that Father regards him upon his return; and thence to learn, with what sentiments we ought to consider that universal Father, whom this exquisite history has shadowed out to the grateful conception of Christians. “ And he arose and came to his Father. “ But when he was yet a great way off, “ his father saw him, and had compassion, “ and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed “ him. And the son said unto him, Fa- “ ther! I have sinned against Heaven, and “ in thy sight, and am no more worthy to “ be called thy son. But the father said “ to his servants, Bring the best robe and “ put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, “ and shoes on his feet,—for this my son

“ was dead, and is alive again;—he was lost, and is found.”

In these words, my brethren, is contained the most consoling truth which the mind of an imperfect creature can learn; a truth important, indeed, at all times, to give us adequate conceptions of the benevolence of “Him that made us;” but at this time more especially important, when comfort ought to be given to every soul that is truly penitent, and when the goodness of heaven ought to be illustrated, as existing as fully in the hour of Redemption, as it did in the glorious hour of Creation.

That the Almighty is a God of justice; that sin must look for punishment; and that punishment will overtake, and ever must overtake it, are doctrines not learnt from man, but instinctive in our nature. They form the earliest mark of human character; they are to be read wherever man has thought, or felt, or acted; and all the inventions of vice, and all the arts of sophistry have been, and ever will be ineffectual in erasing them. It is the unfortunate weakness of man in general, to look no farther; to dread to examine the purposes of this awful constitution of his nature; and thus gradually to permit all the original convictions of the Divine goodness to be obscured amid the seeming darkness of its justice. The lofty doctrine which the wise

of every age have wished or conjectured, in opposition to these fatal apprehensions, is, "that God indeed is just, but that he "is just only because he is good;" that his government is not that of a sovereign only, but that of a father; and that the traces of his beneficence are to be seen, as well in the visitation of punishment, as they are in the dispensation of reward. This is the mighty doctrine "which the voice of Him "that came from the bosom of the Father," has now for ever established to "them that "believe in him;" and it is in the illustration of this fundamental principle of the Gospel, that I am now to suggest from the parable the following circumstances for your reflection and your comfort.

1. We may observe then, in the first place, in the conduct of this memorable story, that the first purpose for which moral punishment is instituted, is for the good of the whole of the family of the Father. It is chiefly in our inattention to this great and universal end, that we mistake so often, and so ungratefully, the justice of Heaven. We are won by the sufferings of the younger son;—we lament over his miseries;—and when we apply them to ourselves, we are too apt to conclude that Heaven is relentless, and to say with the first criminal, "that our punishment is greater than we "can bear."—We forget all this while that

there are others concerned;—we forget that there is a family which he has deserted for the selfishness of his own pursuits;—that he has left his father, his kindred, and his duties;—and that those goods, which have been dissipated in the ignoble purposes of selfish gratification, were given that they might contribute to the family happiness, and to extend the family prosperity.

It is only by checking this sensibility for the suffering of the individual, and by remembering in what consists the happiness of the whole, that we can learn to appreciate the beneficent purposes of individual suffering. It is by it we thence learn, that the happiness of the general family is consulted, and that by the errors of one, the whole are made wise. It is by the sentiments they feel on the unworthy conduct of the younger son, that all the rest are retained beneath the roof of the parent, and protected from the evils to which also they might hasten. It is by the contempt and indignation which they feel for his base and selfish arrogance, that they learn the value of secret duty, and the loveliness of filial obedience. It is the sad but salutary prospect of his want and of his sufferings, which teaches them what are the merited “wages” of disobedience, and what are the just consequences of his base forgetfulness

of that Father who had given him all that he possessed, and had abused.

These are the ends which the sufferings of the "younger son" are intended to produce; ends evidently which spring only from Beneficence,—which combine wisdom with love,—and which, in the invariableness of their execution, testify the invariable tenderness of the great Father of the family. If the human Father be good only when he consults the happiness of the whole of his family,—if he must sometimes sacrifice his own feelings to check that waywardness of "the younger children," which disturbs or interrupts it;—and if in this firmness itself we read most distinctly the profoundness and the extent of his affection,—are there any other principles by which we shall determine the goodness of the Father of moral Nature? Is there any other method by which the happiness of a moral universe can be maintained, than by the punishment of the sins that disturb it? Are the laws upon which the universal happiness is founded, to be repealed from partiality to one younger child? and, deep as may be the sufferings of that wayward individual, are not the pangs which his bosom is formed to feel, as distinctly expressive of the wisdom and affection of the Father, as the grateful throb of the heart of that elder son who had never left and who never wished to leave Him.

2. While the first end of moral punishment is thus to maintain the moral order and happiness of the world, we may learn, in the second place, from the conduct of the parable, that it is at the same time instituted with exquisite wisdom, to the future good of the very individuals who suffer. The punishments of men are often arbitrary; carrying little relation to the crime, and less to the criminal; and calculated apparently for no end, but to shew the resentment of offended power. It is not thus, my brethren, with the punishments of Heaven. In them there is no relation to offended power; no mixture of indignation, or resentment, or any human passion. It is not only for the benefit of the whole, but even for the benefit of the guilty themselves, that they are calculated,—to bring them back again “to themselves,”—to inspire them still more mercifully in the very crisis of disease, with the knowledge and perception of their cure. It was thus with the young man in the parable. His guilt was in his prodigality, in his wasting in licentiousness and vice the goods which were given for the ends of usefulness and virtuous industry;—and what was his punishment? It was in knowing want,—in suffering amid the famine which he was too thoughtless to foresee,—and, from being the younger son of an opulent and indulgent

father, becoming the lowest servant of a foreign master. In every circumstance of this punishment, we read its specifick purpose. It was the punishment which could best instruct him in his past errors; which could show him most distinctly the value of the goods he had dissipated; which, still more, if happier days should ever come, would best dispose him to meet them with wiser views and nobler resolutions.

It is the same, my brethren, with every punishment of Heaven in this and in every future hour; and invariably as “evil pursueth sin,” as invariably in the profound beneficence of the Father of our spirits, is the peculiar evil made the correction of the peculiar sin. Whatever may have been the goods which our ingratitude or prodigality has wasted,—whether health has been lost in profligacy, or time in idleness, or riches in dissipation,—whether learning has been abused for vanity, or power for ambition, or genius for selfish and momentary fame, the hour not only of want, but of peculiar want will come;—the hour when we shall desire, and when no man will give unto us;—the hour, still more, when we shall learn the value of the goods we have wasted, by their loss;—and when conscience and memory will join to teach us the severe but salutary lesson how they *ought* to have been employed. It is here, my brethren,

that we may see the final purpose of the punishments of Heaven; not for the suffering, but for the reformation of the sinner;—in teaching him, by his own experience, what are the laws of that moral system to which he belongs;—in bringing him, even by the means of sorrow, “to himself;”—in leading him to feel that duty and happiness are eternally conjoined; and that, in the future journey of his life, it is only “the ways of wisdom that are the ways of pleasantness, and that in her paths alone, he is to hope for peace.”

3. There is yet, my brethren, another affecting circumstance in the system of divine punishment, which the parable is exquisitely fitted to teach us. In the punishments of men, we see the punishment not only threatened, but accomplished; in the codes of penal law, it is seldom hitherto we have seen any moral proportion between crime and punishment; and too often, even in our boasted state of society, we see it end not only in the punishment of the crime, but in the destruction of the criminal. It is not thus with the justice and the beneficence of Heaven.—Guilty as might be the prodigal in the parable, the last visitations of Heaven are not represented to us in his punishment. Amid want, and famine, and exile, he still survives:—he lives that he may yet return to his father;—that he may be

for ever the emblem to us, of the final and merciful purpose of the justice of the Almighty.

Of those complicated feelings which constitute the immediate punishment of sin, I have formerly said that the deepest and most overwhelming is, that indelible expectation of future punishment, which no art nor sophistry can erase from the mind of the guilty.

Let me beseech you, my brethren, to attend to this extraordinary constitution of our nature;—and to consider what is the evidence it affords us of the character and of the designs of Him who made us. In punishment accomplished, we discern justice; but in punishment only anticipated;—in suffering threatened only, but not inflicted, we must discern tenderness;—we must discern not only long-suffering, and unwillingness to punish in the character of the father; but we must discern, still more, care and concern for the future benefit of the child,—a design to make him wise by fear, and not by suffering,---to reclaim him by the workings of his own imagination, rather than by the chastisement of the parent,—and never to raise the arm of justice, until the last hope of penitence and of sorrow has expired.—It is by this exquisite means, that the necessary justice of Heaven is yet tempered with mercy;—that the final pun-

ishment of sin is withheld, and long withheld, until the milder effect of its anticipation has been tried;—and that, far as the guilty may be from “the house of their Father,” there is no distance so great from which they may not yet be able to return.——

——Such, my brethren, is a slight representation of the magnificent doctrine which the Gospel affords with regard to the ends of moral punishment. It is a subject, like every other in the administration of the universe, at first dark and complicated, but opening at last, to the eye which contemplates it with firmness and reverence, into views of splendour and beneficence which overpower the heart,—which demonstrate, that God is just only because he is good;—that the inflictions of his moral justice are the necessary emanations from the fountain of his beneficence;—that the final purpose of all is, to bring a regenerated world within the pale of salvation;—and that the same Almighty Love reigned over the moral world, in the hour of Redemption, which reigned over the material world in the glorious hour of Creation, when every thing was good, and when man existed in the image of his Maker.

It is for us, my brethren, at all seasons, but more especially in seasons like the

present, to apply this mighty doctrine to ourselves;—to think, if such be the character of the Father of our nature, what ought to be the feelings and the minds of his children?—to consider whether our hearts correspond to the wishes and the invitations of his parental love,—to pray at least, that, under the influence of his spirit, we may arise from the stranger land of sin, and return to the home where we were born.

Whatever may have been the path of our journey, or whatever the stages of its progress, we must all feel, in some degree, that we have wandered from the Parent who gave us birth;—that we have wasted, in some way or other, for the purposes of our own indulgence, the goods which he bestowed upon us; that we are now in a “far country,” where Heaven threatens, and man begins to be unkind, and where the awful shades of futurity are daily rising in deeper gloom before our path. These are the whisperings of the approaching storm,—and their voice is made to breathe around us, that they may teach us to *prepare*. It is for us to consider whether we will listen to their voice;—whether we will rush heedlessly on our journey, or pause to meditate upon the course we are to pursue.

If the first be the case,—if no voice of conscience from within, and no voice of

pitying nature from without, have power to restrain us, where, in the name of Heaven and earth, is our journey to terminate? The clouds are gathering in Heaven,—the famine is approaching upon earth,—the hearts of men are hardening to our fate. Do we still flatter ourselves that, on some future day, we may return? Alas! there is an enemy in that foreign land from whence we cannot fly. The grave may hold us in its arms; and ere we descend to it, we may look back upon the house of our father, and look in vain.

Do we, on the other hand, pause at our danger, and listen to the prophetick voice that is whispering around us?—Do we sit down to consider where our presumption has carried us, and whither it must carry us at last?—Do we long for the home we have left,—and blush at the folly which made us leave it,—and weep when we think of our Father,—and pray to return to his arms?—Then, my brethren, happy are we! The irrevocable hour is not yet come;—the clouds of Heaven will disperse;—the Sun of Righteousness will gild the road which leads us to our home;—and the voice of good and pious men will greet us in kindness and in gratulation upon our way.

“And the young man arose,” says the parable, “and came to his Father. But

“ while he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell upon his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants. But the father said unto his servants, Bring the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. It is meet that we should rejoice; for this my son was dead, and is alive again, he was lost, and is found.”

May these words, which no human imagination could have conceived, and which no human tongue could frame, be verified to you, my brethren, and to every penitent heart that now beats amid this wide and dangerous world! May the Spirit of that tender and compassionate Saviour who pronounced them, descend upon all your souls, and visit you with all his consolations, and strengthen you with all his grace! And in these hours of religious preparation, may the circumstances of this invaluable parable teach you what is the Mercy of God, and what are the Duties of MAN!

SERMON XX.

ON THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON.

LUKE XV. 11.

“ And he said, A certain man had two sons.”—

OUR meetings at this season, my brethren, are the most solemn and the most affecting which our religion prescribes. We come from all the secret chambers of pious meditation, where we have been communing in sadness with our hearts; where memory and conscience have visited us with tidings of sorrow and of shame; and when, in looking back upon the days which are past, the best of us must feel how imperfectly they have corresponded with the hopes and the views with which they began. And we now enter this house with no sentiments but those of humiliation,—to confess before God the errors of our ways,—to implore his forgiveness for all that is past,—to express our wishes and our purposes of amendment,—and to pray for that assistance from Heaven which cannot be given us by men.

It is in these moments, humble and contrite as they are, and gloomy as they appear to a superficial world, that Heaven most peculiarly descends to meet us.—It is at this sacred season that the Son of God comes as it were again, with all the promises of his Gospel upon his lips, to tell us to be “of good cheer, for that he can make us whole;”—to point to that sacrifice which has made a “final atonement for the sins of all them that are penitent;” and to display to our grateful view the mighty Father, whose paternal eye has never left us amid all our wanderings, and who now comes forward, as it were, with extended arms, to animate us to pursue our journey to our real home. Amid the melancholy and the contrition of the past season, it is a moment that meets us like the dream of the Patriarch in the Wilderness, when, amid the darkness of the night, “he saw a ladder as it were let down from Heaven, and angels of mercy descending upon it,” to cheer him amid all his doubts and his fears; and to open to him the lofty scene where faith and obedience were finally to close. —May this be the effect of these sacred moments upon all our souls! and may we so gather around the altar where the human nature of our Saviour is laid, that in his greater capacity, as the High Priest of his people, he may pronounce the forgiveness of all our sins!

To prepare us for the solemnities of this season, I availed myself of that portion of Scripture which applies so nearly to our condition,—the parable of the prodigal and the penitent son. We have seen the errors of the young man;—we have seen the love and the pity of the father;—and still more, that blessed termination of the story which gives to our weak and fallen nature, its fairest and its highest hopes. I am at present to close the subject, by leading you to consider the Character of this penitent;—the sentiments which procured him pardon,—and the conduct which led him to his home. It is here, my brethren, that the story is most essentially useful to us; and as there are none of us who must not be conscious of some departure from our father, there are none of us who are not interested in learning what is the path by which we also may hope to return.

1. The first thing then observable, in this view, in the character of this young man, is the simplicity and entireness of his Repentance. In the picture that is given of him and of his sorrow, there is no subterfuge, no apology, no hypocrisy. When he comes to himself, he feels all his misery and his unworthiness, and he confesses it. He looks about for no argument. He states no example to apologize to himself for his sins. The memory of what he was,—the

consciousness of what he is,—the feeling of what he ought to be,—are all that his mind is capable of. It is here we see the beginning of his salvation. The spirit of God has found him, and he obeys its voice. Though sinful,—though miserable,—though bowed down by shame and sorrow, he is not yet lost; his original nature revives; amid these troubled waters, the purity of his soul is renewed; and the agony he suffers, is the kindly throes of nature, which struggles to deliver itself from the load by which it was oppressed. Can there be to us a stronger representation of true repentance? Can there be a more convincing evidence of the merciful purposes which it is intended to serve? and, when we contemplate it, do we not feel the truth of the lofty assertion of the prophet, “That the high and holy One that inhabiteth eternity dwelleth” upon earth, most chiefly “in the humble and the contrite heart?”

There is yet another observation which arises from this part of the story of the prodigal. It is on the dignity and amiableness of repentance. We have seen him in various lights,—we have seen him with indignation in the midst of his vices;—we have seen him with pity indeed, but yet with satisfaction, when punishment overtakes him. It is now, and now only, that we begin to look upon him with love. In

the blessed moment when he says, "I will arise and return to my father," his character begins to open and to expand upon us. We see virtues which have hitherto been buried, awakening into life,—we trust he may yet be worthy and be happy; and we follow his story with renewed hope, and with deeper interest.—My penitent brethren! let me implore you thus to look upon yourselves.—Such is the light in which you also appear to all who are good and wise on earth,—to all who are great and glorious in Heaven. The hour in which you too say, "I will arise" from the errors into which I have fallen,—is the hour in which your character also begins to open and to expand in the eyes of religion. The spirits of the just here, and the "spirits of the just who are now made perfect," follow your steps with deeper interest, and Heaven opens its everlasting gates to invite you to come in.

2. The second thing observable in the history of this young man in the parable, is the deep conviction which he entertains of his Father's love, and of the reception which he will give to his repentance. He no sooner says "I will arise," than he adds, "I will go to my father."—He had tried the affections of the vicious and the profligate, and they had deserted him. He had been in a foreign land, "and no man

“gave unto him;” but there was yet one place he knew, where he would meet with pity;—amid all the coldness of the world, there was yet one paternal heart which would open to receive his tears and his repentance.—How consoling to every penitent bosom is this declaration of the parable? and how strongly does it testify the importance of that Faith which is able to “make us whole?” It was this faith which saved him from the miseries in which he was involved,—which emboldened him to begin his journey to his home,----which supported him through all its length,—and which brought him finally to his father’s arms. Without this firm belief---without this confidence in his father’s forgiveness---his story would have closed, and he would have perished in that foreign land. And what is it, my penitent brethren, that is able to support also your repentance, and embolden you to return to the home which you have deserted, and give you the confidence that you will joyfully be received? It is “your faith in the same Father:”—It is your undoubting belief in the promises of Him who now speaks to you in this memorable parable; your belief in Him “who despised the cross, and rejected the shame,” that he might conduct you from that foreign land into which you had strayed, and upon whose temporary tomb you

may (in these solemn moments) see these astonishing words written, "Thus hath God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life:"—It is here, and in these hours, when Heaven, in so peculiar a manner, descends to meet you. Your penitence has, I trust, prepared you for the reception of pardon, but pardon God only can give;—and now, in these solemn moments, by the most divine of all beings, and by the most significant of all sacrifices, He comes to signify his Almighty will, and to seal your pardon in the blood of his only and his beloved son.

3. The third circumstance observable in the character of the prodigal son, is his conduct after his repentance. There is something here very beautiful in the conduct of the narration, and the rapidity with which it is carried on very strikingly expresses the character of genuine repentance:—"And he arose and came to his father." This is all that our Saviour says; but it says every thing that our hearts could wish. It says, that his penitence and his faith had their full effect; that he dismissed all fears of his past unworthiness, and all doubt of his father's pity;—it says, that he lingered no longer in that "foreign land," where his errors

had misled him, but that he hastened on his journey home;—it says, still farther, that although his road must necessarily have him led through all the scenes of his former guilt, and into the society of those who had seduced and ruined him, that yet he made no sojourning with them; that he resisted all their temptations, and disdained all their reasonings, and scorned all their ridicule; and that, full of higher thoughts and dearer hopes, he halted not until he found himself within his father's arms.

Is it possible, my penitent brethren, that you can read these words without feeling the instruction they contain to you? In the two first sentiments of this young penitent, in his repentance, and in his faith, I persuade myself you share; but in his conduct after his repentance,—in his noble disdain of all that had formerly led him astray,—in the superiority of his affections to all that before had degraded him,—in the new devotion of his soul to his father, and to his father's service,—it is time alone which can tell whether you also share. May the God of mercy grant that it may be so with all!—Yet suffer me, my brethren, to remind you, that there are dangers awaiting you; that, though you have arisen from the errors which you bewail, you are yet in a “foreign land;” that there is a long journey awaiting you before you can arrive at

your real home; and that, in that journey, all the temptations which formerly seduced, all the sophistry which formerly perverted, and all the associates who formerly misled you, are awaiting your return. To meet these dangers, let me implore you to keep this simple parable for ever in your remembrance. It tells you all that you have hitherto felt; but it tells you, still more, all that you can in future hope. You have known all the sorrows of his penitence; you now feel, I trust, all the blessings of his faith. May you finally feel all the joy of his acceptance! But ere this can be, let his firmness and his resolution be the model of your imitation; and whenever danger or temptation assail you, press to your hearts the Gospel of your Lord, and ask yourselves, whether the penitent whom he describes did not only arise, but whether also, he did not arrive, through all the dangers and all the trials of his road, at the feet of his father.

4. The last thing that is observable in this view of the parable, is its conclusion. It is for this divine conclusion that it was at first spoken. It was for your benefit, my brethren, (for the benefit of every individual among you, and among every congregation of fallen men,) that it was written; and the heart which is not affected by the words of our Saviour, cannot be affected

by the language of man. ~ It concludes, not as man would have concluded it, with the simple account of his pardon and his reception;—it tells us a great deal more; it tells us, in truth, of things which the “heart of man durst not conceive,” and which none but the Son of God had the power and the capacity to reveal;—it tells us of the “robe,” which signifies honour, and the “ring,” which implies glory;—it tells us of the gratulation of the whole family on the recovery of one whom they thought they had “lost;”—but, far more than all, it tells us of the joy of the Father himself, when he once more held this returning son within his arms, and felt the throb of penitence in his heart, and found him again alive to love, to duty, and to happiness.

The parable, my penitent brethren, is indeed addressed to you, but the application of the conclusion I must leave to yourselves. The truth is, that I dare not; that the views it suggests are too mighty to admit of explanation in mortal language; and that the representations which our Saviour thus gives of the tender mercy of the Great Father of the penitent, and of the worth of the human soul, are such, that nothing belongs to creatures like us, but to bury our foreheads in the dust, and to say to our Saviour and to our God, “What

“ is man, that thou thus regardest him, or
“ the son of man, that thou thus visitest
“ him ?”

——Such, then, my brethren, are the circumstances which seem most to demand our attention in the character of this accepted penitent, and such the example which is most fitted for our imitation, in this interesting season of repentance, and of virtuous resolution. His story is finished,—his labours and his trials are over,—and the sincerity of his penitence has met with more than reward. Let it never be forgotten, my brethren, that it is not thus with us ;—that the world, with all its vices and all its temptations, still lies before us ;—that, though we may, in these sacred hours, “ be come to ourselves,” yet that all these sentiments and resolutions may be forgot ; and that a journey yet awaits us, in which we may have yet much to do and to suffer before we can “ come to our Father.”

In the present hours of sorrow and of preparation, let us, in the first place, worthily lament our sins, and acknowledge, simply and sincerely, our wretchedness. Baring our hearts before “ Him who is too pure to behold iniquity,” let us throw from us, with scorn, all those weak apologies,----all that base sophistry with which guilt attempts to screen its deformity, even from its own eyes. Let us cherish, rather,

a full sense of our ingratitude, and calculate, with a firm piety, the value of all the goods which our Father has divided unto us, and which we have wasted in the pursuit of our own selfish and ignoble ends. It is from these humble and heartfelt tears that the fountain of effectual repentance flows.—It is upon these troubled waters, that the angel first descends “with healing upon his wings.”

From this contrite view of ourselves, let us, in the second place, lift our eyes to that Father “who careth for us,”—who deigns to grieve for our wanderings,—who awaits with anxious love the hour when we come “to ourselves,”—and who, not satisfied, like the father in the parable, with looking for our return, comes forward himself, in the person of “his beloved Son;” and (as at this season) spares not even his divine and spotless head, that he may recall us to our home. Upon the tomb of that blessed Saviour, let us lay our guilty heads; and while all the passions of mortality die within us, let us promise, in holy thankfulness, that “we will go and sin no more.”

When we leave the altar, let us arise from it, not as from a service which is performed, but a service that is begun; as from the hour when we leave the foreign land in which we have served a cruel master, and set forward upon our return to the

honours and the happiness of a pardoned and a regenerated being. Are there dangers, and trials, and temptations, in our way? Let us foresee them with a firm and intrepid eye;—let us meet them with a strenuous and calm defiance;—and let us never forget, that the eyes of our Father and of our Saviour are upon our journey; and that their ears listen to every sigh of secret penitence, and are open to every prayer for celestial aid.

Do we want still farther assistance?—Let us, in the last place, from amid all the doubts and darkness of this lower scene, raise our grateful eyes to that final Home which is now in mercy so plainly revealed;—to that home which closes all the hopes and expectations of our being; where the vices and the sorrows of time are forgotten; where nothing dwells but innocence, and goodness, and holy love; where humble penitence is now invited to approach; where all the good whom we have lost, are again to be found; and where the great Father of Good himself, with all the myriads of redeemed spirits who surround his throne, will rejoice over every one of us that arise and come to him.

Yes! “Almighty and ever merciful God! “Thou hatest nothing that thou hast made,” and thy blessed Son has taught us, “that “thou forgivest the sins of all them that

“are truly penitent.” May thy Paternal Spirit be now present to all, in these solemn hours of remembrance and of gratitude, “to create in us new and contrite hearts!”—May we “so worthily lament our past sins, and acknowledge our wretchedness,” that we “may now die unto sin and live again unto righteousness!” In the strength of thy grace may we all advance through the journey of life which is before us! And in the mercy and mediation of the Saviour of the world, may we arrive, at last, at that immortal home, which Thou hast prepared for every penitent child of the dust,—where thy justice will be known to be mercy; and where sin, and sorrow, and death, will be remembered no more!

SERMON XXI.

ON REPENTANCE BEFORE HEAVEN.*

LUKE XV. 7.

“ I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in Heaven,
“ over one sinner that repenteth.”

WE have now completed, my brethren, the greatest solemnity of our religion.— We have again commemorated the death of him who came to give us life; who brought into a world of darkness the light of immortality; and who sealed with his blood the truth of his commission, and the hopes of his followers. In this service of pious gratitude, we have been joined by many millions of the human race. “ In the east and in the west, in the north and in the south, they who shall one day sit down in the kingdom of God,” have been engaged, though in different languages, in similar duties. The same sun which, during the last days, has witnessed our solemnities, on this greater day has witnessed also the kindred solemnities of every Chris-

* Preached on Easter Evening.

tian people, "from where he rises to where he goeth down;" and at this sacred and concluding hour, when the Leader of our Salvation is remembered as rising from the grave, that he might become for ever victorious both over sin and over death, our feeble praise is joined by that of the multitude of the faithful, in every country and of every tongue.

In the service of this day, however, if we are sincere, we have done a great deal more.—We have not only testified our sentiments of pious thankfulness, but we have testified our resolutions of religious obedience.—We have entered into a covenant with Heaven.—We have abjured our errors, and bewailed our sins before the altar of our Saviour. With that blood which was shed for us, we have sealed our acceptance of the merciful conditions of salvation; and before Him, to whom "all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid," we have laid bare the errors of our ways, and promised repentance and amendment of life.

Happy they, to whom this season of thought has brought all the blessings for which it was intended! and who, after silent and sincere meditation, now feel, from the altar of Christ, the angel of peace to descend upon their souls. The young are happy, who, in looking forward to the

world before them, have learnt here to anticipate its deceits;—who have strengthened themselves in the might of their Master; and who purpose, in the integrity of their hearts, “to take that good part which will “never be taken from them.”—The busy and the active are happy, who, ere yet the sins which most easily beset them have enfeebled their souls, have learnt, in the calm hours of thought, to struggle with temptation, and to renew again the innocence and generosity of happier years. Even the aged are happy, to whose ear the voice of repentance comes not in vain;—in whom the decays of nature mingle with the promises of the Gospel, and who feel at last, “that the ways of righteousness only are “pleasant, and that in her paths alone are “peace.” It is for these ends of present and of future happiness, that the Saviour of the world has now summoned again the host of the faithful to his common table.—It is in such hours, that his spirit descends upon the “troubled waters” of the contrite soul; and it is from this exalted communion with Heaven, that the regenerated spirit returns again to the dwellings of mortality, to meet the voice of health and joy.

In such meditations we all have been, for some time, employed. Yet while we are yet assembled around the altar of our

Lord, and ere we mingle again in the business and occupation of common life, there is another and a greater view of the subject which I wish to present to your minds. It is the view which the ever memorable words of the text suggest,—the view of repentance in the sight of Heaven. When we stand upon the dust of mortality, we may regard the duty of repentance in many lights of wisdom and of utility. But it is only when we elevate ourselves to the height of Revelation, that we can see it in its true light of dignity and sublimity, and that we can feel its alliance with all that is great in the character, or sublime in the hopes of the immortal soul. “I say unto you,” says the Son of God, “that there is joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth.” Suffer me at present, my brethren, to suggest to your reflection some of the important considerations which these words are fitted to awaken, and with which it were always wise in us to conclude our seasons of Christian thought and meditation.

1. They teach us, in the first place, in a manner that almost makes us tremble at the prospect, the importance of the human soul. We form some estimate of the greatness of our nature, when we consider the capacities with which man is endued; when we see the sceptre of earthly dominion put into his hand;—when we follow his daring

step as he carries the torch of science into all the dark recesses of nature; or when we regard, in any of its noblest instances, the exertions of his private wisdom or his individual virtue.—But what are these, and what are all our natural estimates of his greatness, to those which the words of our Saviour inspire? when Heaven itself is seen to take an interest in his fate;—when over that space of life which is allotted him, the eyes of immortal beings are seen impending;—and when every thing that is great or good in existence, bend from their immortal thrones to witness the conflict which he has to fight, and the race which he has to run.

2. The same words teach us, in the second place, in the manner of all others the most impressive, the deep and fatal malignity of sin. “There is joy in Heaven
“over one sinner that repenteth.”—Alas! my brethren, the words are relative. They speak of the joy which accompanies conquest,—of the gratulation with which the spirits of Heaven hail the triumph of the Christian over vice and error; but they refer also to different feelings,—they suppose grief and sorrow when he fails. They represent to us the host of Heaven, as mourning over the weak or wayward sinner; and as mourning, because they know, while he disdains to know, the destiny to

which he is going. Even in the silence of the language of the text on this subject, there is something peculiarly solemn. It tells us not the danger which the vicious man runs, but it leaves it to our imagination to conceive, when no less an host than the host of Heaven rejoice at the escape of "one sinner" from it. The parables also which accompany the text, those of the "lost sheep," and the "lost piece of silver," have no common solemnity. They speak of the joy of those who recover that which was "lost;" and they remind us, therefore, by this awful word, that the soul of guilty unrepenting man may also be lost,—that that spirit which was created for glory, and honour, and immortality, may be lost in the universe of existence,—may be lost to its God and to its Saviour,—may be lost to every hope and perfection for which it was originally designed,—and, banished from the sunshine of Heaven, may be doomed to wander in outer darkness, with the unblest and hopeless beings who inhabit it.

3. The words of the text, therefore, my brethren, teach us, in the third place, the true dignity and magnanimity of Repentance. In the present constitution of our nature, it is but little that the mind of men can know of each other. They cannot enter into that secret chamber, where the heart communes with itself. They cannot

know those silent struggles by which the virtuous and the pious have attained their state. With the bitterness which the Christian heart feels, it is not permitted for a stranger to intermeddle. We are not to wonder, therefore, that of all duties, that of Repentance is the one which the world least understands, and gives least credit for. Unwilling to believe in it, and incapable of knowing the powers which it exerts, or the sacrifices which it makes, it is natural for the thoughtless spectator to consider it as affectation, or hypocrisy; or, in the language of the gay and the young, as the miserable slavery of fearful minds to the terrors of religion. To all this, my brethren, the words of the text afford more than an answer. They unveil to us another scene. They shew us other spectators than this careless and unthinking world. They tell us, that, where the eye of man cannot reach, the eyes of Heaven are present,—that there are Minds far superiour to man, who interest themselves not only in our actions, but in our thoughts; who penetrate with unerring eye the recesses of our secret bosoms, and who welcome, with the benevolence of Heaven, every tear of contrition that bedews our midnight bed, and every purpose of amendment which our morning hours can raise. They know, and not the world, all the dignity of re-

pentance;—the purity of those sighs with which the young lament even their venial errors,—the magnanimity of those in elder life, whom the world has seduced, but in whose bosom the seeds of their infant faith were not extinct; and who, in opposition to habit and opinion, and all that the world makes strong, have struggled in many a secret hour with the tempter, and have come off victorious for ever. They know, in the last place, the fortitude of the aged, who, under “gray hairs,” have learnt the words of salvation; and, lamenting their former sins, and acknowledging their former weakness, have formed in themselves, even in their last days, that “right heart and that contrite spirit,” which renews all the hopes and all the purity of their being.

These all are the secrets of the human heart, which man cannot, and was not made to know. But they are the knowledge of the inhabitants of Heaven. They are, in their sight, the secret virtues of the soul, from which all the virtues of conduct finally arise; and while the world judges only (as it can judge) by outward appearance and determinate success, the eye of applauding Heaven penetrates even into the depth of the closet; and the mind which can conquer one evil passion, is more glorious in the sight of the angels of God, than

that which can exalt itself amid the follies of man, by the conquest of kingdoms, or the revolution of established Nations.

Such, my brethren, are the magnificent views, both of hope and of fear, which the Gospel gives us upon the subject of Repentance. In that duty, we have all, for some time, I trust, been employed. It is now, however, that we are to testify both its sincerity and its power. We are to return again into the world, and to our various occupations; and, God knows, the world has power enough over us all, to overturn the resolutions of a few weeks or a few days. It is my first and most grateful duty to believe, after the solemnities that have past, that every one who has shared in them, is, in the present hour at least, fully determined to "live a new life,—to do justice, and love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God." Let me then entreat you, from the words of the text, to consider, in the last place, in what presence all of us, whether high or low, whether rich or poor, are acting; and who it is in existence that have joy in our repentance, and who are the glad witnesses of our amendment.

It is, in the first place, the Father of Nature himself, the High and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity, "the God who willeth that no one should perish, but that all should come to salvation;" and who

now, by the final mission of his Son, opens the arms of Omnipotence to shelter every returning soul.

It is, in the next place, the Redeemer of the world, the first-born of Heaven, "who died for our sins, and who rose again for our justification,"—who, though unseen, still dwells among his people, and listens to all their prayers, and numbers all their tears,—and who never ceases to present before the throne of mercy, the pious vows, and the holy resolutions of those whom his faith has separated from a fallen world.

It is, still farther, the company of angels and archangels, and those glorified spirits who minister continually before the Throne of God. Even in the midst of glory, their eyes yet bend upon man;—upon that being which belongs, by such mysterious ties, both to earth and Heaven; who was formed but "a little lower than themselves," and who is called, on one greater day, to be their fellow and compeer. Amid the wilderness of life, their eyes pursue with anxiety the progress of his road, and, weeping over the wanderers from the way, they prepare the song of triumph to welcome the "conqueror of the world," and to celebrate his entrance into the "promised land."

There is, in the last place, the society of "just men," now in immortality. "made

“perfect,”—the society of those who once fought the same fight with us, and “who have triumphed in the might of him” who strengthened them;—the society of the good and the great of every age, who now look down with the sympathy of brethren upon the generations who succeed them, and call them “to follow them into their rest;”—the society, still more dear, of all those whom we have loved in life, and whom we follow with tears;—the society of our fathers, our friends, and our children, —from the hoary head which is now crowned with a crown of glory, to the infant innocence whom we once laid in an unpolluted grave, and who now seems to whisper to our midnight dreams, of that “spirit of which alone is the kingdom of Heaven.”

—Such, my brethren, is that dread but animating presence in which the words of Revelation tell us we are all acting; those immortal eyes which penetrate both darkness and solitude; those pitying hearts which share in all the errors of mortality, and which beat with joy when the poorest wanderer finds the error of his way, “and saves his soul alive.” I know not that the imagination of man is capable of entertaining a conception of equal magnificence. It is a conception before which life, and all its pleasures, and all its vices, disappear;—which shews us at once the reasons of di-

vine administration, and “of the wonders which the Almighty hath done for the children of men;” and which seems to anticipate that stroke of death, which all sooner or later must know,—when the invisible world shall become known,—and when “things temporal shall be changed for things eternal.”

It is a presence, therefore, my brethren, which it is wisdom in us all to familiarize to our conceptions;—in solitude, to elevate our thoughts;—in society, to dignify our actions;—in the hour of prayer, to exalt our devotion;—in the hour of duty, to animate our exertions;—at the altar of salvation, to kindle our gratitude to him who died that we might live: But most of all, in hours like the present, when we are leaving that altar, to strengthen our resolutions of future amendment, and to impress upon us, the immortal value of that repentance in which the host of Heaven itself deigns, in these concluding hours, to rejoice.

—We are now to return, my brethren, into the world,—to our various duties and occupations; but perhaps, also, to the same scenes which have witnessed our errors, and to the same society which has led us into guilt. These are the deepest holds which sin has ever had upon the human soul. In the might of our Master, let us

here arm ourselves against the danger. Let us remember, that there is another society in which the regenerated spirit lives; and that there are greater spectators than man, who surround the repentant soul.

In the repentance of the humblest, or of the lowest among us, in these late days, Heaven, with all its inhabitants, has "rejoiced." Let us then again enter the world with this sublime impression upon our minds.—Let us feel the importance of that frame, which, while it is united to dust, is yet born for immortality.—Let us think ourselves now as acting, not only in the sight of ignorant or mistaken men, but in the sight of the God of the universe, and of the Saviour of the human race;—in the sight of every being who is great before the throne of Omniscience;—in the sight of Those whom death has for a while separated from us, but who now look down, with all the anxieties of love, upon the course which we pursue; and whose aged or whose infant hands prepare for us those "wreaths of glory," and "those palms of peace," which shadow out in mercy to our feeble and fearful souls, not only "the wisdom," and "the knowledge," but the "joy," the social, and, dearer than all, the domestick "joy" of Heaven.

May such, my brethren, be, in these hours the sentiments of all our minds!—In this spirit may we leave the altar of salvation!—In this spirit may we again enter into the world! And, far more, in this spirit may we so conduct ourselves in it, that, by “patient continuing in welldoing,” we may inherit, with all the good and wise that have gone before us, the promised glory and honour of immortality.

SERMON XXII.

ON THE POWER OF CHRISTIAN FAITH.*

ST. JOHN V. 4.

“ Whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world ; and
“ this is the victory that overcometh the world, even
“ our faith.”

THESE words, which are prescribed by our church for the instruction of this day, are taken from the Epistle of St. John ; and there is perhaps no portion of Scripture more proper for our meditation at this season, than that short but beautiful epistle.

The great events which the Apostle had witnessed were passed. The Master whom he followed, and the Friend whom he had loved, had ascended into Heaven ; and the faith which he taught was now beginning to spread itself through a rejoicing world. It was at this time, when the distance of years enabled him to look back upon all the wonders which he had witnessed with gratitude, rather than with astonishment ;—when experience had taught him all the joy,

* First Sunday after Easter.

and all the exaltation of Christian belief;—and when he saw “the glad tidings of salvation,” pervading every region around him, that he poured out to his disciples the overflowings of his heart, in the epistle which we are now considering.

Among the different epistles of the Apostles, adapted to peculiar exigencies of the infant church, and perhaps fully intelligible only when these temporary exigencies are understood, the character of the Epistle of St. John is peculiar. It is not a system of doctrine, or a detail of reasoning or of proof. It is, on the contrary, a simple display of faith and of feeling;—a representation of the mercy of God, on the one hand, and of the sentiments that become man, on the other;—the picture of a mind penetrated at once with the glory of the revelation it had received, and filled with all the moral and prophetick influences which such a revelation can infuse. There is a tone accordingly of triumph and of joy through the whole of it, which cannot be read without emotion; and which, better than all the reasoning in the world, impresses upon us the conviction of that exaltation of thought, that ardour of benevolence, and that purity of soul, which the Gospel of our Lord is formed, from the experience of the Apostle, both to create and to maintain.

In these hours, therefore, when we are in circumstances not unlike those of the Apostle,—when we have just returned from a nearer approach to this revelation of mercy, and when its influences are yet warm in our hearts,—I know not that I can point out any portion of Scripture more proper for your private study, or for the instruction of your children, than this memorable epistle. It is short, and intelligible even to the young. It addresses itself to the highest principles, and to the best feelings of their nature. It is fitted to make religion appear lovely in their infant eyes: and thus to afford them the surest of all preservations against the temptations and the dangers of the world through which they are destined to pass.

Into that world we are all, young and old, about to return; it is through its dangers, and hardships, and temptations, that we are all appointed to travel to our final home; and to be able “to overcome it,” is the wish not only of religion, but of reason. To account for its dangers, we have no necessity (I fear) to have recourse to any dominion of evil beyond ourselves. It is in our own bosoms where it dwells; in those various appetites and desires which make up our nature; which in themselves are all legitimate and useful, but which when suffered, like the desires of the poor

prodigal of the Gospel, to gain the mastery over reason and conscience, lead headlong to folly, to guilt, and to ruin. It is in holding the firm dominion over them;—in subjecting appetite to the control of reason;—in restraining desire when it approaches the boundary of duty;—in maintaining over every lower passion the high and habitual authority of Conscience, that the true dignity and integrity of the human mind is alone to be displayed. Wherever this dominion is wanting, the character sinks gradually into every thing that is base and contemptible;—the lofty and distinguishing features of man become obliterated;—and his nature descends, but too fast, to the level “of the brutes that perish.”

While to “overcome the world” with all its habitual sins, and all its hereditary errors, has been in every age the object of the moralist, it is not now only the object, but the ambition and the prayer of the Christian. “Whatsoever is born of God,” sayeth the Apostle, “overcometh the world.” To us, my Christian brethren, these words include every thing.—They remind us of that eternal source from which we sprung, and of that immortal end to which we return. They remind us, that we derive our lineage from something greater in nature than man, and that we

are born for loftier scenes than those of a temporary world. While they point, from the narrow space on which we stand, to the infinity of the past and of the future, they call us to remember that that narrow space is a scene of danger;—that if, in the hours of trial, much is to be won, every thing also may be lost;—that the soul which loses the command of itself, loses also the hopes which the promises of the Gospel had once displayed to it;—and that, in the final home of existence, they only will be recognized as “born of God,” who have “overcome the world.”

What then is the high and commanding principle which can arm us for this field? which, amid all the temptations of the world, “can put into our minds good desires,” and, amid all its dangers, can “enable us to bring them to good effect?” To this question the answer of the Apostle is ready, and decisive:—“And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our Faith.” Upon these few, but momentous words, I presume, in moments like the present, to offer you a few reflections.

1. It is the first assertion of the Apostle, that the faith of the Gospel is “able to overcome the world.” This assertion I feel it is unnecessary at present to confirm by any process of argument or illustration. I shall withhold myself, too, from any exemplification of it in the history of those who,

in every age, *have* overcome the world, and passed, under its influence, through time, as men who looked and who marched to immortality. I wish rather, in the present hours, to appeal to your own feelings and your own experience, and to ask you, whether, in those late exercises of faith in which we all have been engaged, you have not yourselves felt something of that power and of those influences? I would ask you, my brethren, whether, when you lately retired for a time from the world, you did not feel somewhat at least of its fascination to be broken,—some of its delusions dispelled,—some of its chains relaxing?—I would ask you, whether, when you approached the altar, and raised your eyes to the cross, and saw the Saviour who suffered upon it, you did not feel the impression of something high and holy in that nature for which the Son of God thought it not too much to die, and the conviction of some nobler service than that of this world, in which his followers were called to be employed?—I would ask you, whether, when you saw him with the eye of faith, rise again from the grave, and ascend to the throne of his Father, and seat himself at the right hand of the Eternal Majesty, that he may continue to make intercession for all that believe in him, you did not feel as if the gates of eternity were opened to your view,—as if the world had disappeared

from your regard,—and that nobler world come forward to your eye, where alone all the desires of the human soul can find their final gratification, and all its prayers their fulfilled repose?—And even now, my brethren! now, when these high exercises are at an end, and when you are preparing to return again into the world of time, I would ask you, whether you do not feel in yourselves a loftier preparation than before, for the scenes into which you are again to enter?—Whether vice hath not lost to you its former charm, and folly its usual influence, and example its past seduction?—Whether the remembrance of the covenant you have made with God himself, doth not make your heart beat high with the resolution to fulfil it? and whether, in the workings of your bosom, you do not feel the presence of the Spirit of God, inciting you to a more cheerful obedience, and animating you to the performance of “all those good works which God hath prepared for you to walk in?”—If these are the consequences of the late exercises in which you have been employed;—if these are the fruits of that faith which you have professed, you have then an evidence superiour even to demonstration, that “this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith;”—you have the evidence that the principle itself is able to give you the victory;—you have the evidence that it is

the want of it which alone subjugates man to the world;—you have the evidence of your own conscience, that, to be born of God, is “to overcome the world;”—and the evidence of your own experience, that the principle which can alone enable you to make this conquest, is that faith which He, in contemplation of your weakness, hath now in mercy given you.

2. This is the first and greatest instruction which the words of the Apostle afford us. There is a second, with regard to the nature and character of faith, which, in these hours, is not of less importance. Among the inventions of men, there is, you know, a faith which belongs not to the Gospel, but to the schools;—which respects only the understanding, but which leaves the heart uncultivated;—which is learned in words and in doctrines, but which makes little account of dispositions or of affections;—and which employs its votaries, not in opposing the sins, but in opposing the opinions of the world.—There is a faith, you also know, which belongs only to the closet or the cell;—which, instead of studying to “overcome” the world, seeks only to desert it;—which considers all the duties, and all the obligations of life, as things beneath its regard;—which, in working out its own individual salvation, cares little for the fate of the rest of mankind, and conceives that all the high and

active powers of human nature were given for no purpose but to be lost amid the observances of superstition, or dissolved amid the visions of enthusiasm. Whatever may be the errors of churches or of sects, such, my brethren, is not the character of faith in the view of the Apostle. He speaks with higher respect, and contemplates with nobler views, that nature which he was commissioned to instruct, and which his Divine Master descended to save. He speaks not of words, but of deeds,—not of doctrines, but of duties,—not of deserting the world, but of overcoming it,—of advancing into it in the confidence of faith, and of combating in it with the assured hope of victory. He speaks of it, not merely as a space only which is to be passed, and which lies in unmeaning distance between us and our dreams of eternity, but as a field which is to be fought, a school in which we are to be trained, and upon our conduct in which, all our hopes of that eternity depend. It is in “the world,” he says, and amid its dangers, its temptations, and its sorrows, that he who is born of God, and who is again to return to God, is formed and disciplined;—it is amid its dark but infant scenes, that piety is awakened, and beneficence employed, and patience exerted, and resolution displayed, and resignation shewn. “Whatsoever things,” in human nature, “are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are

“of good report,” these all are to be formed in it. It is precisely amid its evils, its sorrows, and its sins, that they are destined to spring; and he who is born of God, and who is to be crowned with the palms of immortality, is not he who deserts the world, but he who combats against it in the armour of faith, and who, in the might of that armour, is victorious.

In the present moments, my brethren, it is a lesson of deep consequence to us. We have performed, indeed, one of the highest exercises of religion, and we have felt, I trust, the sentiments and the wishes which an exercise so solemn is fitted to inspire; but let us not think, therefore, that our service is finished. What we have done is wise, indeed, but it is only preparatory;—it is not victory, but only the preparation for victory. We have not yet “overcome” the world, and it is now, in returning to it, that the decisive trial is to be made. There is, therefore, a third instruction in the words of the Apostle, which is of much importance to us at this time to consider;—it is in regard to the test or the criterion by which we can alone judge whether we possess this efficacious faith.

3. In the construction of the words, you will observe a striking peculiarity. The Apostle does not speak of the general power of faith, but of its actual power. He does not say, that faith is *able* to overcome, or that it *may* overcome, but that it

doth overcome the world. It is not the future but the present that he speaks of; and the test he gives by which we can try "and examine ourselves," whether we really possess this vital principle, is not by asking ourselves whether we wish, or hope, or pray to overcome, but whether we *do*, actually and in truth, overcome the world.

This, therefore, my brethren, is the lofty purpose which we now ought to assume, and the high test by which we ought perpetually to examine the character of our minds; and to this Christian heroism, we are now called by every thing that can be fitted to animate the soul of man. We are called to it by Him who sitteth upon the Throne of Being, and who hath yet permitted the children of the dust to ascend through time to him; by Him, whose cross we have just left, and in whose grave we have professed to bury our errors and our sins; by Him, whose consoling presence follows us through every path of our journey, and who seeks to gather into the fold of salvation, whatever has wandered or been lost amid the darkness and deceitfulness of the world.

We are called to it, still more, by the consideration and the experience of our own weakness. In the eventful race of life there is no moment of pause. If we do not advance, we must retreat. If we do not press forward to "the prize of our high calling," we must fall down again into the

dust from which we sprung. If we yield to the world,—if every appetite is able to lead, and every passion to seduce us,—if in some dark corner of our hearts we cherish some prevailing sin at whose shrine we sacrifice both faith and conscience and reason,—where are the remains of that high nature which once was born of God? and where are the hopes that it will ever return to him?—If animated, on the contrary, by that faith which is able to overcome, we hold with firm hand the reins of every desire,—if, in passing through the world, we look to things beyond it,—if, summoned to the society of the angel and the archangel, and of “the spirits of the just made perfect,” we seek ever to fashion our minds to the height and to the purity of theirs, how bright is the path which lies before us, and how profound the joy in which it is promised finally to close!—

——While the words of the Apostle are thus instructive, there is another sense in which I think, my brethren, you will feel them as commemorative. “Whatsoever is “born of God overcometh the world.” Can we pronounce them without remembering, that there *was* indeed One who “was born of God,” and who “hath overcome the world:” and can we murmur at whatever the world has to try us, when we remember what it had to try him?

This is the high example which this season ought ever to bring to our minds; and

it is with hearts glowing with the remembrance of his holiness, that we should ever return from his cross to our own homes.—If it be into the scenes of danger and of temptation we are to return, let us remember that He also passed through the world, but unsubdued by its temptations, and unacquainted with its sins.—If it be into the scenes of hardship and of suffering we return,—let us remember that he once “endured the cross and despised its shame,”—that it was by “suffering” that he was made “perfect,”—and that now at his name every thing in Heaven and earth is commanded to bow.—If it be into the scenes of mourning and of sorrow we return, where death has been busy, and where the grave has closed upon our hopes,—let us remember that He hath burst the fetters of the grave; and that, in that final state, where there is death, and sin, and sorrow no more, he reigneth to reassemble, in one happier hour, all those who, amid the miseries of the world, put their trust in him.—

—May these, my brethren, be the influences of this season upon all our hearts!—May the spirit and the strength of that faith which we have now professed, and “which is able to overcome the world,” go along with us into every scene where the providence of God may lead us; and, under its guidance, may we so pass through all the shadows of time, that we may finally gain all the promised realities of **Eternity!**

SERMON XXIII.

ON OUR SAVIOUR'S ASCENSION.*

ST. JOHN xiv. 2, 3.

“I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also.”

THE discipline of our church, which has appointed annual seasons in which we commemorate the great events of our religion, has not only for its object to confirm our faith, but to awaken those religious feelings and dispositions which such events are intended to produce. It is ever to little purpose that our understanding is employed upon the subject of religion, if our hearts remain unmoved; and a wise man will ever study to meet those yearly solemnities which the discipline of the church prescribes to him, with a mind prepared for the peculiar emotions which the season is fitted to inspire.

The season which is now passing, is that in which we commemorate the ascension of our Lord. The portions of Scripture which are read, are those in which this

* Preached on Ascension day.

great event is related ;—the prayers which are employed, have all a reference to the influence which it ought naturally to have upon our minds ;—and, to receive all the benefits which so lofty a contemplation is fitted to leave upon us, it is necessary for us to fix our attention with more than ordinary care, upon the magnificent event we are commemorating, and to open our hearts to all the suggestions which it is calculated to awaken. It is in this view, that I am now to lay before you a few reflections upon the subject, in the confidence that I cannot present it, even for a few moments, to your minds, without awakening sentiments of religious gratitude, and I trust of religious consolation.

The first and most obvious reflection that occurs to us upon the remembrance of the Ascension of our Lord is, that of the demonstration which it gives of the truth of the Gospel, and of the certainty of our faith. The circumstances in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, which have occasioned the incredulity of vulgar and sordid minds in every age, as they did of those of the Jews in his own, the humility, the poverty, and the apparent meanness of his condition, are now all past. He is no longer “the humble and despised teacher,”—the “son of the carpenter,”—the “friend of publicans and sinners,” and who had not a place “where he could lay his head.” By the

most stupendous of all miracles ;—by his visible Resurrection from the grave, his pretensions are now confirmed by the interposition of Heaven ;—and by his Ascension from earth, he has proved to the senses as well as to the understanding of mankind, from what abode he came, and what is the divine nature to which he belongs. It is on the right hand of the Father that he is now seated, far above all human principality, and all angelick power ; to him is given “ that holy name which is above every name ; and before Him every knee is now commanded to bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.” The gracious work which he was commissioned to do, is now performed ; and the Christian eye follows now the Leader of its salvation into that original glory from which he descended, and in which “ He dwelt before the foundation of the world.” Compared to such astonishing events, the pretensions of all other religions are vain ; and even the philosopher who measures the powers of human invention, by what it has performed, will acknowledge the truth of the Ascension of our Saviour, from the very circumstance, that it is an event too stupendous for imagination to have invented, or for imposture to have attempted to perform.—There is, beside all this, another circumstance in the event which every Christian mind will feel,—it is, its analogy

to the whole genius of the Gospel, in the simplicity and even the modesty with which it is performed. The greatest scene upon which the eye of man ever gazed,—the visible passage of a divine person from earth into Heaven,—is yet transacted with the plainness and simplicity of an ordinary event. No convulsions happen in nature;—no disturbance of its usual serenity to awaken the attention of the world to the spectacle which was to follow. In the midst of his apostles, while he had assembled them as usual in the calm of the evening, upon the mountain where he used to teach,—when he had finished the final instructions he was to give them; and when their minds were in their usual state of veneration and attention, He rises slowly from among them, and mingles with the sky, and is finally withdrawn in silence from their sight. In the ease and simplicity in which all this sublime event is performed, we see at once the reality of that divine power which, without effort, performs it; and when we consider afterwards how imposture would have performed its work, we are convinced, that, in the very description is the evidence of truth, and that nothing that was false could have been told with such affecting plainness, and such unconscious sublimity.

2. There are other reflections of a moral nature which the present season is equally

fitted to excite;—and, in the contemplation of this great event, there are sentiments which must arise in every thoughtful mind, by which we may be made wiser and better.—It is fitted, in the first view, to remind us of the importance of the human soul, and of the care of Heaven for its recovery and salvation. When we commemorate the birth of our Saviour, we are reminded of the Benevolence of the system of the Gospel, by which “the day-spring” “arose upon a dark and a wretched world.”—When we commemorate his sufferings and death, we are reminded of that parental tenderness and loving-kindness which “spared not his own Son” to redeem us from present and from future evil.—When we commemorate his Resurrection and Ascension, we are reminded of the Greatness of this system. In the loftiness of the person who is employed, we recognise the importance of the end He pursued. We tremble to think of the dread responsibility we incur by the magnitude of this mercy; and the first question our hearts suggest is that of the apostle,—“What manner of men ought we to be for whom” all this system of divine tenderness has been prepared and employed?

The ascension of our Lord is, in another view, a perpetual proof to us of the certainty of our own immortality. It was not alone to confirm the faith of his followers,

or to substantiate the truth of his mission, by an evidence which could not be resisted that the disappearance of our Lord from earth was thus conducted. It was, far more, we may believe, intended to shew them the actual possibility of this mighty change;—to demonstrate to them that there were “bodies celestial” as well as “bodies terrestrial;”—that it was the weakness of man only which limited the power of God;—and that when He willed, the greatest and most astonishing events which the imagination of man could contemplate, could yet be performed with the ease and simplicity of the most ordinary occurrence. It was yet still farther intended, we may believe, to shew them the duration of their own existence. He had suffered death, as they were all to do; but he was again alive. In finishing his human course, he was beginning only a greater and a more exalted one; and, after having fulfilled the will of his Father, he was now to return into his bosom, and to be seated at his right hand “for ever.” They were to follow through the same path;—in his history, they were to read their own; and, while they thus saw him triumphant over death, they were to see, as it were, the emblem of the great change which they were afterwards to experience, and the opening of that greater state of being into which that change was to conduct them.

To such a conclusion, to such an evidence of the immortality of the mind of man, no other religion that ever appeared upon earth has pretended; and the Christian who contemplates it, cannot but feel, with new delight, the greatness of that dispensation into which he is admitted, and the foundation which it gives to the first and profoundest hopes of the human soul.

3. In continuing this meditation, there is a third view of the subject which naturally opens upon our minds:—it is, of the greatness of that state to which the human soul is finally destined. It is the command of the Apostle, that we should ever “look unto Jesus as the Author and Finisher of our faith;” and in thus looking to him “as having gone before us,” we best can understand and conceive the nature and character of those mansions which he has “prepared for those that love him.” At the hour of his ascension, all that was humble, all that was painful, all that was degrading in his human life, was passed. We see him rising above the darkness of time, and the dust of mortality;—we see him entering into a state of unmingled happiness and triumphant glory;—we see him clothed with infinite authority, and the angel and the archangel bending their grateful heads before him;—we see him, still more, entering into “dominion” only to continue the system of mercy which he had begun,—

inclining his eyes for ever upon that world which he came to save,—breathing, through every age, the inspirations of that holy Spirit “which proceedeth from him,”—interceding with the Father for all the penitent and all the sorrowful,—and gathering, in progressive mercy, all that will come unto him, into the fold of eternal safety. Is it possible, my brethren, that we can contemplate this subject without feeling our minds purified at the same time they are exalted?—without feeling ourselves born for something greater and more permanent than the scenes of time can unfold?—without letting the poor passions and the sordid cares of mortality fall from our remembrance?—without the prayer, “that the same mind “may be in us which was in Christ Jesus?”—without “looking unto him,” with the ardent desire of “following his steps,” and of one day being found worthy to stand before the Throne, and before Him, for ever.

—Such are the reflections which seem most naturally to arise in our minds in contemplating the great event of which this season reminds us;—reflections which are in alliance with every holy and lofty disposition, and which can never be entertained without making us wiser and better. To state them is to recommend them; and I now, therefore, leave them to your own farther meditation,—as there are some other considerations which I wish at this

time to lay before you, which belong more particularly to those who "labour and are heavy laden," under the usual misfortunes of life, and which I most willingly introduce, as they appear very naturally to arise from the subject we are now considering.

When the event of our Saviour's crucifixion was approaching, and when he was preparing the minds of his disciples for their separation, we read that Simon Peter said unto him, "Lord, whither goest thou?" and that our Saviour replied, "Whither I go thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards." In continuing the conversation, he employs the words of the text; "Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." Such were the words with which our Saviour consoled the sorrows of his disciples, when he was about to leave them,—which must have occurred to their minds when they witnessed his ascension;—and which, we may believe, are left to console the sorrows of his followers, under such circumstances, in every age of the world.

1. Is there not something, in the first place, in these words, my brethren, which substantiates the dearest hope of humanity,—that of knowing in another state those whom they have loved here, and of being known by them? It is not fit, indeed, for the duties, or perhaps for the happiness of man, that the veil should be too much raised over the bright sanctuary of eternal repose. But we may expect, that some light would be given us by Revelation upon this subject,—some merciful condescension to the strongest and the most virtuous wishes of man. In the words of the text, we may (I trust) without presumption find this light. They obviously express a state of memory and of recognition. They express the great fact, that they who are separated on earth shall be reunited in Heaven, and that they shall recognize each other. The same doctrine is involved in many other passages of scripture,—in the account of the last judgment,—in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus,—in the consolation which our Saviour gives to the penitent sinner upon the cross,—and in general, throughout the whole book of the Revelations of St. John. To know this, is of itself to know much; it is to acquire a principle sufficient to console some of the deepest distresses of humanity, and to make that faith yet dearer to us, which is mingled with the purest hopes of human nature.

2. But is there not in these words, my brethren, something which yet leads us further, and which may extend this hope to that of the renewal, in a future state, of all genuine love, and all virtuous affection? It is not only by assuring his disciples, that they shall “know each other,” that our Saviour consoles them; it is by assuring them, that they shall be “united together;”—that all their former affections, all their former connexion shall return,—that the valley and shadow of death obliterates none of their recollection, and diminishes nothing of their love. “I will receive you,” (says he) not in general terms, but “I will receive you unto myself;”—into the same arms which have hitherto held,—into the same bosom which has hitherto loved you,—that “where I am, there ye,” with all your memories, with all your affections, with all your gratitude, with all that has formed your past happiness, “may be also.” If there be any presumption, my brethren, in interpreting these memorable words in this manner, it is a presumption which may easily be justified from the whole character of the Gospel. To draw from it those conclusions which can relieve anguish and console misfortune,—which can sanctify virtuous affections, and extend the reign of Christian charity,—which can exalt friendship into religion, and mingle hope with faith, is surely to serve the cause of the

Gospel,—to give it a deeper hold upon the human heart,—and to diminish the power of the vices of time, in the same proportion in which it expands the promises of eternity.

3. Is there not another instruction, my brethren, which these words afford us, in the simple but sublime picture which they hold out of the Heaven of the Gospel. Every religion has had its scene of future reward ; and it is mortifying to the pride of man to reflect, that this scene has every where been composed of the lowest, the basest, and the most sanguinary materials of his nature. How different is the scene which these words of our Saviour point out to us !—A scene of simplicity, of purity, and of love ;—a scene which gives us back the innocence of childhood with the wisdom of age ;—which admits nothing that can hurt, nothing that can destroy ;—which brings together, from every corner of the world, the wise, the meek, the pure, the merciful, the patient ;—which restores to the mourners the friends they had lost, and opens to the eyes which longed for righteousness and truth, the splendours of that state in which Truth and Righteousness are evermore to reign.

Upon such prospects, my brethren, it is scarcely possible for us to meditate, without becoming more fitted to enjoy them. They fall in with every thing that is good or pure in our nature. They woo us to

religion, by blending it with all that is dear to our understanding or our hearts; and prove to us, by something better than argument, "that her ways are ways of pleasantness, and that in her paths alone is eternal peace." They raise, finally, nobler desires and loftier hopes in our bosom, than "things temporal" can satisfy; and, while we rise with Christ, they teach us to "set our affections on the things which are above, where he now sitteth at the right hand of God," and yet where (in continued tenderness to mankind) he says, "where he is, we may be also."

4. "And when he had spoken these things," says the Evangelist, "while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward Heaven, as he went up, behold! two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said unto them, Ye men of Gallilee! why stand ye gazing up into Heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into Heaven."

This is the last instruction, my brethren, which the remembrance of this great event affords us. It is fit that we should, in times like these, gaze with the apostles upon this magnificent scene;—that we may see the majesty of our Master;—that we may see the end of his mission;—that we

may see the mighty end which awaits the faithful of his people. But the great duty which now belongs to us, as it did before to the apostles, "is to descend again into "the world;"—to prove ourselves his disciples in the state in which he has left us;—to teach the truths, and to practise the virtues which he has enjoined;—and, whatever may be our condition, to study "that "the same mind may be in us which was "in Christ Jesus."

From these lofty contemplations, may such, my brethren, be the resolutions with which we descend again into a dark and a dangerous world!—May no season return without giving strength to our faith, sublimity to our hope, and purity to our obedience!—and wherever may be our path through "things temporal," may it be so steadily irradiated by the light of the Gospel, that it may finally lead us to "the "things and to the Beings that are eternal!"

THE END.



