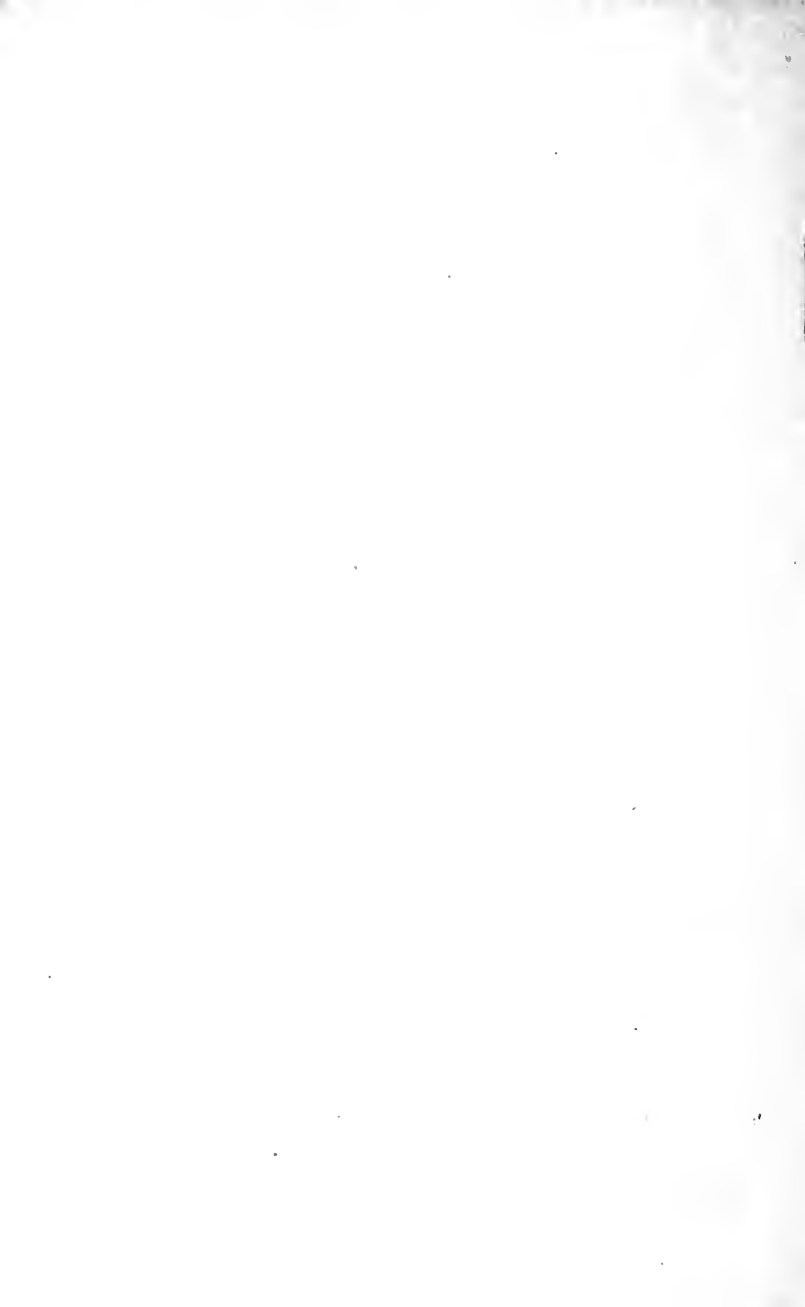
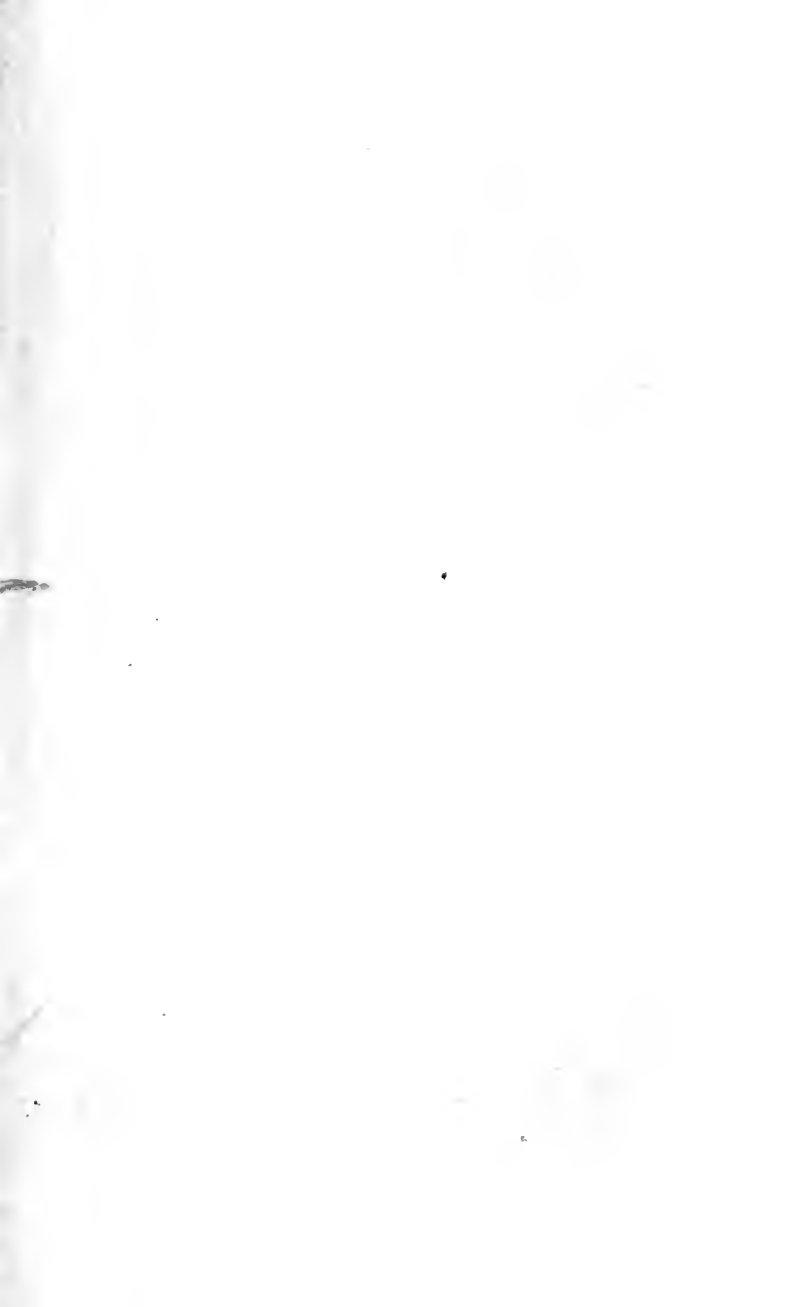
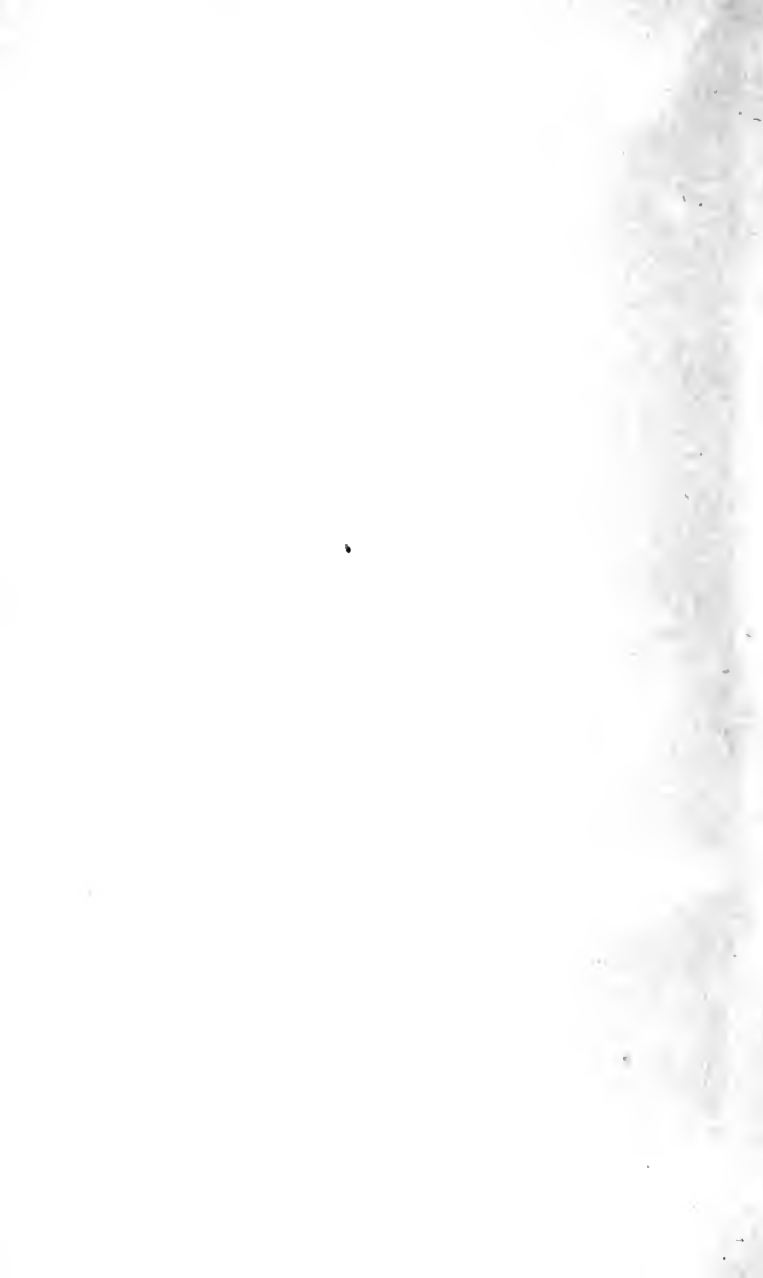


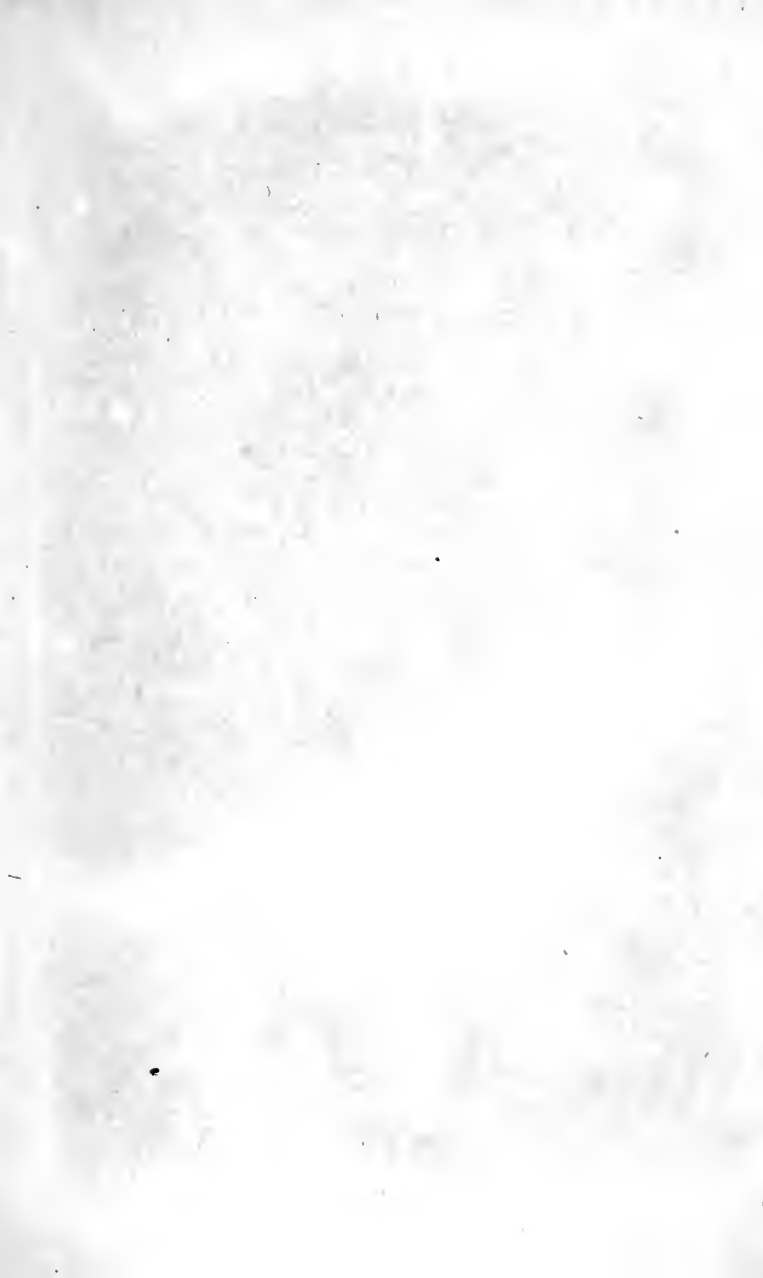


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SERMONS

BY THE LATE,

REV. W: H. DRUMMOND, ^{amilton} D.D., M.R.I.A.,

WITH

MEMOIR,

BY THE,

REV., J. SCOTT, PORTER.

xlix, 365 p

cont



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P R E F A C E .



HAVING undertaken to see this little volume through the press, it remains for me to say the two or three words that may be needful to introduce it to its readers. Most of the sermons published by my father during his life—indeed I think all of them—were of a controversial character ; and though many of them might well deserve republication, it has been thought best on the present occasion to select such as are of a more general character, as being most likely to be acceptable to the present generation of readers. A few of the sermons will no doubt be found, in

their strict adherence to the letter of the Old Testament, to be a little behind the present times, but it must be remembered they were written many years ago ; and pains have been taken to choose such as give the greatest prominence to those lessons of piety and virtue which never go out of date. Should any faults of style be detected, (and it is believed the instances will be very few), it is only necessary to say that the sermons never underwent the revision of their Author with a view to publication. I have taken no liberties with the manuscript.

“THE PREACHER,” to judge from a rough note which I have found, was intended to be a poem in four books. The first book and the fragments of the second have been very carefully written, apparently from some rougher copy, and may be presumed to be in the form which the Author’s judgment approved. The remaining fragments which appear as the third book, would probably have been expanded, had the poem been finished, into the third and fourth books.

Of the two photographs prefixed to this volume, I have to say that the first represents my father in the prime of his youth, at the age of twenty-three or twenty-four, and is from a portrait by Robinson, father of Dr Romney Robinson, the astronomer, of Armagh, and in the possession of the Rev. George A. Armstrong, of Dublin, who kindly consented to its being copied. The other is from a drawing by my sister, Mrs John Campbell, and represents my father in the calm of old age, as he was during the few years preceding his decease.

It would be ungrateful to conclude this brief preface without a word of thanks to the Rev. J. Scott Porter, for the readiness with which he undertook to write my late father's memoir, and the pains he bestowed upon it. Mr Porter is one of my father's oldest friends, and it seemed to Dr Drummond's family that there was no one who could perform the task better, or who was more likely to regard it as a labour of love. The admir-

able biographical notice prefixed to the sermons more than justifies their expectations.

ROBERT B. DRUMMOND.

EDINBURGH, *August 5, 1867.*

C O N T E N T S.

MEMOIR,	PAGE i.
-------------------	------------

S E R M O N S.

THANKSGIVING,	I. 3
-------------------------	---------

NOT WEARY IN WELL-DOING,	II. 23
------------------------------------	-----------

WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION,	III. 43
----------------------------------------	------------

CONVERSION,	IV. 63
-----------------------	-----------

	PAGE
V.	
THE RICH AND THE POOR,	82
VI.	
THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS,	102
VII.	
FREE GRACE,	120
VIII.	
GOD'S GOODNESS AS DISPLAYED IN HIS WORKS.	158
IX.	
NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS,	178
X.	
A WINTER SERMON,	197
XI.	
THE PURSUIT OF WISDOM,	220
XII.	
FRIENDSHIP,	241
XIII.	
JUDGE NOT,	253
XIV.	
PREPARATION FOR COMMUNION,	270

CONTENTS.

xi

	PAGE
XV.	
THE END OF LIFE,	289

XVI.	
IMMORTALITY,	309



THE PREACHER, BOOK I.	327
THE PREACHER, BOOK II.	341
THE PREACHER, BOOK III.	344

lished. The first of these was his poem on *Trafalgar*. In the preface he admits that this effusion was not adjusted to the strict rules of art; for he mourned the loss of his hero before he described the battle, or celebrated his victory; but it is, nevertheless, an admirable composition, containing several passages of animated and pathetic description; and in parts, is instinct with Homeric fire. The catalogue of the two squadrons of the British Fleet going into action, led respectively by Nelson and Collingwood, is worthy of being compared with the corresponding passages of the *Iliad*. This publication was soon succeeded, by *The First Book of T. Lucretius Carus on the Nature of Things, translated into English verse* (1808), which was printed as a sample of a new version of the entire work. The project did not meet with encouragement sufficient to induce him to persevere. But though the design did not fall in with the taste of the million, it attracted the attention of some whose approval far more than counterbalanced the neglect of the multitude. Among these was the justly celebrated and admired Dr Thomas Percy, Lord Bishop of Dromore, the friend and associate of Johnson, Burke, Goldsmith, and Reynolds. He had previously sought the personal acquaintance of Mr Drummond; he now interested himself in procuring for him from the University of Marischal College, Aberdeen, the well-merited degree of Doctor in Divinity,* and established

* The Diploma is in the usual form — it is dated 29th of January 1810.

with him a friendship which lasted during their mutual lives. Many of Dr Drummond's warmest personal friends were clergymen and laymen of the established church. Among his correspondence are found letters from many gentlemen of that persuasion, written evidently in the full confidence of the closest friendship. His heterodox views were perfectly well known; but at that time theological distinctions were not suffered to impede the harmony of social intercourse and domestic life.

The next publication from the pen of Dr Drummond, and in a bookseller's point of view, the most successful of his works, was his poem on the *Giants' Causeway*. It deserved the celebrity which it speedily obtained, for it is one of the most graceful and finished descriptive poems in the English language; the pictures of scenery with which it abounds are not only beautiful in expression, and rich in historical allusions, but at the same time so exact that it is even now one of the best guide-books the tourist can take in his hand, while surveying the romantic coast which is its theme; the episodes are appropriate and skilfully introduced; and the acquaintance with the philosophical theories which had then been formed to explain the natural phenomena of the Causeway, was so accurate, that it procured for the author the singular honour (for a poet), of correspondence with distinguished geologists, who hailed him as a brother of their order.

In the month of November 1815, Dr Drummond received a unanimous call from the congregation of Strand Street, Dublin, to become its junior minister, as colleague to Mr (afterwards Dr) James Armstrong, one of his early and most attached friends.* Of this call he determined to accept; and accordingly he resigned the charge of the 2nd congregation in Belfast over which he had exercised the pastorship for fifteen years. He had previously offered himself as candidate for the Chair of Logic and Belles Lettres in the Belfast Academical Institution, then recently founded, but had not been successful, although some of the most influential among the electors were his personal friends and members of his flock. There is no doubt that some of them voted against him on this occasion; perhaps unwilling that his time and thoughts should be withdrawn still farther than they already were,

* The method of election followed by the congregation of Strand Street (now Stephen's Green), on this occasion, deserves to be recorded. After hearing several ministers who were willing to afford to the congregation an opportunity of judging of their ministerial gifts, the Managing Committee issued a circular requesting each of the electors to return the names of two ministers from whom he thought it desirable that the ultimate selection should be made; and when these returns had been examined and compared, the two who had the largest number of votes on this preliminary scrutiny were notified to the members of the congregation, with the request that each should signify for which of them he gave his vote, by returning the paper after striking out the name of the other, of course subscribing his own name. By this means, sufficient opportunity was afforded for the free expression of opinion; while, at the same time, the danger of engendering heats by discussing the merits of the various candidates in public, was avoided. The final vote was *unanimous* in favour of Dr Drummond.

from that constant intercourse with his congregation in which all Irish Presbyterians so much delight. It has been thought that he decided on leaving Belfast in consequence of an estrangement thus produced between himself and the leading members of his congregation. But Dr Drummond distinctly assured me that such was not the case. There was no cessation of friendship between him and them. He went to Dublin because he was desirous of having his ministerial labours lightened by the assistance of a learned, able, and confidential colleague; because he expected to have, in consequence, leisure to carry on his literary works with less interruption; because he knew that he could have in Dublin many facilities for prosecuting his studies in the great libraries of the metropolis, such as a provincial town could not afford; and chiefly because in the capital city of the island, to which the nobility and gentry from different parts of the country still resorted in considerable numbers, and to which great numbers of persons were, as they still are, drawn by the business of the courts of law, and other occasions of amusement or occupation, he would possess the means of a larger influence for the dissemination of religious truth and the repression of religious intolerance then beginning to grow rampant. In this last hope he was not altogether disappointed.

He had not been more than two years resident in Dublin, when the death of the Princess Charlotte of

Wales, (1817), plunged the nation into grief, and called forth an *Elegiac Ballad* from his prolific pen, which is, I think, his least successful effort. He was unfortunate in choosing a kind of verse quite unsuited for such a subject; and there was nothing in the imagery or the diction to atone for the unhappy selection. The publication of it was, in my opinion, a mistake; but the error, (if it was one), was soon more than compensated by a poem on the Christian Beatitudes, entitled, *Who are the Happy?* (1818), to which were appended some other religious pieces. Among these are about thirty hymns, all of great merit, and some of them among the most beautiful now extant in the English language. All the hymn-books now employed by Unitarian Christians, and some that are in use among societies where the doctrines of Unitarianism find little favour, are enriched by pieces borrowed from this publication; and had their author never penned another line he would have earned the gratitude of the churches. With reference to one of these, a curious anecdote recurs to my memory. One of his antagonists in the field of controversy, arguing that Christian Unitarianism was a dry and barren system of negations, incapable of exciting the imagination or moving the devotional feelings, challenged him to produce from the whole compass of Unitarian hymnology, a composition that could be compared with that admirable lyric beginning—

“ Give thanks to God the Lord!
The victory is ours.”

This learned writer must however have looked blank with amazement and discomfiture when Dr Drummond, in his reply, pointed out that *he was himself the author of this hymn*, and referred to the publication and the page in which it had first appeared.

Not long afterwards, (1822), Dr Drummond published anonymously *Clontarf, a Poem*, which called forth the hearty commendation of Ireland's best beloved bard, Thomas Moore; and, in 1826, *Bruce's Invasion of Ireland, a Poem*. In 1835 he gave to the world *The Pleasures of Benevolence*; and many years later, *Ancient Irish Minstrelsy*, being a selection of poetical translations from bards of the olden time; whose compositions, however, were quite unworthy of his genius. It is true that, as rendered by him, they are for the most part graceful and spirited poems; but in almost every instance they owe all their grace and spirit to their gifted translator. He was a respectable Irish scholar; but, like many others who have meddled with Celtic literature, he was occasionally carried away by his enthusiasm, so as to find in its remains beauties which eyes less sharpened by sympathy failed to discover.

But in thus grouping together his poems, I have departed from the order of time.

It was after his settlement in Dublin, in the maturity of his years and of his reputation, that he came forward

as a writer on theological controversy ; and his very first work on that subject showed that a formidable champion had entered the arena. It was occasioned by an incident in a public discussion on the comparative merits of the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches, which was carried on in Dublin, between Mr Maguire, a Catholic priest, and Mr Pope, a clergyman of the Established Church. In the course of the controversy, Mr Maguire asserted that there were many doctrines held by Protestants generally, and even deemed essential to salvation, which could not be proved by reason or scripture, and which must therefore be abandoned unless the authority of tradition and the infallibility of the church be admitted. Among these he specified the doctrine of the Trinity. This assertion attracted, as indeed the whole controversy had done, much attention. Neither of the contending champions had followed out the argument above suggested systematically. Dr Drummond embraced the opportunity of speaking an earnest and truthful word to both parties, and to the friends of Protestantism more especially, by the publication of an Essay, entitled, *The Doctrine of the Trinity, founded neither on Scripture, nor on Reason and Common Sense, but on Tradition and the Infallible Church.* This publication, replete with learning, logic and argumentative eloquence, had a success such as seldom attends productions on the Unitarian side of the question ; having gone through three large editions in the United Kingdom, and at least one in America ; and it is still read,

quoted and referred to, while the replies—of which several appeared, some of them by men of distinguished ability—have, without exception, fallen into oblivion, or are read by those only who make it a rule to study no work on religious controversy without also reading, if it can be procured, any reply which it may have elicited—a good and salutary rule ; which, however, it is to be feared, few persons now trouble themselves with observing.

The *Essay on the Trinity* afforded Dr Drummond the opportunity, or rather subjected him to the necessity, of appealing to the public several times on other topics connected with the same general question. In the month of January 1828, a meeting of the “Reformation Society,” (which had been set on foot for the purpose of converting to Protestantism, the six millions of Irish Catholics, and which, according to its own shewing, had actually succeeded in converting 2,357), was held at Fermoy, in the county of Cork, at which the Earl of Mountcashell, a nobleman of very benevolent heart and intensely “evangelical” sentiments, presided. Some Roman Catholics presented themselves as disputants, prepared to argue the question of the superiority of their church. In the course of their address, they declared themselves ready to defend the principle laid down by Mr Maguire, namely, that the common doctrine of the Trinity of Persons in the Unity of God is not to be found in the Bible, as interpreted by its own declarations, with the aid of reason and common

sense ; so that either the members of the Reformation Society were bound to discard that doctrine altogether, or if they preferred to remain Trinitarians, they must submit to the teachings and interpretations of the Infallible Church. This question his lordship would not permit to be argued. The opponents insisted on their right to discuss that, or any other question bearing on the comparative merits of the churches of England and Rome. But Lord Mountcashell was peremptory, and finding it impossible to silence the advocates of Catholicism by other means, he called in the military, and caused his antagonists to be removed. The Protestants of the neighbourhood took the opportunity of presenting his lordship with an address, in which they highly applauded his conduct. In his reply, he took occasion to speak of “ *a Socinian named Drummond*, who had made a tool of the Rev. Mr Maguire,” by the employment of the argument to which his lordship had refused to listen at the Reformation Society’s meeting ; and to class him with “ the deist and the infidel.” But his lordship does not seem to have known the sort of man whom he presumed thus hardily to assail, else he would scarcely have ventured on so rash an attack. The “ *Socinian named Drummond*,” soon shewed that he could “ make a tool ” of a coroneted earl, as easily as of a tonsured priest. He immediately printed *Unitarian Christianity, the Religion of the Gospel, and the New Reformation a Chimera ; in five letters to the Earl of Mountcashell*, (1828) ; with respect to which the people of

Fermoy did not deem it expedient to present any address, nor his lordship to pen any reply. A similar provocation from the Most Reverend Dr Magee, Archbishop of Dublin, elicited another pamphlet, entitled *Unitarianism, no Feeble and Conceited Heresy; demonstrated in Two Letters to His Grace the Archbishop of Dublin*, (1829); a brochure to which that distinguished prelate never rejoined.

The powers, both of vigorous thought and expression which Dr Drummond had manifested in these writings, and the high eminence which he had already attained as a theological writer, pointed him out to the Committee of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association as a fit and proper person to be invited to advocate its interests, and defend its principles, as preacher at its anniversary meeting in London, on the 10th June 1829; and having received a cordial invitation to undertake that honourable but responsible duty, he complied. I was at that time settled in London as minister of the congregation then assembling in Carter Lane Chapel, Doctors' Commons, but which has since removed to Unity Church, Islington; and happening to be one of the very few persons in the metropolis with whom he had been previously acquainted,—being also the son of one of his old competitors, (who was nevertheless throughout life his steady friend,)* and being moreover a hearty admirer

* My father, the Rev. William Porter, of Newtown-limavady, had preached as a candidate in the congregation of Strand Street, before the election of Dr Drummond.

of his genius and character,—I prevailed on Dr Drummond to spend with me the greater part of his time which was not otherwise engaged; in this manner I gained an acquaintance with his mind and spirit such as ten years of less familiar intercourse could not have produced; and the more I knew of him the more deeply was I impressed with the genuine goodness of his heart, purity of his motives, and amiableness of his disposition. The same effect I believe was produced on every one who obtained the privilege of intimacy with him. He was indeed a man to be loved even more than he was admired. Few persons who knew him only as a theologian and controversialist would have suspected the tenderness and sensibility of his feelings; and not many of those who were acquainted with him only through the medium of his serious writings, could have formed any conception of the playfulness of his wit, and the hearty enjoyment which he felt in any humorous incident that he chanced to meet with. Of the former class were some emotions which I unthinkingly awakened on the morning when he preached his anniversary sermon. We were walking together towards the chapel where it was to be delivered, and had occasion to pass in front of St Bartholomew's Hospital. When we came to a well known spot,—I caught him by the arm and said, "Here then we stand upon the very spot where tradition affirms that Anne Askew, and Joanna Bocher, and George Van Paris were burnt for heresy; and Hooper and many

others in after times." The shock that this speech occasioned to my companion was such as made me regret that I had spoken the words. I was at first apprehensive lest I should have rendered it impossible for him to preach at all that day. Happily however he recovered his self-possession after a short interval, and delivered his discourse, which was a clear and powerful vindication of the employment of the intellect in the search after religious truth, with remarkable spirit and animation. The sermon was afterwards published under the title of *Reason the Handmaid of Religion*, (1829).

In rapid succession followed a discourse, entitled, *The Unitarian Christian's Faith*, (1830), a sermon which, if reprinted at the present time, might help to remind some who call themselves Unitarians and Christians, of the true and genuine import of those significant, but alas! much tortured and perverted terms:—*One is your Master, even Christ*, (1831), a discourse delivered in Clonmel, before the Presbyterian Synod of Muuster, and to which a similar remark may apply:—and soon afterwards an Essay, entitled *Original Sin; an Irrational and Unscriptural Fiction, dishonouring God and demoralizing Man*, (1832). This is one of the most elaborate of all Dr Drummond's publications; but the title was unhappily chosen; it bears a warlike and hostile aspect on its very front, which has repelled from its perusal thousands who, if they could only have been induced to read and study

its contents, might have risen from its perusal with better notions both of God and man than those with which they commenced the task. At no time of his life was Dr Drummond sufficiently careful to conciliate his reader; and his negligence in this respect rendered some of his works far less useful to the object which they were designed to promote, than they would otherwise have been.

Dr Drummond's next publication of a doctrinal character, included two sermons, on the *Paternal Character of God*, and *Truth the Parent of Liberty*, which had been delivered before the members of the Scottish Unitarian Christian Association, at their anniversary meeting on the 29th of September, 1833*; and which were printed at the earnest request of the persons present; a request with which he was at first rather re-

* I hope to receive pardon for mentioning that I was present, and bore a part, (though a subordinate one). in the services of that anniversary meeting. Dr Drummond preached in the morning and evening; it devolved on me to officiate in the afternoon. My sermon on that occasion was afterwards published, entitled, *The Creed of the Many, and the Faith of the Few*; and is one of the few publications of mine which attained the honour of a second edition. During our visit to Scotland at this time, a numerous party, of which Dr Drummond and the Rev. George Harris were members, but of which I believe I am now the only survivor, made a short excursion among the western lakes and highlands, the memory of which will be a cherished one to me, so long as I may be able to remember anything. Poetry and religion, philosophy and *fun*. (I cannot find a fitter name for it), held our minds,—*mine at least*, entranced—from the time of our starting from Glasgow till our return. *Eheu!*

luctant to comply ; but the urgency of which was fully justified by the unusual excellence of the sermons themselves. It was while he was attending that meeting that he learned the affecting news of the death of the Rajah Ram Mohun Roy ; and not long after his return to Dublin, he preached, and afterwards published a discourse occasioned by that event, under the title of *A Learned Indian in search of a Religion*.* Of this discourse two editions appeared. Next year brought out *Tritheism Exposed ; a Letter to the Church and Congregation assembled in Union Chapel, Abbey Street* ; a protest against a charge of *dishonesty*, which their pastor, the Rev. D. Stewart, had advanced against *all* believers in

* The title of this discourse was suggested by that of a publication, anonymous, but known to be from the pen of the poet Thomas Moore, *Travels of an Irish Gentleman in search of a Religion*, which at that time attracted much attention. A story was current, how true I know not, that Moore had originally intended to make his hero end his travels by becoming a Unitarian of some sort or other ; Arian or Samosatene, or what is now denominated Humanitarian ; but that, on showing his manuscript to a bookseller, the latter declined having anything to do with it in that shape ; well knowing that as it then stood, it would never *pay*, though he offered to give several hundred pounds for it, if the story could be so altered as to make it terminate in the conversion of the "Irish Gentleman" *either to orthodox Protestantism or to the creed of the Roman Catholic Church*. The author is said to have adopted the idea, and being, like the bookseller, intellectually indifferent to the two communions to which his choice was restricted, he naturally gave the preference to the Roman Catholic Religion, in which he had been brought up. I have no better authority than rumour for this anecdote ; and it may, perhaps, have been quite erroneous ; but the readers of Moore's beautiful tale of *The Epicurean*, will not look upon it as altogether destitute of probability.

the simple unity of the Divine Being, but with especial reference to Dr Drummond by name, in two sermons preached in their pulpit and published at their request. Mr Stewart rejoined in a letter to the congregation of Strand Street, containing a defence of the statements in his two sermons, and Dr Drummond summed up the controversy in a concluding letter, to which, I believe, no reply was attempted. This was the only occasion, so far as I can recollect, in which, after once delivering his sentiments, he recurred to the same subject in a separate publication. He was more solicitous, that his word should be the true word, than that it should be the last word in any of the discussions in which he was engaged.

Among his controversial publications I here introduce, though they did not appear till a later period, his treatise, entitled, *Supreme Religious Worship due to the Father only*; being a reply to a tract, by the Rev. Dr Urwick; and his translation of *Fur Predestinatus*, a tract on the moral argument against Calvinism, which, in common with many other writers, he ascribes,—though in my opinion erroneously,—to the pen of Archbishop Sancroft.*

* No reader of *Fur Predestinatus*, can fail to perceive that it was written in Holland, by an adherent, if not a member of the remonstrant party, in that country; and that its design was to decry the principles of their opponents, the Gomarists, or rigid Calvinists, who had been placed in possession of all the offices both of church and

But the opponents of Dr Drummond's theological views were not always satisfied with conducting their controversies through the medium of the pulpit or the press; some of them determined to invoke the aid of the Courts of Equity, for the purpose of ruining heretics whom they could neither silence nor refute. Among those was a person then known as George Mathews, whose position enabled him to exercise a baleful influence over the ecclesiastical affairs of the Irish presbyterians for many years. This man's real name was *Duncan Chisholm* ;*

state, by the vote of the Synod of Dort. But this was a matter in which Archbishop Sancroft was not concerned, and in which he probably felt very little interest. The fact seems to have been that Sancroft, when in Holland, received from some one a copy of *Fur Predestinatus*, or perhaps transcribed it with his own hand from a copy that was lent to him. He brought it with him to England; and when it was found among his papers, and published, it was believed to be his Grace's own composition: a supposition which internal evidence refutes. Dr Drummond appears never to have questioned its authenticity as a work of Sancroft's.

* This man had the distinguished honour of a parliamentary blue-book, devoted to himself exclusively, under the title of *Returns*; — *Duncan Chisholm, alias George Mathews: ordered by the House of Commons to be printed, 8th May 1851*; (279, I., pp 241, fol.) from which I have extracted the chief incidents of his history. But nothing short of the perusal of the book itself can give any idea of the blindness, stupidity, and absolute infatuation, into which Lords-Lieutenant, Chief Secretaries, and Under Secretaries appear to have sunk, on all occasions when his character and previous malversations came in question. The only person, of all the officials who had intercourse with him, that at once saw through his real designs, and attempted to put a stop to his robberies, was Mr T. F. Kennedy, Paymaster of Civil Services; who repeatedly called the attention of the Lords of the

he was originally a solicitor and leather-seller at Inverness; became insolvent; absconded under a charge of pecuniary malversation and perjury; enlisted in the 53d Regiment, under the assumed name of George Mathews; was promoted to the rank of serjeant; was reduced to the ranks for improper conduct; but afterwards obtained an appointment as "Staff Military Clerk in the Brigade Office, Dublin." Having received a better education than that which usually falls to the lot of persons in such

Treasury and of the Irish Government to the irregularities occurring in Mr Mathews' (i. e. *Chisholm's*), department, and to the risk of loss thence arising; but to no purpose—unless we are to suppose that Mr Kennedy's own removal from office, which took place soon after all his charges against Mathews had been demonstratively proved, was the consequence of his interference with the favourite official. It appears that many complaints of Mr Mathews' fraudulent practices were from time to time sent into the Castle; *these were all referred to himself to report upon!* His explanations were for a long time accepted without further examination; and this was afterwards referred to as an "official inquiry;" and whenever allusion was made to such charges, complainants were told that the matter had already been made the subject of "official inquiry," by which his character had been amply vindicated, and that the charges could not be re-opened! One of his artifices was ingenious though simple. He had been charged with *perjury* at the time when he ran away from Inverness. Whenever this accusation was referred to, he chose instead of "*perjury*," to read "*forgery!*" he constantly protested that he never had been charged with *forgery*, (which was true enough); and so Sir T. Redington, in his communications with those who wished to know whether this George Mathews had not fled from Scotland to avoid a prosecution for "*perjury*," never could he got to give any other answer than that "no charge of *forgery* had ever been brought against him!" It is proper to add, that the complaints referred to proceeded, *in every case*, from adherents to Mr Mathews' own creed.

situations, he attracted the attention of his superiors ; and ultimately became one of the clerks in the Chief Secretary's office in Dublin Castle. His business talents were great ; his application unbounded ; and he soon rendered himself useful, if not indispensable, to the embryo statesmen, who, from time to time, were sent over by successive administrations, to serve their apprenticeship to public life, in the simple and easy office of governing Ireland ! Some of these interesting young noblemen were as weak as they were well-meaning, and became the mere passive instruments for accomplishing the purposes of Mr George Mathews, *alias* Duncan Chisholm. The branch of the public service which he most coveted was that of dispensing the pecuniary bounty of the state to those who were its objects ; and he soon was intrusted with the uncontrolled management of the *Million Fund*, which had been granted by Parliament for the relief of the clergy who had suffered from the tithe-agitation—the *Regium Donum* voted for the support of non-conformist ministers—the *Concordatum Fund*, a charitable grant amounting to between £4000 and £5000 a-year—and the *Civil Contingencies Fund*, designed for similar purposes, and amounting to about £1000 a-year. Possessing the unlimited confidence of his superiors, this man was enabled to rob the public and defraud individuals of sums to a very large, but hitherto unascertained, amount ; but at length, having received information that an inquiry

was about to be instituted into his proceedings, not by his blinded dupes in the Castle, but by the Lords of the Treasury, he absconded a second time from public justice. Soon after his flight, two bills of indictment for embezzlement were found against him by the Grand Jury of the City of Dublin; but not having been arrested, he has, of course, not been tried.

It appears that Chisholm, (or George Mathews), had not been long ensconced in his office in Dublin Castle, when he began to turn his attention to the affairs of the non-subscribing church, thinking that they would afford a profitable field for the exercise of his peculiar talents. With this view, he endeavoured to get himself enrolled as a seat-holder and member of the congregation of Eustace Street, Dublin; in which capacity he would have been enabled to file a bill in Chancery against its trustees and other officers, with a view to the confiscation of its funds and landed property; but this scheme was defeated by the vigilance of its minister, the late Dr Ledlie; than whom few men were more sagacious or had a clearer insight into character. Dr Ledlie early perceived the corrupt and selfish nature of the well-paid government official; and by his advice, Mr Mathews' overture was declined. But Duncan Chisholm was not a man to be easily turned aside from a bad purpose. Foiled in his intention to proceed by bill, he obtained the consent of the Attorney General to institute a suit

by information ; and having procured the aid of a speculative solicitor, soon dragged into the Court of Chancery, the Trustees of the General Fund,* and the ministers, trustees, and committee of the two congregations of Eustace Street and Strand Street, in Dublin ; the allegation in all cases being that the trusts had been founded

* The "General Fund" was instituted by contributions collected in the year 1710, in consequence of a prospectus put forth by Sir Arthur Langford, Bart., (a member of the congregation of Wood Street, in Dublin, which afterwards moved to Strand Street), and other gentlemen who were, like himself, Protestant Dissenters. Among the reasons set forth to induce persons to contribute, the following occurs:—"As nothing should be more dear to us than the LIBERTY OF OUR CONSCIENCES, so there is nothing we should be more deeply concerned for, than to secure the enjoyment of this blessing, not only to ourselves, but to our POSTERITY AFTER US;" and the deed of trust, dated 1st May 1710, commences thus:—"Whereas, from a pious disposition and concern for the interest of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the welfare of precious souls, Sir Arthur Langford, Baronet, and Joseph Damer, Esq., with divers other well disposed Christians, have designed and intended to set on foot a stock or fund for the support of religion in and about Dublin, and the south of Ireland, by assisting and supporting the *Protestant Dissenting interest* against unreasonable prosecutions (some of which they have been recently exposed to contrary to her Majesty's sentiments, publicly declared), and for the education of youth designed for the ministry among *Protestant Dissenters*; and for assisting *Protestant Dissenting Congregations* that are poor and unable to provide for their ministers; and for such other pious and religious ends, and by such means as shall by the subscribers hereunto be thought proper and reasonable for promoting the design and intention herein expressed." This is absolutely all that is found in the document that has any reference whatsoever to religious doctrine. From this it would appear self-evident that *all Protestant Dissenters* of any kind, if approved by the Trustees, are qualified to share in the bounty of the fund; and that being set on foot for securing to posterity "*Liberty of Conscience*," it ought to be administered in the most liberal and comprehensive

at a time when the profession of Unitarian sentiments was prohibited by law ; that the founders, therefore, must be held to have been orthodox Trinitarians in belief ; that the funds and properties which they had created must for ever continue to be applied to the support of Trinitarianism exclusively ; and that the management must for ever remain in the hands of Trinitarians. It was even contended that a special fund, which had been raised a few years previously to the institution of these suits in Chancery, by the congregation of Strand Street, for the support of its ministers' widows and families, though set on foot when the whole of the members were avowed Unitarians, and with a particular view to the benefit of Mrs Armstrong, the wife of the Rev. Dr Armstrong, Dr Drummond's colleague, in case she should survive her husband (as in point of fact she did,) must follow the adjudication of the meeting-house ; and a supplemental bill was filed for the purpose of having this special fund, which had been omitted in the original information, handed over to Trinitarian trustees, for the use and benefit of the widows of Trinitarian ministers, being themselves also Trinitarians ! Of these suits, two were

sense. But Sir Edward B. Sugden decided that persons of Unitarian judgment and belief, are, by the terms above set forth, excluded from the benefit and management of the charity ! It should be added, that although the ministers and several of the lay members of Strand Street congregation had always been trustees of the fund, not one of them had ever derived any pecuniary advantage from it whatsoever.

pending at the time when the Dissenters' Chapels Act mercifully stepped in to stay the hand of the spoiler, and to confirm the rightful owners in the possession of the properties bequeathed to them by their noble-minded predecessors and ancestors ; but the then Lord Chancellor of Ireland, Sir Edward Sugden, had already transferred the General Fund to the persons nominated by the *virtuous and religious Duncan Chisholm*, who had stepped forward as relator in the suit : that wretched swindler, who had come to Ireland a few years previously, as a fugitive from justice, and left it a short time afterwards in the same capacity ! The ground on which his lordship came to this decision was the somewhat extraordinary one, that the term "Protestant Dissenter," which was used in the original trust-deed, necessarily implied a believer in the doctrine of the Trinity ! I can hardly regret now a decision, which, unjust as it seemed, and still seems to me, called forth that admirable letter from Dr Drummond in *Explanation and Defence of the Principles of Protestant Dissent* (1842) ; in which, while preserving the writer's own dignity and the decorum due to the bench whose judgment he impugned, he has left to future judges in equity no excuse for adopting the erroneous interpretation by which Sir Edward B. Sugden was misled. In the proceedings connected with the passing of the Dissenters' Chapels Act in 1844, Dr Drummond felt, as was natural, a deep concern ; in fact, his correspondence and conversation at that period, shewed that he laboured

under an intense anxiety for the success of a measure in which both his interest, his feelings, and his principles were deeply involved. It would have been a hard trial had he been sent forth in advanced life, and with failing bodily powers, from the church in which he had for thirty years preached the gospel of the grace of God ; and had he been doomed to see his wife and children despoiled of a part of that support which he had expected them to enjoy, when deprived of his own aid and guidance. No wonder that he felt a deep anxiety for the passing of that measure. But he wisely left the prosecution of the steps which were needful for procuring its enactment to younger men, better suited for conducting such undertakings with effect ; and it is only justice to say, that, among those who took an active part in the great work, few laboured more strenuously or more successfully than the members of a deputation from the Strand Street church, headed by his colleague, the Rev. George A. Armstrong, son of the Dr Armstrong who was for many years Dr Drummond's co-pastor, and throughout life his steady friend.

It would be doing deep injustice to the memory of Dr Drummond to lead the reader of this memoir to imagine that, even when he was most actively engaged in those sharp controversies which I have enumerated, they occupied the whole of his mind and thoughts. Far otherwise. His pulpit ministrations were, even then, in the great

majority of cases, as they had been from the commencement of his ministerial life, devotional, earnest, and practical. His sermon on the *Union and Reciprocal Influences of Science and Religion*, occasioned by the meeting of the British Association in Dublin, in the year 1835, and published in the same year; his *Charge at the Ordination of the Rev. James Martineau*, (1829); his Discourse entitled *Humanity to Animals, the Christian's Duty*, (1830,) and his *Funeral Sermon on the Death of the Rev. Dr Armstrong* give a more correct idea of the prevailing character of his preaching. They have the charm of mingled gentleness and power, which shews the hold that such subjects had upon his own heart and tends strongly to impress that of the reader. The subject of humanity to the lower animals was a favourite one with him. He often adverted to it in society, and especially when a walk or drive in the country brought him where large numbers of them, tame or wild, were to be seen assembled. On this subject he wrote an excellent essay, entitled, *On the Rights of Animals, and Man's Obligation to treat them with Humanity*, which was printed in 1838. This essay, which abounds in scientific details, and thoughts at once humane and just, was undertaken with a view to competition for a prize offered by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; but unfortunately it was entrusted to a gentleman who neglected to deliver it to the secretary of the society until

the time fixed for receiving it was past. He also produced two biographical works :—*The Life of Michael Servetus, the Spanish Physician, who, for the alleged crime of Heresy, was entrapped, imprisoned, and burnt by John Calvin, the Reformer, in the city of Geneva, October 27th 1553* ; and the *Biography of Archibald Hamilton Rowan*. The former of these was printed in 1848. I have had occasion to go over the same ground that is occupied by this work ; and I have found throughout a very careful adherence to the documents cited for the different facts and opinions alleged ; nevertheless it appears to me that Dr Drummond has occasionally been misled by relying too much on intermediate authorities, when the primary were within reach and might have been consulted. In the case of the *Biography of Hamilton Rowan*, the documents which were placed at the compiler's disposal by the family chiefly interested, place the authenticity of the narrative beyond the reach of question. Dr Drummond and Mr Rowan had been for many years intimate friends ; and the task of preparing his memoirs for publication was with the former a labour of love. He was attached to Mr Rowan himself by ties of no ordinary strength ; and for Miss Rowan, at whose solicitation he undertook the preparation of the memoir of her deceased father, he felt the same union of veneration and affection which that admirable lady inspired in the breast of every one who knew her, and was capable of appreciating her worth.

Soon after his removal to Dublin, Dr Drummond was elected a member of the Royal Irish Academy, by far the most eminent and important of the learned societies in Ireland. I understand that he contributed several papers to the volumes of its transactions. Among these I can speak from personal acquaintance, of his *Essay on the Genuineness of the Poems ascribed to Ossian, by Macpherson*. These productions, after circulating for many years in English, had more recently appeared in Gaelic, under the auspices of the Highland Society of Scotland; and their publication in that language was held by many to be a convincing proof that Macpherson had only stated the truth when he affirmed that he had found them in Gaelic, and had merely translated them into English. But Dr Drummond, by the exertion of that nice critical discrimination which he possessed in no common degree, was enabled to demonstrate that the pretended Gaelic original is nothing more than a translation from the so-called English version; and has amply vindicated for Macpherson the honour, (which the latter always indignantly disclaimed), of being the *author*, not the translator and editor merely, of those wonderful poems which pass under the name of Ossian. This essay gained for Dr Drummond the honour of a prize carried off from many distinguished competitors.

I have dwelt largely on Dr Drummond's writings, because he was distinctively a literary man, and the

history of his writings is the history of his mind. On surveying the long catalogue of his publications, it is impossible not to be struck with the richness of his mental stores, the versatility of his intellectual powers, and the amazing vigour and fertility with which he poured forth the acquisitions and creations of his genius. We might almost say of him, as was said of a more illustrious but not a better man, "*nihil fere intaetum reliquit; nihil quod tetigit non ornavit.*" Take him for all in all, as a man, as a scholar, a theologian, an orator, a poet,—it is no disparagement of any living man to say that he has not left his equal behind him, in the denomination of which he was so long the *decus et tutamen*, the ornament and the champion. Nor were his private virtues less eminent in their sphere than the splendid talents which attracted the admiration of the public; though, of course, less generally known. In thinking of his character, the lines of Pope rise instinctively to the mind,

"Of manners gentle and affections mild,
In wit a man, simplicity a child."

Never did a purer or more sympathetic spirit animate a human form. One of his most vehement opponents in controversy, who had known him long, and at one period intimately, speaks of him,—in the very same sentence in which he denounces his doctrines in terms of unmitigated virulence which there could be no advantage in now repeating,—as "the learned, virtuous and amiable Dr

Drummond ;” and it is to the credit of all concerned that among his many theological antagonists he had not a single personal enemy. It deserves to be held in remembrance that — though he was keenly alive to inconsistency in conduct and character, quite capable of wielding the weapon of sarcasm with its epigrammatic sting had he been so minded, and at times inclined to expose with playful humour the palpable sophisms with which his arguments were sometimes met—his writings are singularly free from that personal asperity which so often adds bitterness to controversy. Every reader of his writings must perceive that he at least endeavoured to act upon the advice which he gave to a theological opponent, “ Drop the personalities, and answer the argument ;” and every one who is aware of the kind of reasoning which he had to expose, the spirit in which it was advanced, and, in some cases, the character of the persons from whom it proceeded, will be aware that, in conducting his part of those discussions with mildness and courtesy, Dr Drummond must have often exercised considerable self-restraint. It was a sacrifice of feeling on the altar of duty ; and he made it unhesitatingly.

To such a man his private friends could not but be attached by ties of unusual strength. He had many friends ; among whom were men and women of the highest intellectual attainments and of the most sterling worth ; and the love and admiration with which he was regarded

by such persons were in themselves no feeble attestation to the excellence of his character. He was of a nature eminently genial and social. In mixed society he sometimes took a less active part in conversation than his conversational powers would have justified; for, though an eloquent speaker, he was, what eloquent speakers sometimes are not, a good listener; but his presence always diffused joy, especially among the young, with whom he delighted in unbending his intellectual bow. No one who ever spent an evening in his company will forget the hearty ringing laugh with which he welcomed every outpouring of innocent hilarity, or the unaffected sympathy with which he listened to every tale of sorrow. "He rejoiced with them that did rejoice, and mourned with them that wept." In the domestic circle his affectionate dispositions manifested themselves unceasingly. Even in advanced life he was among his children rather as an elder brother or companion than as a parent; and his tenderness was well requited.

Among his peculiarities, the strong love of books which he always manifested, and sometimes rather inconveniently indulged, must not be forgotten. It will have been remarked that his fondness for his books broke forth, though in the form of playful hyperbole, in his correspondence with his sister, when he was only twenty years of age. It continued with him through life. In the course of time he accumulated a library of several

thousand volumes, many of which were rare and valuable,—others, it must be confessed, of a very miscellaneous character,—which occupied every available inch of space from the top to the bottom of his house. He never could resist the temptation of going to a book-auction, “just to see what the collection was like,” and seldom returned without having made an addition of a dozen or a score of volumes to his already overgrown stock. But he was not like some collectors, a collector merely. He was an assiduous, and careful, as well as rapid reader; and there were few books in his library which he did not know sufficiently well to be able to refer to them at once for information of which he was in quest, and which they could afford.

Dr Drummond was under the middle size. In early life his figure was slight, and his appearance even more youthful than his years would have led any one to expect; as he advanced in age he gained flesh, though he long retained his active step and bodily activity. His countenance was an index to his character; not merely handsome, but beautiful; and expressing as a mirror the various emotions of his mind. I am uncertain whether it was most to be admired as I knew it first in the beauty of early manhood, or as I saw it last in the mild dignity of venerable age. It may perhaps be deemed worthy of consideration by those who think they can explain all the phenomena of the human mind as the result of mere

organic structure, how to account for the fact that he who was one of the most graphic describers of natural scenery was from a very early period in life remarkably near-sighted; and how it was that one of the most harmonious of poets, whose verses have a peculiar fitness for being adapted to music, was so deficient in musical ear that he never turned a tune. Surely, there must have been something more than mere mechanism concerned in the production of that intellect, so keen, so searching, so lofty; those feelings so varied, so tender, so sympathetic; that soul so pure, so loving, and so true.

But alas! a time arrived when that clear and brilliant mind was doomed to experience an eclipse, through the decay of the bodily structure with which it was united. In consequence of a succession of apoplectic attacks, his memory some years ago began at first to grow weak, and afterwards to fail almost entirely. Still there were occasions on which brief corruscations of the wit that once sent joy and mirth around the social circle, flashed forth out of the deepening gloom. On my last interview with him, knowing the state of weakness in which he had been for some time, I was agreeably surprised to find that he recollected me, and inquired how matters were going on with us in Belfast. He was seated near the window in his bed-room whence he had a good view of the street; and seeing a drove of pigs go past, he called my attention to them, and added, with a mock heroic emphasis that

reminded me of other days, "You and I, my friend, from our high intellectual eminence, can still look down upon the swinish multitude!" Though there were indications not to be mistaken, of rapidly failing faculties, I can bear my testimony that he took a lively interest in what concerned the highest good of his fellow-men. For a long time his kindly affections shewed themselves as strong as ever for those whom he had known and loved. Gradually he ceased to recognize even his nearest and dearest; and life became an intellectual blank. It is only historical fidelity to record, (though I may not dwell upon it), the unceasing tenderness which watched beside him, anticipated his every want, and soothed, as far as human care and love could soothe, his every pain. At length kind nature gently drew a veil over an existence here, which if protracted would have only been a scene of prolonged suffering; and the pure spirit left its frail tenement to ascend to its kindred sky. He died on Monday, the 16th October, 1865, being then upwards of eighty-seven years of age; and was interred in the cemetery at Harold's Cross, near Dublin, on the following Friday.

Dr Drummond was twice married. By his first wife, Barbara, daughter of David Tomb, Esq., of Belfast, he had several children, who died in infancy, and has left a surviving son, William Bruce Drummond, Esq., of Dublin, and two daughters. By his second wife, Catharine, daughter of Robert Blackley, Esq., of Dublin, he has left

two sons, the Rev. Robert Blackley Drummond, minister of St Mark's Chapel, Edinburgh, and the Rev. James Drummond, junior minister of Cross Street Chapel, Manchester ; and a daughter, married to John Campbell, Esq., of Copeland View, Belfast.

J. SCOTT PORTER.

BELFAST, NOVEMBER 1866.

S E R M O N S.

S E R M O N S .

I.

T H A N K S G I V I N G .

LUKE xvii. 15, 16,—“And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his (Jesus’) feet, giving him thanks; and he was a Samaritan.”

OUR Lord, as he journeyed towards Jerusalem, through the midst of Samaria and Galilee, on his entrance into a certain village, was met by a group of ten men, all of whom were infected with the loathsome disease of leprosy. They had heard of our Lord’s numerous miraculous cures, and were naturally desirous of sharing his favour, and experiencing his power of healing: accordingly they stood at a distance, for they were prohibited by the Levitical law from approaching persons in health, lest the infection of their disease should be communicated. The same law also obliged them to announce their approach, by calling out *Unclean! Unclean!* Standing,

therefore, afar off, they lifted up their voices, and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Such an appeal was never made to the benevolent Physician in vain. When he saw their sad condition, he said unto them, "Go, show yourselves unto the priests;" an injunction implying more than may, at the first glance, be apparent. No leper was permitted to show himself to the priest until his cure was completed. Our Lord's words therefore imply that they might forthwith proceed to give this last decisive proof that their disease was gone—that every vestige of it would have disappeared before they could reach the priest's residence. Accordingly, as they proceeded on their way, they found their wishes accomplished—their disease was removed—all their wonted health returned, and with it, we may suppose, an ample share of those feelings of delight which succeed to the removal of pain, and which generally accompany a restoration to health after a protracted, a dangerous, or a hopeless malady. Their emotions of joy, indeed, appear to have been so great as to absorb all other emotions, and make them forget the kindness of the benefactor to whom they were so greatly indebted. Having hastened to obey his injunction, as well as to fulfil the requirements of the law, by shewing themselves to the priest, surely their next duty

was to glorify God for their miraculous cure, and to thank the benevolent prophet by whose agency it had been accomplished. But of the ten, there was only one who entertained or expressed such sentiments. This one, "when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice," for he was not ashamed to give such utterance to his gratitude as could be heard, "glorified God," acknowledging the divine power and goodness manifested in his cure. Nor was this all. He also, according to the Oriental mode of profound obeisance, fell down on his face at the feet of Jesus, giving him thanks. A person who knew only this much of the history, would probably have some curiosity to know who was the man thus distinguished above his fellows by piety and gratitude. A Jew would have little hesitation in concluding that he must have been one of his own nation and tribe; and least of all, would he surmise that it could be one of a race so much detested by his countrymen, as the Samaritans. Nevertheless, "He was a Samaritan:" one of those whom the religious prejudices of the Jews would not allow to be possessed of any virtue, and from whom they would have withheld the common rights of humanity. Our Lord was pleased with the conduct of this Samaritan, as much as he disapproved that of his companions. "Were there not ten cleansed,"

said he, "but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." His question conveys a palpable rebuke of their impiety and ingratitude. They had a blessing conferred on them which no power on earth could bestow,—which no power save that of God could effect. They were rescued from a painful and loathsome distemper, which kept them in a state of excommunication from society, and robbed life of all its enjoyments; and yet they showed as little grateful consciousness of the blessing, as if they had been so many stocks or stones. No wonder if he, whose practice of ascribing all to the glory of God was so habitual, felt indignant at their conduct, especially when contrasted with that of the stranger, from whom less was to be expected. Him he honoured with a still farther mark of his regard, by saying unto him, "Arise, go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole,"—literally, hath *saved* thee; an instance out of many, showing that the words *saved* and *salvation* are not always to be understood in connection with future eternal happiness.

The conduct of the lepers presents us with only too faithful a picture of the conduct of the great mass of mankind. That there are some like the Samaritan stranger, grateful to God for all his good-

ness, it would be presumptuous to deny,—that there are many who evince that pious gratitude is a virtue which exercises but little influence over their mind and heart is equally undeniable,—and that but a comparatively small number, if any, constantly endeavour to be as grateful as they can, it would be hazardous to contradict. And yet gratitude is a virtue by no means foreign or uncongenial to the human breast. It stirs emotions in our bosoms whenever we receive a benefit, and we can no more repress them than we can keep down the ebullitions of joy or the bursts of grief. Our feelings of thankfulness and our expressions of praise, are as naturally associated with the name of a benefactor, as the effect with its cause. As we feel indebted to men for their kindness, so, also, do we feel indebted to God, when we cause his mercies to pass before us. When we devote ourselves to serious meditation on his works of nature and of grace, it seems scarcely possible to be cold or ungrateful. All that was originally good and amiable in our nature, must be perverted or annihilated if we can contemplate with indifference the rich effusions of his bounty and the inexhaustible treasures of his love.

But our misfortune, or rather our fault, is, that we do not contemplate them either so frequently or so intensely as we ought. The same condem-

nation which the Prophet Isaiah pronounced on the Jews, is applicable to how many of the present day, that "they regarded not the work of the Lord, nor considered the operation of his hands." The most conspicuous blessings of providence are overlooked or disregarded because they are common. With how little admiration, if with any, are the most striking phenomena of nature beheld by the majority of mankind? Though the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth the work of his hands: though day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge, how few are affected by the contemplation, or hear the voice, of creation, chanting the praises of the Creator. We enjoy the light without considering the munificence of the hand which supplies its inexhaustible fountain. We expect and enjoy the regular and beautiful vicissitude of the seasons, without lifting up our thoughts in grateful praise to Him whose vivifying breath imparts life and beauty to the animal and vegetable tribes, which clothes the earth with verdure, expands the fruits and ripens the golden grain. We enjoy health and strength—plenty and peace, all bodily, intellectual, moral, and spiritual enjoyments, without a sufficiently grateful recollection of what we owe to the Giver of all. But were we to be suddenly deprived of them:

should the sun forget to shine, or the earth to yield her wonted increase, we should be filled with consternation, and be roused to express the sense we should entertain of their value, by the bitterness with which we would deplore their loss. When left in darkness, we should begin to remember what we owe to the Dispenser of light, and in the sufferings of want recollect that plenty is a blessing which merits the expression of thanks to its Bestower. The slave can appreciate the value of freedom, and the sick man knows how dearly health is to be prized. The Jews were miraculously fed with manna and quails in the wilderness, and drank of the water which flowed from the stricken rock, and felt a momentary glow of gratitude. But they soon "forgot the works and the wonders which the Lord had shewed them. Of the Rock that begat them they were unmindful, and forgot the God that formed them. But when God visited them with chastisements, and slew them, then they sought him, and remembered that God was their Rock, and the High God their Redeemer." To guard us against such ingratitude the Apostle enjoins us to give thanks to God *always*—a word however which we are not to interpret in too rigorous a sense, as if the whole business of life were prayer; but we are to understand him as enjoining us to

cultivate a grateful disposition towards the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and give expression to it on all proper occasions. Accordingly, he who promptly and cheerfully acknowledges the divine mercies, and cherishes in his soul an habitual gratitude for them, may be justly said, in the evangelical sense of the term, to thank God always.

Gratitude to God then has its seat in the heart. It consists not in cold verbal declarations, nor in formal and frigid acts of worship, but in a strong consciousness of obligation prompting to the culture of such affections, and the performance of such duties, as are acceptable to God and well pleasing in his sight. It requires us to entertain a lively remembrance of all the benefits conferred on us by the Almighty, whether public or private, common or particular, national or domestic, social or solitary, to estimate them at their proper value, and to make such acknowledgment for them as the laws of God, and a sense of gratitude itself will dictate. To remember God's benefits, then, is the first step towards being grateful, for we can scarcely call them to mind without feeling emotions of thankfulness springing in the heart. Never is the power of memory so beneficially exercised as in a task like this ; never is its exercise so decidedly

an obligation. In other subjects a defect of memory may be more a misfortune than a fault, though there are instances of forgetfulness, which bring an impeachment on the moral character, as of just debts and solemn promises. What degree of blame shall we attach to forgetfulness of great benefits, even though their Bestower never expected them to be held in remembrance? Does not the very circumstance that no acknowledgment is looked for, while it enhances the benefactor's generosity, argue great deficiency in the moral feelings of him who receives the benefit, if he does not feel, and if he does not own that he feels, grateful? Of all characters, that of the ingrate is the most universally despised and disowned. It is foreign to the proper nature of man, it is foreign even to the most ferocious of the brute creation. The wildest of them can be tamed by kindness. They will fawn at the feet of their daily visitor, and lick the hand which supplies their food. Shall man be less sensible of the mercies of the great Benefactor, less unequivocal in the expression of his thanks. Whilst he riots in the enjoyment of an endless variety and boundless profusion of animal, moral, and intellectual delights, shall he consign to oblivion all thoughts of that great Being by whom they are supplied, and who is conveying to him every day, every

hour, and every moment, some new memento to awaken his gratitude and love?

To guard against that forgetfulness into which so many fall, we should set apart fixed times and seasons, for the special purpose of reviving our pious recollection of the divine mercies. In public and in private, in the solemn assemblies of the people, and in the retirement of our own chamber, when we have abstracted ourselves from the cares and vanities of the world, and commune with our own hearts on our beds and are still, we should cause them to pass in review before us, and as they pass elicit our grateful thanksgivings. We should reflect again and again on the works and the ways of God, especially as they have been manifested in our own history, on all the happy circumstances of our lives, on the blessings we have enjoyed, and on those which we now enjoy or hope to possess. We are sufficiently disposed to remember the evils, real or imaginary, that have befallen us, and to magnify them as we sometimes magnify our virtues. It would be better for us to forget the evil and remember the good; or rather to regard the evils, the misfortunes, or afflictions which we may have suffered, as blessings in disguise, as intended by the beneficent Father of all for some salutary purpose, to rouse us from some idle day-dream of

the imagination, to raise the thoughts from earth to heaven, from the fading joys of time to the bliss of eternity. Nor should we be contented with a hasty superficial glance at the most obvious or common of the divine favours, but consider those which seem to be marked by some special providence, of which every man, who will take a careful retrospect of the past, may behold numerous instances. Many of the blessings which God confers on us are so striking, that even the professed unbeliever will sometimes be prompted by their occurrence, to bless that God whose providence he denies. But there are many others which, though they do not thus forcibly obtrude themselves on our attention, are not less worthy of being noted in the book of our remembrance, or made the topic of gratitude and praise. We should therefore exercise our powers to recal them, and by frequent revisal keep them fresh and green in the memory. We are not to forget, in our advanced years, the mercies we enjoyed in youth, nor in a short period of sickness our long years of health, nor in misfortune our season of prosperity—much less in prosperity should we forget by what providential circumstances we escaped misfortune,—nor when we have arrived at our desired haven, omit our thanksgivings to Him who conducted us safe through all the perils of our voyage.

In order to promote habitual gratitude to God, we should learn to appreciate, at their just value and importance, the various blessings which he confers. Our thanks are generally commensurate to the estimation in which we hold a favour or a gift, and we naturally feel grateful for a gift which may be intrinsically worth nothing, but which the kindness of the giver has stamped with an adventitious value. All the gifts of God are excellent, and more than can be numbered. What then should we frequently ask ourselves, do we owe to Him who has surrounded us with blessings, who, of his own pure and unmerited goodness, brought us from a state of nonentity, into a state of life and enjoyment; who formed us in his own image, who endowed us with such a variety of moral and intellectual powers, in the exercise of which we find an inexhaustible source of delight. What do we owe him for the beautiful world which he has given us for our dwelling, so richly adorned, so magnificently furnished with the sun to light our steps by day, and the moon and stars by night; for the harmonious vicissitude of the seasons; for the balmy spring, and for the summer's ripening heats; for the autumn's fruits, and the warm hearth, and the social joys of winter? What do we owe for all that, in the technical language of theology, are called *creature comforts*—for the bread that strength-

eneth man's heart, for the oil that makes his face to shine, for the sheep of the fold, and the beasts of the stall? What for the pleasures of civilized life, for the improved and improving age in which we live, for our society, our friendships, our education, our religion? What for the joys of a self-approving conscience, for the life and immortality revealed and promised in the gospel? For all the divine mercies, from the mere privilege of breathing, up to the hope of ineffable everlasting joys in heaven, we are bound to thank the Almighty. Nor should we be querulous and dissatisfied if we do not receive all those gifts, which vanity and folly may sometimes prompt us to think we deserve. For though we possessed not one for every thousand of the comforts we enjoy, we should still be debtors to God—still should we have enough to challenge our devout ascription of blessing and praise to the Father of all, and happy would it be for us were we to cherish this belief. In every situation, whether in poverty or riches, in obscurity or in distinction, in sickness or in health, we have a fund of hopes and consolations, for which we should feel grateful. 'What,' may those who have the spirit and feel the power of Christianity say to themselves, 'what though we want some of those possessions which have fallen to our neighbour's lot, shall we be less

thankful for those which we do enjoy? Surrounded as we are with so many evidences of divine love, possessed in our breasts of so many sources of pure delight, and invited as we are to participate the bliss of celestial spirits, shall we be cold and slow in our acknowledgment of God's mercy and loving kindness? If we have been denied great opulence and a splendid establishment, the warrior's glory and the statesman's elevation, we have, what is far preferable, peace, content, hope, exemption from worldly care, and the prospect of endless felicity. If our condition be humble and obscure, let us thank the goodness and wisdom of the Creator, for not having appointed us to fill a station of eminence, exposed to a variety of temptations, which might have put our virtues to too severe a test. Instead of repining, because our lot has not been cast into the lap of grandeur, let us be thankful that we have been saved from the snares and dangers of ambition. Let our gratitude be poured forth to heaven, for having invested us with the privileges of Christians, and incited us to run the high and glorious career of virtue. Trials have their rewards; and if we endure the pains of conflict, we enjoy the pleasures of victory. If we are bowed down by sickness, or tried by afflictions and disappointments, as long as we retain our integrity,

and hear the approving voice of conscience, we shall not cease to bless God. All his visitations are salutary to the righteous. They lead to repentance, to amendment, to resolutions of obedience. There is a kind providence in the most trying calamities—an angel of light in the centre of the dark cloud which overshadows the land. “Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”’

By such reflections as these, we may convert into real blessings those trials which an obstinate, a rebellious, and an ungrateful spirit, would make a source of durable affliction. If it appears, then, that, even in the hour of calamity and suffering, we should thank God for the comforts and hopes still remaining, how much more strongly incumbent is it on us to perform this duty in the season of prosperity, and when living in full possession of all that our hearts can reasonably desire? If you enjoy health and strength, a sound understanding, and a peaceful conscience, can you be too grateful for treasures so inestimable? Did it please God, how soon could he resume all the blessings he has

lent, overwhelm you with a load of affliction—shoot racking tortures through your limbs, and reduce your body and mind to a state of infantine imbecility? Learn, then, to prize the blessings you possess, and be grateful to the great Bestower. If a man be placed in a situation superior to that of the many, let him bless God for the more frequent opportunities, and the more ample field which it affords him, of doing good. His rank, his honours, his riches, are the instruments by which he may promote the felicity of his fellow-creatures, and their duration with him depends on the will of that great Being, who in a moment could dissipate them all. On what foundation, but on the will of Him who reigns supreme in the heavens and on the earth, is the power established of the most formidable potentate? How soon, did God withdraw his support, would not only thrones and dominions, but the pillars of the world itself fall in utter confusion?

While we learn to make a due estimate of the divine mercies, we should testify our gratitude for them, not only by words, but deeds, and by making such a due and proper use of them as reason and scripture will dictate. God, it is true, is not to be requited as we would requite a mortal benefactor, nor can any act of ours add to

his beatitude. But still we should manifest our sense of his kindness, by receiving his favours with cordiality, and using them with discretion. A hearty enjoyment, and judicious application of benefits, are the best proofs of the gratitude of the receiver. If God has opened the fountains of pleasure, surely it is that we may drink; if he clusters around us the glories of the universe, surely it is that we may admire, and praise, and magnify the Creator. What are all our senses but so many inlets of pleasure, which it would be an impiety to injure or obstruct,—what are all the objects designed for their gratification, but so many substantial testimonials of divine benevolence, which it would be blindness and stupidity not to see, to admire, and to enjoy? There are some morose and gloomy and superstitiously sanctimonious spirits, who think, or seem to think, it sinful to have any relish for the enjoyments of life; who prefer wandering through a labyrinth of briars and thorns, to a clear and open pathway scattered over with flowers; and the more wretched they can render themselves and all who have the misfortune to breathe their atmosphere, the more acceptable do they imagine they must become to the Parent of all, whom of course they must regard as dark and gloomy as their own thoughts. But this is a fatal mistake. The

gifts of heaven are not to be received with a reluctant hand, and a frigid heart, but with the same avidity as the thirsty soil drinks up the dew. God loves a cheerful receiver as well as a cheerful giver. His goodness flows around us in an exuberant never-ceasing stream, and he who does not quaff it with cheerfulness, has yet to learn what it is to be grateful.

When the mind is affected and penetrated by a sense of the divine mercies, it feels no reluctance in making its acknowledgments to God, either in public or private. The grace that lives in your heart finds utterance in the lips. Gratitude is not a solitary, but a social virtue. It delights to diffuse its sentiments, and in no circumstance more than in acts of devotion. Hence the hymns composed and sung with such pomp, and to the sound of such a variety of musical instruments, by the heathen nations, in honour of their respective deities. Hence their costly offerings to the altars, their incense, their libations, their hecatombs of bulls and of goats. The sacrifices required of us are spiritual—the immolation of our selfish and unsocial passions on the altar of obedience, the culture of the kind affections, the practice of the Christian virtues. He who would be grateful to God, must be just and kind to his

creatures. Such is his gracious condescension, that he accepts as rendered to himself those acts of philanthropy which are done for the benefit of our species. Hence, the well known declaration of holy writ, "He that giveth to the poor, lendeth to the Lord," and hence our Saviour says—"He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me." And again—"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

The true expression of gratitude to God is obedience to his laws. He glorifies him best who best conforms to the divine precepts. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken, than the fat of rams." Verbal enunciations of praise, and loud and long professions of belief in creeds and articles are nothing compared to the even tenor of a holy virtuous life. By this, my brethren, let us evince the deep sense which we entertain of what we owe to the Author of all good, worshipping him duly in the congregations of the righteous, as well as in the retirement of the closet; complying with all the ordinances of his appointment, submitting with resignation to his will in every painful trial; and in all our relations, social and domestic, acting from motives

of Christian piety, charity, and kindness. Thus shall we manifest our gratitude,—thus shall we render glory to him who daily loadeth us with benefits. “Bless the Lord, O our souls, and all that is within us, bless his holy name.” Amen.

II.

NOT WEARY IN WELL-DOING.

GALATIANS vi. 9, 10.—“ Let us not be weary in well-doing ; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

To do good is a duty of great extent, and the precept exhorting us to it may be obeyed in a boundless variety of ways. We follow it when we contribute in any manner to the moral improvement, the comfort or the happiness of our fellow-creature—when we instruct the ignorant—feed the hungry—or clothe the naked : when we reclaim the wicked—cheer the despondent—re-dress the wronged—or heal the broken in heart. It is a duty which ramifies itself into a thousand branches, and every day, nay, almost every hour of our lives presents us with opportunities for its exercise.

The objects of our benevolence are all mankind, for we are commanded in the gospel to do good to all men. The Jews confined their's to men of their own religion and country, but our Saviour restored the law of universal philanthropy, and gave it the sanction and authority of a new commandment. He extended our good will beyond the pale of political and religious prejudice, and bade it be diffused as widely and as freely as the sunshine and the shower. But in desiring us to do good to all, his religion would not have us to embrace all in the same circle, or give them an equal share of our philanthropic affections, for this would be a most unprofitable dissipation. Our faculties, being limited, should be directed to some specific and determinate end. When therefore we are commanded to do good to all, it is added, "especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Though our good will should extend to the whole of animated being, its emanations, like those of light and heat, should be strongest and warmest at their source. Those who are united to us by the ties of blood and friendship, have a claim on our good offices prior to strangers, and those who worship in the same house of prayer, naturally stand nearer to us than those who are aliens to the commonwealth of Israel.

The motives to do good, and to persevere in its performance are stated in the text—"In due season we shall reap, if we faint not." The Jews being a people much devoted to agriculture, the metaphors taken from that art are very numerous in the sacred writings, and happily they are easily and universally understood. Our good actions are as good seed which will produce an abundant crop hereafter. But then we must wait patiently till the time of harvest, and not expect to reap before the appointed season. As we sow we shall reap, is as sound a truth in morals as in agriculture. He that soweth sparingly, shall also reap sparingly. "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption ; but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting."

As every cause must have time to operate its effect, the husbandman must wait till the prolific heat and the nutritious moisture of the earth and air cause the seed to germinate, to blossom, and reproduce itself fifty, sixty, or one hundred fold. Nor is he to be deterred from prosecuting the necessary labours of cultivation by floods and storms, by gusts or panting heats, threatening to render his industrious exertions vain : but he must persevere in doing every thing which circumstances re-

quire or admit, and trust the issue to the Lord of the harvest. Thus it is with every man who embraces the Christian life. He should consider himself as engaging in a cause from which he is to derive unspeakable benefits—if not immediately—at no very remote period. Our great encouragement to be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, is our assurance from the Lord himself that our labour shall not be in vain. He does not require us to cultivate a barren and unproductive field. He will give an ample compensation of their toil to all the labourers in his vineyard. He seeth in secret, and will reward openly. Let no man, therefore, abandon the holy design of leading the life of a Christian, from the dread of its being unprofitable—for it is written, that “godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” Though God may seem slow to punish or reward, as men count slowness, he will assuredly, sooner or later, render unto all in proportion to the fruit of their doings;—to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honour, and immortality—eternal life: but to those who are contentious and obey not the truth, but unrighteousness—tribulation, and anguish.

To have a constant sense of these truths on our

minds, is of the utmost importance to our happiness; and did we cherish it, it could scarcely fail to make us aspire at exemplary virtues. But, unhappily, we are all so liable to be seduced by the transient and perishable objects of sense, that we forget the invisible objects of eternity. Not contented with the divine promise and the hope of salvation, we must also have our worldly passions gratified, and would, if possible, establish a new order in the divine government, by which rewards and punishments would follow virtue and vice more closely and more surely. How often has it been asked—If God be just—if he loves virtue and abhors iniquity,—why are the best of men persecuted and afflicted; and the worst suffered so long to triumph? Why are diadems and thrones the prize of aspiring crimes, and the gaol and the gibbet the termination of the patriot's and philanthropist's career? Why does the bolt linger in the hand of Omnipotence to dash the oppressor from his guilty elevation? How long shall the wicked triumph, increase with the gains of extortion or fraud, and riot on the portion of the orphan and widow? Must patient merit for ever bear the contumelies of the proud? Are the pious to be made examples of suffering, and to be shorn down in their prime, while those who brave God and set his laws at defiance are left to flourish?

Such questions, though often answered, are still repeated. But a little reflection will shew that they proceed from very partial and limited views and from manifest ignorance of the character and the ways of the Almighty, with whom a thousand years are but "as one day, and one day as a thousand years." With equal reason might we ask, why do not harvests spring up immediately after the seed is deposited in the ground? Why are some of the rarest and most beautiful of the vegetable tribes so fragile and short lived, while others, not to be compared with them, that are noxious to the taste and wounding to the touch, are perennial? Why does not the acorn in the course of a week become an oak? or why is the approach of day gradual and not instantaneous? The laws by which the material and the moral worlds are governed, have a very striking analogy to each other. Both require time for their operation, and certain seasons are appointed by providence in both, to bring its various plans to perfection. We are born infants—not men. It would be the extreme of folly to look for the experience of a man in the imbecility of a child—or the perfection of a plan while it is only in progress—or the joys of heaven while we are yet upon the earth. "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven: a time to be born and a

time to die ; a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted." There is also a time for God to rectify every disorder in his moral government—to shew that many of those evils which we deplore are the effect of wise and beneficent design—that what we call discord, is "harmony not understood"—and that the present sufferings of the righteous shall terminate in everlasting joy. "Let us not, therefore, be weary in well-doing, for, in due season, we shall reap if we faint not."

Industry and perseverance are necessary to success in every human undertaking, much more in our spiritual pursuits, in which if we do not continue progressive we shall retrograde—as he that rows against the current, is borne away with it the instant that he suspends the impulse of his oars. How many years of close application, of instruction, and of obedience to the commands of a superior, are necessary for a youth to acquire an accurate knowledge of the principles of a manual art, of commerce, of any department of science, or any learned profession? How many more years, after he has acquired this knowledge, must elapse, before he attains those honours and emoluments which he is taught to consider as the end of his labours? If he grow wearied of occupation and study ; if the prospect of future advantage be too

remote to stimulate his endeavours; or if he dissipate in a variety of employments, all that attention which may be essential to success in one; is it to be expected that he shall gain any of those advantages proposed to him at the commencement of his career? Or is it to be wondered if men of far inferior talents, or worse opportunities, but of more diligence and activity, should overtake and outstrip him in a path in which he is contented to linger, or from which he is diverted aside by every novel attraction? Would it not be most preposterous for any one to expect the same profits from a business of which he is ignorant, and which he has only just commenced, as he who has spent his life in endeavouring to understand its principles, and in prosecuting them to the best account? Wherefore should we expect the rewards which religion proposes to her votaries, before we have fulfilled the conditions? Her crowns are for the victor in the spiritual conflict. "To him that overcometh, he will give to eat of the tree of life."

That God should grant us that recompence at the beginning of our journey, which he has promised only to our faithful perseverance to the end, is a most unreasonable and unfounded expectation. For his word desires us not only to

begin and proceed, but to persist without relaxation—and that he who perseveres to the end shall be saved. The efficacy of perseverance is well understood in the common affairs of life. There are few difficulties which it cannot overcome, few undertakings which it does not accomplish. It is the great means by which men arrive at riches, honours, dignities. It achieves all that is laborious in art, and secures all that is valuable in science. By this conducting us in the gospel-paths of salvation, shall we at length reach the kingdom of God. But what have we, on any principle of reason or religion, to expect if we grow weary of our duty—desert the course which we ought to pursue—or stop short of the goal to which our wishes, our hopes, and all the passions and affections of our souls should be directed?

The want of a due conviction of these truths is productive of much evil. Looking only at the present, improvident of the future, and forgetful of the end, men think that the good and the evil are equally the objects of divine regard or neglect, and that the same destiny will attend them all. The wicked flatter themselves that they shall escape, as they imagine others have escaped, with impunity. “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the

sons of men are fully set in them to do mischief." And for an opposite reason the better disposed sometimes become despondent, and think themselves neglected or overlooked by the Omniscient. They say they have cleansed their hearts and washed their hands in innocency in vain. But should they enquire into the nature of the divine government, they would soon discover the injustice of their complaints, and that, if the scheme of rewards and punishments were fully accomplished in the present state, man's freedom as a moral agent would be impaired and the necessity of a future state done away. For suppose that every crime were punished at the time of its commission, and every virtue, in like manner, rewarded, we should be living under perpetual restraint. Indeed, both virtue and vice, so far as they ceased to be voluntary, would lose their peculiar character: for we cannot with propriety give to either its respective name, while it proceeds from necessity or compulsion, and not from free choice; and these acts can scarcely be called voluntary which are the immediate consequences of some threatened pain, or the purchase of some promised gratification. We ascribe no great merit to the man who is deterred from the perpetration of an enormous crime, not by respect for the laws of God or the constitution of society, but by the dread of the

scaffold and the gibbet. Neither do we rank *him* very high in the scale of the deserving, whom no abstract love of God or his fellow-creature, but a selfish desire of popularity and aggrandizement, leads to the performance of actions which have all the semblance of liberality and public spirit. In what would our state of probation consist, did the divine justice execute its laws so promptly and vigorously as never to leave any interval between our deeds and their appropriate sanction, but had bound crime and punishment, virtue and recompence as close together as the contiguous links of a chain? It is wisely ordered by Providence that they are not always so closely connected—yet close enough to influence the conduct of every considerate mind. If they be slow they are sure. The wicked may escape for a time, but a day of retribution awaits them at last. Therefore their present prosperity and apparent happiness afford no fair ground of imputation on the divine justice : God spares them till the measure of their iniquity be full—or, in his mercy, he gives them opportunity for repentance—tries perhaps to reclaim them by kindness ; and forbears to cut them off in a moment from all hope of heaven and grace. “Therefore, O man, despise not the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, but let the goodness of God lead thee to repentance.”

If the pious and the good are subjected to a lot which they deem peculiarly severe, let them recollect that the wise Disposer of all employs various means to edify and improve the heirs of salvation; that under his benignant and paternal care all things are and must be so ordered as to co-operate for their everlasting benefit, that their light afflictions will be succeeded by a weight of glory—their transient pains by an eternity of joy. The tempests that deform their spring, and the clouds that darken their summer, shall all pass away and leave them to rejoice in the bounties of a luxuriant harvest.

But though it be admitted and maintained that the scheme of divine government is not brought to perfection in the present state—though temporal blessings, such as honours, riches, power, are not always in the train of merit; nor poverty, shame, and infamy in the retinue of guilt; there are other accompaniments to both, which clearly demonstrate that the scheme is in active progress, and gradually going on to its consummation. The gnawings of conscience, the bitter condemnation of the heart, the fearful apprehension of divine wrath—that apprehension which the arguments of infidelity, “with all appliances and means to boot,” can never obliterate from the mind even of the

most determined sinner, the worm that dies not, already commencing its eternal feast in the breast, the fire that is quenched not, already beginning to kindle its inextinguishable flame in the vitals—this is the portion of a wicked man from God. How many a sinner whom prosperity surrounds with all her gaudy trappings, and whom the world considers as the most enviable of mortals would be found, on narrow inspection, to be the veriest object of compassion to the most lowly and destitute outcast, who is still left in possession of the inestimable treasure of an untarnished conscience, and who would make a miserable exchange of the straw pallet where he is visited by refreshing slumbers, for the downy couch which the harrowing cares of its occupier convert to a bed of thorns!

Nor is virtue without its immediate benefits. It is ever blended with the most delightful associations. It has “the soul’s calm sunshine and the heartfelt joy,”—the conviction that, in life and in death, it must be under the special favour and protection of the Author of good. Whence then the complaint that God is slow to reward the just? Every kind thought—every generous deed—every laudable act of self-denial has its compensation in itself, and what more would

human selfishness require? What good can we do that it is not our bounden duty to do? Are we not at best unprofitable servants? But what has the most faithful and diligent to expect more than his wages? God is debtor to no man, since he gives us life, and breath, and all things, and the best obedience we can show is no requital of his goodness. Our substance, our bodies and our souls are all his property, over which he has an absolute and indisputable control. He gives and he may take away, and wherefore should a mortal man complain? Yet he suffers no good act whatsoever to pass without some token of his love. The still small voice in the heart speaks his high approval, and what can we ask beyond the approbation of God?

Let us suppose that you have lived as the gospel requires, soberly, righteously and piously, preserved a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man, and been, in thought, in word and in deed, the most exalted of all characters—a Christian. You have respected the worth and dignity of your nature, and bravely resisted the temptations by which it would have been degraded. Pleasure has courted and ambition flattered you in vain. You have never defiled your hands with the wages of iniquity, nor tam-

pered with your principles, nor suffered corruption to profane the sanctuary of your heart. You have stood firm where thousands have fallen, and proved victorious in the conflict with the arch-enemy of our peace. Nor have you been wanting in offices of active benevolence. You have listened to the claims of the orphan—you have bound up the wounds of the broken-hearted—the sorrowful have been consoled by your sympathy—the despondent cheered by the hopes you inspired. To all within your sphere you have been as a shining light to guide them, and shew how best to sustain the character of a father, a husband, a brother, and a friend.

Now, has not the doing of all this had an ample reward in itself? Have you not experienced a happiness in the very performance for which no earthly gift would be any equivalent? Have you not enjoyed the most gratifying of all feelings—the consciousness of having done your duty—the self-dependence of a heart whose trust is built on immovable foundations—the honest pride of integrity—the conviction that you have nothing to dread in life nor in death, since God is your hope, since the joys of his kingdom will be your inheritance for ever? But this is not enough. You despise these delightful considerations—this ante-

past of heaven—this reversion of happiness in a world to come; for it has pleased God to make some men more great, more affluent, or gifted with more talents and genius than you, and you desire to be like them, forgetful of your own peculiar blessings and of the evils with which their envied gifts are connected—of the base alloy that impairs the value of their gold—of the canker that consumes their beauty—of the corruption that blights and tarnishes the most splendid endowments of their minds. You wish to have all inconsistencies reconciled in your own person; and discontented with what God has already given you, so far beyond your deserts, as your own better judgment will constrain you to acknowledge, would also possess those things which his wisdom has denied, and which, if granted, might only prove your destruction. You would have those things which, not the infallible oracles of inspiration, but the false pride and lying vanity of the world, have classed among the essentials of human felicity, those pleasures that perish in the grasp—the bags which wax old—the ore that rust corrodes—the glories that wither and rot like a garland on a wintry grave. Fool! these are not the rewards of virtue. If you hoped for such things, you have laboured in vain. They do not grow in the garden of the Lord. You must till another soil—you must

serve another master. Her rewards are of a more pure and ethereal nature—not to be grasped by a hand which the wages of unrighteousness have polluted—not to be enjoyed by a conscience which worldly passions have seared.

But perhaps you have experienced various trials and afflictions—pains of body and conflicts of the mind—public wrongs and domestic calamities—from all of which you think your integrity and your services in the cause of God should have rendered you exempt. This is another egregious mistake. Does reason, or the history of human life, or the revealed word of God, inform us or give us any room to imagine that such is a part of the plan of the divine government? Were the wise and holy men of former times, whose lives are recorded for our instruction and example in the Scriptures, free from all similar inflictions? Were the laws of nature suspended in their behalf? Did they know the pains of hunger, and thirst, and nakedness, and peril, and the sword, only by description? Were they covered with a panoply that rendered them invulnerable to all the arrows of adversity? Did the angel of providence come in the pestilence and the whirlwind, to breathe around them an atmosphere of health, and shelter them from the desolation that swept through the

tents, and laid prostrate the pride of the ungodly? On the contrary, they were subjected to every variety of woe, and made examples to all generations, and not only of faith and obedience, but of deprivations the most severe, of sufferings the most acute. See the grey hairs of Jacob brought down with sorrow to the grave, by the foul conspiracy of his own sons bereaving him of his favourite child. See Moses, the meekest of men irritated by the murmurs of an ungrateful people, to an act of impatience which excluded him from the land of promise. See David struggling with the treason and insurrection of his own household, and stricken to the heart's core by the death of his rebellious son. See Job covered with sackcloth and ashes—bereaved of all that attaches man to life, and stricken with a horrible disease—loathsome and tormenting. Ask the dungeons that echoed to the prophets' groans, the caves in which they sought an asylum from persecution, or the executioners, who glutted their tyrant's rage with their blood, if the most exemplary sanctity of life gave any warrant of security against exile, imprisonment, torture, and death. What made John the Baptist the victim of an unprincipled woman's resentment, and laid his head on a charger? But what do I say? Behold the Redeemer himself, reviled, smitten, derided, spat

on, buffeted, agonized, nailed to the cross, and giving up the ghost under an accumulation of sufferings the most dreadful. For God spared not his own Son—spared not his chosen one, his best beloved, his own anointed, the blameless, impeccable, righteous, and holy Jesus—but delivered him into the hands of his enemies, and gave him as a lamb to the slaughter—teaching us, by the greatest and most effecting of all examples, that whom God loveth he chasteneth, and chastiseth every son whom he receiveth.

The glorious company of saints and martyrs, then, were not less distinguished by their afflictions than by their virtues. But they bore them without murmuring—nay, they welcomed them as trials of their faith and patience—they considered them as pledges of their future acceptance with God, and felt assured that he would, one day, vindicate their fame among men, and exalt their fidelity in heaven. For they all, like Moses, had respect to the recompence of reward; even Christ himself, “for the joy that was before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of God.” Hence, my brethren, we derive the greatest possible encouragement to continue patient in well-doing, and never faint nor grow weary. Happy shall be our lot if we

persevere to the end in an undeviating course of piety and rectitude. Though difficulties and dangers beset the way, let us never for a moment desert it; but fixing our eye steadily on the goal in the temple of immortality, press towards it with a steadiness and resolution not to be shaken or diverted. "Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober and hope to the end," that you may receive the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. And may God assist us and bless us in all our pious endeavours, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

III.

WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 12, 13.—“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

THE Apostle's object in kindly and affectionately addressing these words to the Philipians, seems to be this—to encourage them to perseverance in the practice of their Christian duties, and, at the same time, guard them against a false security in the mercy of God, or from thinking that their everlasting salvation was to be attained, without their steady co-operation with the designs of God, and a faithful use of those means of grace which the gospel has provided. They, like all other converts, had been freely admitted to a participation of evangelical privileges. They had been called from darkness to light; rescued or redeemed from the bondage of the law, and emancipated to

enjoy the freedom of Christianity. Their former sins were blotted out, or remembered no more. They were justified, elected, sanctified, in the primary sense of those terms, and all this gratuitously without any merit or virtue on their part, which, in the smallest degree, entitled them to such favour. But there were other blessings beyond these, a further justification, election and salvation, which were made dependent on their proper use of the mercies already accorded to them. They would not yet be secure of everlasting salvation, this being conditional, and to be secured only by fulfilling its conditions. These conditions were obedience, and a life of conformity to the precepts and doctrines of their new faith. Without these, all the blessings of which they were then living in the full enjoyment, might be forfeited and lost. They might fall by their relapse into iniquity, from the happy state into which, through the tender mercy of God, they had been brought, and then their condition would eventually be worse, than if they had never heard the sound of the gospel—"For," as the Apostle Peter argues, "if men, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them,

not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they had known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." Well, therefore, does the Apostle admonish his friends and brethren, not to sit down in contented indolent repose, as if the great task of salvation were accomplished, and nothing remained to be done. Their task had been only commenced, and all that had yet been achieved would bear nothing, without a farther zealous and constant prosecution of their prescribed duties. He therefore calls on them to *work*, and for what? For the most important object that can interest the understanding and the heart of man—for their final acceptance with God. He exhorts them not only to *work*, but to *work out* their own salvation—to labour sincerely, earnestly, effectually in their Christian vocation, in improving their talents, cultivating their minds, cherishing holy affections, and practising the social and domestic virtues, as they are taught and enjoined by the revealed will of God; in a word, as he elsewhere exhorts, to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure. For though they had been called, elected, or even predestinated from all eternity, to be placed in that state in which they were, when he addressed them, their final everlasting state was to be determined by their own conduct.

The words of the Apostle would seem to apply, in a particular manner, to those Christians who think or speak as if they were altogether passive in the work of salvation, as instruments in the hands of God, created to honour or dishonour, according to his own arbitrary will; and not as moral and accountable agents, to whom God has entrusted various powers and faculties, of which he requires the proper care and exercise, and on which he has made the chief blessings, both of the present and future life, dependent. Such Christians, misled by the lying spirit of fanaticism and enthusiasm, think they magnify the goodness of God by depreciating their own nature—and that the more despicable worms and reptiles they make themselves now, the more exalted angels they must become, when they burst out of the chrysalis of mortality. And hence it may be feared that some inconsiderate minds are led to attach but little importance to both obligations of the moral law, and to speak of human virtue in terms of contempt, as if it were a nullity, a thing of no value. The words of my text would amply demonstrate their mistake, though unsupported by a multitude of passages, nay, by the whole tenor of the gospel, encouraging and exhorting us to add to our faith, virtue, and declaring that without virtue, faith is dead. Obedience is the proper test of belief, and

accordingly the greater number of gospel precepts, have for their object the enforcement of obedience to one or another part of the moral law — some kind affection to be cherished, or some social duty to be performed : and you will generally find some peculiar blessing annexed to the cultivation of every good principle and the performance of every particular duty. This we find implied in the commandments of our Saviour's sermon on the mount. Thus, the inheritance of the earth is promised to the meek ; and the enjoyment of the beatific presence of God to the pure in heart. Now, as certainly as peculiar blessings are promised to peculiar virtues, so certainly must those blessings be forfeited or lost, or rendered unattainable by the want of those virtues. But if a *single blessing* may be unattainable without the virtue which is as the instrument by which it is to be procured, a *multitude of blessings* may be unattainable without those virtues which are their proper and procuring causes ; and hence it follows, undeniably, that that state of future enjoyment which is implied in the term salvation, may be lost to us for ever by our want of those Christian graces, or by our not endeavouring to fulfil those conditions to which it is annexed. Hence a powerful reason for the Apostle's exhortation to work out our own salvation

with fear and trembling—an exhortation not less appropriate nor less requisite to the sober-minded, cool-judging, dispassionate Protestant Dissenter and Unitarian Christian, than to any other denomination of Christians. It is seldom, indeed, that we admit the passion of fear into our discussions, or to bear a prominent part in influencing our opinions or our conduct. We do not often hear, nor would we patiently listen to denunciations of divine wrath from the mouths of uninspired men. We are contented to let the terrors of the Lord repose in peace, and seldom think of displaying them in the Apostolic office of persuasion. Though fear be one of the strongest passions in the constitution of man, and one of the most powerful springs by which many think his pious determinations are swayed, it is a spring which your preachers but seldom, or very gently touch. We consider the religion of Christians, not as a religion of terrors and alarms, but of hope, joy, and consolation. Nevertheless, it is not without its fears, nor is the violation of its laws without penalties. Every system designed to regulate the conduct of mankind, whether it be theological or political, must have the sanction of rewards and punishments. There is no government, human or divine, without them.

But what have we to fear, it may be asked,

under the administration of an all-wise and beneficent Creator? Nothing, we admit, while we endeavour to obey his commands and follow that rule of life which he has given to conduct us in the paths of virtue and felicity; but much if we violate those commands and contemn that rule. What has the son of a kind parent to fear when he wastes the paternal property in rioting and drunkenness? What has a servant to fear when he abuses the confidence of his master, and wastes and destroys the estate of which he was appointed the guardian and keeper? What has a subject to fear when he becomes a traitor to his king and country? The same may be feared by the child, the servant, or the subject of God, when he abuses his powers, and, in defiance of all warnings and commands, becomes disobedient and rebellious. The simple neglect of those means of improvement which the divine goodness bestows, may not only disqualify a man for that happiness of which he was originally susceptible, but it may lead to consequences more deplorable than mere disqualification. The unprofitable servant not only failed to gain that interest which a proper use of his talent would have secured, but the talent itself was taken from him and given to one more deserving. Our Saviour has given us to understand that a man may lose his soul—may miss the attainment of those

joys of future being which are promised to the righteous—and its very possibility might justly create a salutary fear of such a catastrophe. This, you perceive, is not an idle imaginary fear, but a well-founded rational fear, which the strongest mind may admit, and even encourage to produce its proper effect. Such a fear is not a servile passion, but a laudable and virtuous principle: not the trembling of a slave for the scourge, but the apprehension of a noble mind lest it should incur disgrace or dishonour—the reverential awe in which a wise son holds the counsels of an indulgent father, and which guards him against every act of folly or misconduct that might excite a father's sorrow or indignation. God is the kindest, wisest, best of parents: therefore we should fear to disobey his commands, or abuse his indulgence. Parental love has its limits, and there may be violations of filial duty beyond the path of forgiveness.

The Apostle encourages us to perseverance in the path of salvation, by assuring us that, while we are thus piously employed, we have the most powerful of coadjutors in God himself, "For it is God," says he, "that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." If we properly employ the powers which God has already given

us, we may confidently trust that he will give success to our exertions; and as in the natural world he may be truly said to co-operate with the husbandman in giving a rich increase to the seed committed to the ground; in the mental constitution, he may be said to co-operate with the diligent student in improving the faculties of the mind; and in the moral constitution, he may be said to co-operate with the philanthropist in improving the condition of society. So, also, may he be said to co-operate with every individual who seriously engages in the work of salvation—not by an act of irresistible grace in which the mind is completely passive, but in the ordinary course of his good providence, which is always ready to extend assistance to those who assist themselves, which replenishes the store-house of the industrious with corn, and wine, and oil, while it consigns the idle and improvident to poverty and rags, which gives salvation to those who work for it with fear and trembling, but leaves the spiritually slothful to spiritual penury and starvation.

We must work out our own salvation then; and to render our work effectual we must labour with the same diligence and perseverance as we should exert in the prosecution of any cause whose success depended on the energy of our exertions

—with such a fear of failure or disappointment as would not dispirit, but rouse and stimulate. The Christian state is not always a state of perfect security. Salvation depending on conditions, the degree of our security must be proportioned to the progress made in fulfilling those conditions. But though this doctrine be so strictly conformable to the conclusions of reason, to the analogies of the divine government on earth, and to the whole tenor and spirit of the gospel, there is no error to which men more pertinaciously adhere than to the belief that, though they continue in their sins, even to the hour of death, grace will abound, God will freely pardon, and grant them a ready entrance into the mansions of bliss. Under this persuasion they live, and too frequently die, and so far from entertaining a fear which would lead to repentance, indulge a hope which generates presumption. Their error is founded on a wrong idea of the divine benevolence, which they seem to consider as an indiscriminating virtue, and not as modified by justice, that principle by which, as it is written, God will render to every man according to his works. If God be good he is just. There is no real goodness without equity and right. The Supreme Being, all good as he is, and because he is good, must conduct his government of those creatures whom he has placed in a probationary state, and made

moral and accountable agents, by laws of justice. If he rewards virtue, would he be consistent with himself, or act agreeably to the laws of his own government, did he not punish vice whether it be by negative or positive penalties? It would be strange lenity in a legislature to give indulgence to crimes that threatened its existence, or brought it into contempt for the want of decision and energy. But we shall be told that the mercy of God is infinite. Is not his justice infinite also; and what is it in fact to exalt one attribute at the expense of another, but to dishonour both? Let us, however, assign what extent we please to the divine goodness, and we grant that we can never give it extent enough on proper grounds, does it thence follow that we may transgress with impunity? May we abuse the blessings which God bestows without any fear that they shall ever be recalled? Will bodily health cling to us in spite of every attempt to injure and destroy it by intemperance? If we swallow poison, shall we tax the goodness of the Almighty if a law of nature be not suspended to prevent its deadly operation? Should a good name follow us through every stage of depravity, fortune return at our call after we have given it wings to fly, or the friendship which we have forfeited resume its confidence when we are in a humour to ask it? If we lose temporal

blessings by folly and misconduct, how can we expect that spiritual blessings will endure such an alliance? It is impossible, while we pursue vice, to know the peace of virtue; or, while we stand in the way of the sinner, to enjoy the blissful hope, the antepast of salvation. If we tempt God by leaping from the precipice, no angel will bear us up nor save us from being dashed to pieces.

Are we then no longer to depend on the mercy of God? Wherefore should we not? Let us only take care that our dependence be well-founded—that it be based on the rock of virtue, and not on the sands of iniquity. The only sure ground of a Christian's hope, is a Christian life, and hope itself, rightly understood, is not an idle, but a practical efficacious desire, which lays hold of the means by which the hoped-for good may be secured. We do well to hope that God will bless us with salvation; but if this hope be not sustained by the piety of our lives, it is fallacious. If it do not bind us more closely to the service of God, when its only fruits are obstinacy, presumption, continuance in practices which the laws of God condemn, what is its object or end, but to deceive? The word of holy writ tells the presumptuous transgressor to dread the chastising arm of the Almighty, to contemplate him, not as

arrayed in the placid garb of peace, with a countenance illuminated by benevolence, and animated by the power of celestial love, but clothed in the terrors of wrath and judgment, having the dark and fearful aspect of indignation—armed with resistless might to destroy, and when he has killed, to cast both soul and body into hell.

It may be argued, that, as we are all weak and sinful, none of the works which we can perform will be of any efficacy to salvation, since we are all unprofitable servants. If the most exalted of spiritual intelligences are impure in the sight of God, what becomes of us, dust and ashes as we are—we who drink up iniquity like water—we who are shaken like reeds by every gust of temptation? With what does a review of our lives inspire us, but with shame and regret for opportunities lost and mercies abused? Have not the most virtuous reason to be alarmed, as well as the most guilty; and are not all at length reduced to the equal necessity of throwing themselves entirely on the divine mercy? Grant this—to whom are we taught to believe that the divine mercy will be vouchsafed? All are unprofitable servants; but all are not equally unprofitable. There is some distinction made between him who waits for the coming of his Lord, and him who, presuming on

his Lord's absence, indulges in rioting and excess. There is some difference between him who is exalted for his fidelity to be ruler over ten cities, and him, who, for his wickedness, is cut asunder, or has his portion among hypocrites. The sinner gains nothing by contending that all others, as well as he, are subject to condemnation. This only shews his own situation to be more desperate; for, as the Apostle argues, if judgment begin with the house of God, where will the sinner and the ungodly appear? There is an obvious difference between presumptuous transgression, and incidental failing—a difference which all see and acknowledge in the common affairs of life, and which we may reasonably infer will be admitted in the life to come. Who has the fairest claim to favour and indulgence, he who wantonly abuses the powers which God has bestowed, or he who has endeavoured to improve them—he who courts, or he who flees from temptation? When we act according to our ability, and fall short only from natural imperfection, we may, on evangelical principles, hope for the succour of divine grace; but to count on the mercy of God, while we give indulgence to passions which he commands us to subdue, is to cherish a faith without foundation. It is a phantom which will deceive and mislead us—alluring us to the edge of a gulf, from which

there is no retreat, and disappearing at the moment when light is most wanted to guide us through the gloom.

If, on the one hand, however, we have reason to tremble at the judgments of God, as long as we persist in unrighteousness; on the other, we have the positive assurance of the gospel, that he will pardon and restore us, when we solicit his forgiveness by prayer and reformation. When we seriously begin to work out our own salvation, he becomes our friend and auxiliary. Our trust is then secure—our hope is without apprehension. It becomes the animating principle which leads to higher and higher degrees of virtue. It prevents all pause or relaxation in our spiritual progress, giving us bouyancy and courage, and alluring us forward with accelerating speed to the goal of immortal triumph.

That we may feel this noble animating hope, and be actuated by all its influences, we should form a just opinion of the work in which we are engaged, regarding it in its true light as the grand business in which all our thoughts should centre, by which all our affections should be engrossed, to which all our passions should be subservient. And what in the eye of reason and of wisdom may

challenge equal regard? Born as we are for immortality, (to which our present state of being is in point of duration but a moment), what can be placed in the balance, to counterpoise its loss? All that the tempter is represented as having offered to the Redeemer, supposing it could be retained for ages, would be no equivalent. What but the virtues which we exercise now, will attach themselves to us, when we are disembodied, and ushered into the world of spirits? It will be nothing to the sinner when cited before the tribunal of his Judge—nay, before that—when he is brought to the bed of distemper, when he is approaching the gates of death—it will be nothing to him that he once glittered among the most brilliant in the assembly of the great—that he was the most affluent among the devotees of commerce—that he marched among the foremost in the ranks of glory—or climbed highest among the adventurers of ambition. Such recollections will mitigate no pang—they will inspire no hope—they will dismiss the fleeting spirit with no blissful anticipation of meeting everlasting peace in the presence of God. On the contrary, they may only convince him, when conviction will be of no avail, of the vanity of every pursuit unconnected with virtue. Then, as if the mental perception had become more acute, he will see and learn to appreciate the

value of the Christian graces, and justly deem that their exercise, as displayed in promoting piety to God, and good-will among men—nay, that one sigh of sincere devotion—one mite of true charity, is of more value than all the treasures for which the avaricious have toiled, than all the glories to which the ambitious have aspired. Let those graces be our companions through life, and they will not desert us when all earthly comforts fail. They will console us on the bed of death, and inspire us with the most elevating hopes. Being the witnesses of our accomplished warfare, they will attend us to the seats of bliss, and proclaim our triumph before the throne of God.

Were we to truly estimate the greatness of our loss, or the value of the gain comprised in the term salvation, we should be so appalled by the danger of the one—so transported with the hope of the other, that we should lose no time in commencing the task to which we are now exhorted; but the magnitude and the danger of such a loss, are topics on which we seldom reflect; and yet, how sensibly alive are we to losses and disappointments of every other description! The failure of a speculation mortifies, the injustice of a creditor irritates, a visitation of adversity, or an unforeseen disaster reduces us to despair. What are men's

feelings when they receive an unmerited provocation—when a scandalous imputation is flung on their fair name—when the shaft of malevolence has reached them, or the dagger of perfidy and ingratitude found a passage to their hearts? But even those feelings may be supposed calm, unembittered, and certainly transient, compared to the agony of the soul shut out from God and bliss. Those are feelings which will be effaced by the lenient hand of time—mitigated by the consolations of friendship—or triumphed over by the strength of an untarnished conscience. But what can cool the burning wounds of remorse? What can soothe or allay our pain, when conscience is armed against itself—when our own hand is wielding a whip of scorpions to chastise our guilt—when our own passions have kindled the unquenchable flame, and roused into fatal activity that worm which is insatiable and immortal? What have we to hope—what dare we even venture to wish, when the best of friends, the most indulgent of parents—our Creator—he who careth for us more than we care for ourselves, is obliged, by the constitution of his providence, and eternal and immutable excellence of his nature, to array himself in the awful attribute of judgment, and to pronounce our irreversible sentence of condemnation?

If such should be the lot of any of us, which God forbid, the mercy of the Most High would stand unimpeached, for he has given us the means of working out our own salvation—the most tempting rewards are offered to our obedience, and the aid and co-operation of divine favour promised to all our pious exertions. If the conditions be refused—the aid rejected—the prize lost—the blame is all our own.

But let us indulge a more pleasing hope, and if we have trembled at the fear of losing, let us now rejoice at the prospect of attaining, the celestial prize. We can lose it only by negligence, by indifference, and the consequent non-performance or violation of our duty. Let us labour strenuously in our Christian vocation, and walk blameless in the ordinances and commandments of the Lord, and it will most assuredly be ours. On the nature of the salvation that awaits us—on a glory that admits of no parallel—on a felicity which contemns all description—who shall venture to expatiate? It would be unwise to hazard the degradation of a subject to which the inspired Apostle has declared himself incompetent to render justice. It is only from what we may have felt in ourselves that we can form the least idea of its beatitude? You have enjoyed that

peace which passeth the understanding. You know what it is to have tasted pure joys of friendship and affection—the sympathetic union of souls—the hallowed delights of divine love. You have perhaps experienced the overwhelming effects of your own generosity when the happiness of which it was the author has rolled back upon you in torrents of grateful emotion. You have felt some of the sublime raptures of devotion when the spirit, almost emancipated from its corporeal chains and winged with the pinions of light, has soared to the regions of immortality, and with him who beheld the apocalypse, contemplated the river of life, and the throne of God and the Lamb. But all those extatic feelings, all that eye hath seen or ear heard, or imagination thought, are flat and insipid compared to the joys which God has prepared for those who love him. That we, my fellow Christians, may form a true estimate of those joys, that we may industriously labour to secure them, and that not one of us fail in our endeavours, may the Father of mercies grant through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

IV.

CONVERSION.

MATTHEW xviii. 3.—“Verily, I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

WE are informed, in the beginning of this chapter, that the disciples came unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?—a question dictated by a spirit of vain curiosity, or by a wish, perhaps, to be confirmed in their expectation, that they should be placed in some situation of honour or emolument in that kingdom, which they imagined Christ came to establish upon earth—a kingdom, not as he has assured us, not of this world—not a spiritual, but a temporal dominion—which, however, was dignified by the name of the kingdom of heaven as being a state of happiness and glory, and presenting on earth an image of that future state of blessedness which the gos-

pel reveals. The wife of Zebedee appears to have indulged a similar notion, when she requested that her two sons might sit, the one on the right, and the other on the left hand of our Lord, that is, that they should be exalted to the most honourable situations in his secular government. In both instances, our Lord, with his characteristic wisdom, replies as if he understood them only in reference to a future state, and accordingly he said to Zebedee's wife and her sons, "Ye know not what ye ask. To sit on my right hand and my left is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." To correct the erroneous ideas of the disciples, to mortify their pride, and at the same time give them a striking lesson on the necessity of being humble, innocent, and unassuming, our Lord called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and declared that unless they were converted, and became like little children, so far from holding places of pre-eminence, they should not so much as be admitted into the kingdom of his glory.

What, then, are we to understand by being converted? for though this doctrine was addressed particularly to some of the disciples, it applies to us all, and it is one in which all who have souls

to be saved must be deeply interested. The doctrine itself is easily understood, but its practical application is generally a task of difficulty ; for, as the prophet asks, “ Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye do good who are accustomed to evil.” By *conversion* then is simply meant a turning from evil to good, from a state of impiety and sin to a state of piety and virtue, from the life of a worldling to that of a Christian, from misery and death to the enjoyment of happiness and the hope of eternal life. It is the turning of our eyes from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that we may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them who are sanctified by faith in Christ Jesus. It is, in the language of holy writ, to be born again—“ not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever,” to undergo, as it were, a second act of creation—for, it is written, “ If any man be in Christ he is a new creature : old things are passed away ; behold all things are become new” —to experience a spiritual regeneration, or to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and have our hearts and affections firmly devoted to God.

As it is but too notorious that a man may be in a most perilous state with respect to his final

acceptance with God, without being aware of his danger, or making it a subject of serious reflection, it may not be unedifying briefly to consider the common indications of an unregenerate and unconverted heart. The first, and most obvious is a general corruption of morals—which corruption consists, not in those infirmities of temper and disposition to which all men are by nature liable, but in the continued practice of known sin—in depravity of the heart and affections—in the habit of doing evil—of standing in the way of the sinner, and sitting in the chair of the scornful—and of being in the condition of those who “knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.”

2. Another sign of an unconverted heart is a perversity of the affections in turning from God, in alienation of mind from religion, and the non-performance of its duties—the neglect of private prayer and public worship—and that servile cultivation of the friendship of the world which the Apostle declares to be enmity with God. Our blessed Saviour strongly reprehends a worldly spirit—an anxious solicitude about our mode of life, our raiment and our food—inasmuch as they betray a distrust in that good providence which

bounteously provides for the wants of all its creatures, which feeds the young raven in the wilderness, and clothes the lilies of the field. He desires us to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and that all things necessary to our present and future welfare shall be abundantly supplied unto us, and therefore, for any man to prefer this world's glories and emoluments, civil honours, and hierarchical distinctions, to the maintenance of his religious truth and integrity, is a clear demonstration of the necessity he labours under for the grace of God to convert him, and inspire him with evangelical thoughts and principles of action.

3. A third striking evidence of unregeneracy is the opposition of our will to the will of God. We are taught by the gospel to subject all the thoughts and desires of our hearts to the will of our heavenly Father, who both knows and ordains what is wisest and best. Therefore, it is our duty to submit with cheerfulness to all his dispensations—to be resigned in affliction and patient in adversity, confidently believing that all things cooperate for the everlasting good of those who fear and obey him. They who have felt the influences of the law of God, which converteth the soul, do not murmur nor repine at his doings, because they

do not correspond with their own limited and imperfect views. They do not charge him foolishly, by blaming the unequal distribution of human happiness, nor exclaim, in the language of impious reprehension, "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave." Instead of making such idle complaints and contenting himself with a superficial glance at the condition of the wicked in their prosperity, the converted may look beneath the gaudy exterior, which hides their real form and features, to inspect the secret heart, where sin has fixed her sting, and remorse made her abode, and consider the ultimate consequences of their misdeeds. He sees that the candle of the wicked is often put out, and that destruction cometh suddenly upon them. They are as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away. But where such a result is not witnessed, he acquiesces in the wisdom of the divine decree, that the tares and the good grain

should grow together till the harvest, when the one shall be gathered for combustion, and the other laid up in the garner of the Lord. If he suffers deprivation or distress, the loss of fortune or of friends, he bows with meekness and resignation to the rod, acknowledges the goodness of the Lord in all his trials, and in conformity to the example of him who was made perfect through suffering, says, "Not my will, but thine, heavenly Father, be done." He looks with the eye of faith, to the final consummation of things, when everything which may now appear dark and perplexed in the order of providence, will become luminous and simple, when every apparent disorder, when pain, and sorrow, and death, shall be known no more, when universal harmony and love shall prevail among the children of God, and when the righteous, being highly exalted, shall be made partakers of such treasures as surpass the power of the uninspired to describe, or the imagination of man to conceive.

4. A farther evidence of the want of conversion appears in gross ignorance of those things which belong to the spiritual life—a state similar to that described by the Apostle, when speaking of those Gentiles who "walk in the vanity of their minds, having the understanding darkened,

being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." Such is the unfortunate condition of thousands, who, either through wilful neglect or want of opportunity, have all the nobler faculties of their mind unemployed, and who, seeing not that a light has arisen to guide them to happiness and immortality, still continue in darkness and the shadow of death. Combined with this ignorance of the importance of moral and religious obligation, is frequently found an opposition of the will to the influence of truth. Their hearts become hardened against its softening and reclaiming influence; and in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, "By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive; for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." Happy if they could be drawn from such a state of misery and made sensible of their misfortune, that they had all obstruction to their mental sight and hearing removed; that they could be roused to an awful sense of their danger, and that, having the

light of the everlasting gospel poured around them, they might see and pursue those things which concern their eternal being!

The necessity of being turned or converted from any of those conditions which have been thus cursorily noticed, is apparent to the least reflecting mind; for in all such conditions there is delusion and misery, and what must be the future situation of those who are cut off in the full career of their iniquity and folly? But the question is, how is their conversion to be effected? How are the obdurate to become soft, the foolish wise, the proud humble, and the selfish cruel and implacable, gentle, humane, and forgiving? Some maintain that it is to be effected only by a singular act of divine and irresistible grace—that God, in a moment, converts the sinner to a saint—and that from being a vessel of wrath he is suddenly replenished with the spirit of wisdom, and adorned with all the beauty of holiness. That God may act thus by the sinner, and of his own free grace and goodness qualify him for an abundant participation of the joys of his heavenly kingdom, is what I shall not deny. In his hand is the soul of every living creature; he is the former and sovereign disposer of all things in heaven and on earth; he may mould both the bodies and the

minds of his intelligent offspring as he pleases, and assign them whatever portion of good or evil he deems fit both here and hereafter. The power and right to conduct his own government in whatever manner he chooses, no one will be so hardy or so unwise as to dispute. The question for us to consider is, not what Omnipotence can accomplish, but how, in the ordinary conduct of providence in human affairs, is a favourable change wrought in the temper and disposition of individuals? Instances are rare of men's whole character being suddenly transformed either from evil to good, or from good to evil. Habits are the growth of time, and when they are bad they are not easily relinquished. I do not however contend against the possibility of a sinner being instantaneously touched by a deep sense of his iniquity—of his being awakened from his lethargy by some powerful reclamation of conscience—of the word of God striking him like a flash of lightning, and discovering to him the fathomless abyss on the verge of which he totters. Some secret spring may be touched which may give a new turn to the whole machinery of his constitution—to the movements of his heart, and the cogitations of his soul. A drunkard may become an example of sobriety—a spendthrift may be converted to an economist—and an idler to an industrious worker.

There are various ways in which it may please our all-merciful God to sway the minds of his creatures—to reclaim and to restore them. The work is done by the terrors and chastisements of the Lord, and those whom the riches of his grace and goodness could not lead to repentance, may be driven to it by the rod. The obdurate heart may be melted by the fiery trials of affliction, and those whom prosperity corrupted, may be reformed by the visitations of misfortune. These and similar changes must have been often witnessed by all of us, but they have little or no resemblance to those sudden conversions which are supposed to be the consequence of an immediate interposition of divine power, moulding the heart according to its own pre-determined purpose. They are commonly effected by a slow process. The change is not instantaneous but gradual. However sudden may be the first impulse, it must have time to operate, and produce its full effect. The word of God may strike the mind powerfully as soon as it is heard; it may awake the slumbering and alarm the guilty conscience; it may extort the sinner's tears and self-reproaches, and cause him to form resolutions of amendment. But still this is not conversion. It is only an indication of his capability of being converted. The effect may be transient. The salutary alarm excited in the soul

may soon be forgotten, and all the promised hopes of reformation dissipated like vapour, or exhaled like the early dew. It is only when the good impression remains permanently fixed—when the wise resolution acquires strength, and the sinner proceeds seriously and systematically in regulating his affections, and squaring his actions by the precepts of Christianity, that he is in a fair way of becoming a thorough convert. But it is contrary to all our experience of human nature, and to all our knowledge of the ways of God, to conclude that, in a moment of time, by a mere act of his sovereign grace, he puts the most guilty individuals into a state of salvation. He does not thus violate the ordinary rules of his providence, nor having already given us ample means of conversion, does he leave us room to suppose that he has left them deficient, by laying us under the necessity of having additional influxes of his favour. Hence the danger of a death-bed repentance—of trusting “the vast concerns of an eternal scene,” to that awful hour when the whole heart is sick, and the whole head faint, and we are trembling on the brink of dissolution.

How often is the sinner emboldened to persevere in his iniquity from a tacit or avowed persuasion (for some are bold in asserting it),

that he may be converted and made fit for the kingdom of God in an instant by an act of supernatural grace! Hence, instead of immediately bursting from the bondage of sin, he goes on regardless of its consequences, giving indulgence to the depraved inclinations of his heart, and rendering the chance of his final conversion more and more desperate. For the snares in which he is involved become more complicated and more strong—the native energies of his mind are enfeebled—the desire of emancipation from his cruel servitude becomes extinct—and instead of being *converted* in a moment, he is *cut down* in a moment, in the full blossom of his sins, and taken to his final account impenitent and unprepared.

Another serious objection to the doctrine of instantaneous conversion is this. It proceeds on the supposition that we are ourselves completely passive in the task, and have no more to do in working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, as the apostle recommends, than if it were a business with which we had no concern whatsoever—that we are as clay in the hands of the potter—that we may be formed into any shape, and destined to any purpose which the great artificer pleases. But though it be admitted that God orders the outward circumstances of men in

whatever manner he deems most fitting and expedient—assigning to some riches and lands, to others poverty and dependence, he does not by any arbitrary decree fix their condition in a world to come. For he has given us free will—the power of moral choice as of voluntary motion. He has offered us the means of grace, but he does not oblige us to receive them. He invites and solicits us by arguments, the most persuasive and affecting that can influence the rational soul, to turn to him and live, but he does not compel us, as beasts of burden, to go as we are driven. Seek, said our blessed Lord, and ye shall find—knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Do what you can—what God has empowered you to do, and your labour shall not be in vain. But hope not that the pearl of great price will be found without diligent search, or that the gates of heaven will fly open spontaneously to receive you.

When our Saviour gave the disciples a lesson on the nature and necessity of conversion, he did not tell them that they must wait for an act of the divine interposition to remodel or recreate them, but, according to his own expressive mode of enforcing and illustrating his doctrines, he called a little child unto him, as presenting an appropriate similitude of that particular virtue which he wished

to recommend, and said, "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child shall be greatest in the kingdom of heaven"—not, Whosoever shall be humbled by some or by any external cause, but whosoever shall *humble himself* by his own voluntary act, without which act of volition humility is no virtue at all.

In order then to be converted and qualified for the kingdom of heaven, we must become as little children. We must resemble them in all those moral particulars which are peculiarly characteristic of the state of childhood. Nothing is more harmless than an infant child. It is free from all those boisterous passions which disturb the peace of society, untouched by ambition, envy, or pride, incapable of displaying any hostile or unsocial feeling, captivating by its little smiles, and presenting the most beautiful and affecting image of innocence. The angels of heaven are often depicted with the faces of children, as most emblematic of their divine purity and goodness. When Isaiah prophetically describes the happy state of Christ's kingdom, he gives us a picture of exquisite beauty, in which a child bears a conspicuous part. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;

and a little child shall lead them And the cow and the bear shall feed ; their young ones shall lie down together : and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain : for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." How beautiful is this scene — how very striking the imagery ! The presence of the little child—the sucking and the weaned child—indicate all that the prophet could express of the innocence and tranquillity of the state he would describe. Such is an image of Christ's kingdom. Nothing that hurts or annoys can find admission there. Our sensual and un-social passions, which resemble ravenous and rapacious beasts of prey, the wolf, the leopard, and the lion, must be tamed and subdued. Our benevolent affections must be improved, our piety warmed, and all the feelings of our souls brought into unison with heaven, before we can have a full participation of its joys. An unconverted soul would have no pleasure in the society of the blessed. If the palate is depraved, honey will taste as gall. The sweetest sounds of the musical chord vibrate nothing but discordance to the mis-tuned ear. Guilt transfers the gloomy pictures of

its mind to the face of creation, and in those scenes where innocence gathers only flowers, the rose of Sharon, and the balm of Gilead, the wicked finds nothing but thorns, the poisonous night-shade, and the baleful yew. Various are the modes devised by superstition, and supported by priestcraft, to inspire the perishing soul with false trust, and dismiss the dying sinner with a presumptuous hope of acceptance with his God. But from Christ's positive declaration, we may learn that conversion from a life of sin to a life of righteousness—from pride to humility—from the veteran hardihood of guilt to the guileless innocence of a child, is the indispensable requisite. For in Christ Jesus, says the apostle, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature—a creature divested of those sinful affections which war against the soul, and modelled after the image of God, according to righteousness and true holiness. And this change is what our cordial reception of gospel truth, and our thorough imbibing of its spirit, will produce. This spirit, like the Spirit of God upon chaos, will reduce all the discordant elements of our constitution into beauty and harmony. The word of Christ restored the withered arm to its original plumpness—it banished leprosy, whose very touch was contaminating—it rescued the dying and the

dead from the jaws of corruption. Such are still its effects on the spiritual frame. It renovates the drooping and exhausted powers—it vanquishes the stubborn and rebellious passions—it purifies it from the leprosy of sin, and prepares it for the enjoyment of immortal felicity. But all this is not effected without our own hearty co-operation—without our attendance on the duties of religion—without prayer, meditation, and persevering resolutions of obedience. God requires us to exercise the powers which he has bestowed, and to embrace the means he has so abundantly supplied of becoming wiser and better, and of daily growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we are sincere and steady in our endeavours, we may be assured that he will favour them, and in proportion to our earnestness and industry will be our success. The sooner too we commence, the more certain will be our progress. But all delay is dangerous, and may prove fatal, for the current of life is rolling on, and how soon it may carry us down to the great ocean of eternity, who shall presume to say?

Let us therefore make haste, and delay not to keep the commandments; and God grant that we may also labour in our Christian vocation, that we

may obtain the commendation of good and faithful servants, and be permitted to enter into the joy of our Lord. Amen.

V.

THE RICH AND THE POOR.

PROVERBS xxii. 2.—“The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all.”

THOUGH the distinction between the rich and the poor is sufficiently apparent, the points in which they meet are so numerous and striking that they cannot escape the notice of the most superficial observer. They are all descended from the same parent stock, all moulded by the hand of God, and endowed with similar faculties both of body and mind. In exterior formation they are alike even to the smallest nerve. Their appetites, passions, affections, are all similar, though liable to different modifications, caused by their various circumstances and conditions. They are subject to the same accidents and diseases—feel the same wants—elated by the same hopes—depressed by the same fears. They are equally

the objects of divine favour and regard. God careth for the rich and poor alike, and with him there is no respect of persons. He stands to all in the same interesting relations of Friend, Benefactor, and Father. Again, they are mutually dependent on each other—and by their reciprocal services the good of both is promoted. Without the labour of the poor the table of the rich would be scantily provided—their wardrobe would exhibit small variety of dress—nor would their taste for equipage and splendour find wide room for indulgence. The king himself is served by the field. And were it not for the rich the poor would find but a small recompence for their labours. Their ingenuity in the mechanical attainments would be discouraged—the produce of their industry unpurchased. Again, they are similar with respect to the mutability of their conditions, which may be exchanged, the one for that of the other. Some go gradually down—while others are ascending gradually up, till they reach the very topmost round in the ladder of ambition. How often are the great and noble reduced to a morsel of bread, while the naked and hungry are advanced to opulence and splendour! The shepherd's crook is exchanged for the sword—and David is advanced from the cares of a shepherd to the administration of a

kingdom. God effects these changes in his inscrutable wisdom, to convince men of the mutable nature of all things earthly, and direct their thoughts to the attainments of imperishable and unchangeable felicity. Finally, the rich and poor meet together in the grave. By whatever barriers of vanity and pride they may have been kept asunder during life—death, the great leveller of all distinctions, at last reduces them to a perfect equality. The bones of the oppressor and the oppressed moulder quietly together, nor can the most discerning eye discriminate between the ashes of the luxurious epicure and the famished beggar that perished at his gate.

There are some, however, who seem to think that the rich and the poor form two very distinct races—that happiness is the lot of the one, and wretchedness of the other. There are some, also, who, in pursuance of certain gloomy reflections, come at last to the conclusion, that the sum of man's happiness falls far short of his misery—a conclusion founded on the most superficial views, and involving consequences injurious to the character of the Deity. They contemplate only what is dark and gloomy in the aspect of things—overlooking the good, and dwelling on every appearance of evil till it is swelled and magnified beyond

all just dimensions. Human nature they consider as a mere wreck of its original self, and forming their ideas of what the world once was, from accounts of it as fabulous as the mythological tales of the golden age, look upon the earth which we inhabit as a mass of ruins, and the state of human nature as a "vast lazar house, wherein are laid numbers of all diseased." But we find no such representations of the world, nor of human nature, in the book of God, though they may be found in many a theological volume, nor could any one who surveyed mankind with a friendly and benevolent eye, avoid beholding much to be praised amidst something to blame—a great redundance of happiness with a comparatively small mass of misery. That human nature is subject to numerous evils and afflictions, is what no one can or would wish to deny; but that it is not adorned by numerous virtues, who will be so misanthropic as to maintain? That it is a continued scene of suffering, who will be so ungrateful to the Giver of good as to assert? It would be difficult, if not impossible, to single out an individual whose enjoyments have not far exceeded his sufferings; and were we to take an extensive view of the existing state of society, we should be far indeed from inferring that there is not, at this moment, much more virtue and happiness than vice and

misery on the earth. All men are in pursuit of happiness in the various paths of fortune, ambition, literature, commerce, and the arts, or in the calm shades of domestic life. Now if some miss their object, and are disappointed in their expectations, this cannot be predicated of the majority. How few are confined by disease compared to those who are exulting in the bloom of health and strength! How few are exposed to hunger and nakedness—to the inclemencies of a wintry sky—or the horrors of a bloody campaign, compared with the multitudes who are clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day—basking in the beams of a genial sun, enjoying the warmth of a cheerful fireside, and the society of dear friends. If one suffers shipwreck, what thousands are pursuing their voyage with success, and entering their desired haven in triumph! If chains and darkness be the portion of two or three, the consequence perhaps of their crimes, how many millions are illuminated by the light of heaven, and exhilarated by the air of freedom! If in one place the mourners go about the streets, in another they are eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. It is not only apparent that the sum of human happiness infinitely exceeds that of human misery, but that happiness is much more equally diffused among the children

of men, than some discontented and repining spirits would lead us to believe; and that, in this respect, as well as in the estimation in which they are held by the Father of all, the rich and poor meet together. This will be seen by the illustration of two distinct propositions—the one that some of those whom we judge most happy are frequently the reverse, and the other that those whom the world deems wretched, judging as it does merely from externals, might, with more justice, be ranked among the happy.

No object of human enquiry has engaged more of the attention of philosophers in all ages, than man's happiness and the chief good. Various and contradictory are the systems and opinions which have been supported; and were any one just now to be interrogated on such subjects, he would find it by no means easy to give a definite and satisfactory answer: for that which constitutes the chief happiness of one man would be the cause of overwhelming anxiety to another. One courts the sunshine and another the shade—glory is the idol of the brave and enterprising—meditation and retirement the delight of the studious. There is such a variety of tastes and dispositions that it would be impossible to ascertain what constitutes the chief enjoyment of all. But every creature,

whether rational or brute, may be deemed happy, when living in the actual possession of such pleasures as are best adapted to its nature. Hence, it will appear that the degrees and kinds of felicity are exceedingly numerous and varied. Some are merely animal, others intellectual. The ox browsing on the pasture, and the lamb which frolics on the lawn, are happy; for they enjoy all they require, and have no fearful anticipations of the future. But we do not compare the happiness of a brute to that of a human being, nor have its pleasures any resemblance in excellence or dignity to those of rational and accountable creatures, whom God has formed in his own image—whom he has crowned with glory and honour, and made but a little lower than the angels. Those very circumstances which contribute the highest gratification to one, would be the extreme of wretchedness to another. The inhabitant of the frigid zone, who spends one half of the year in procuring a poor subsistence by fishing, and the other half in the filth and gloom of a cavern barricaded by snow, is as happy as his temper, his habits, and views of life will allow; but his happiness is widely different from that of a man accustomed to the luxuries and refinements of some great and opulent metropolis, or to the elegant pursuits of literature and science. Again, the man who has

a taste for any useful or ornamental art, derives the greatest pleasure from its prosecution—a pleasure of which those who are destitute of such taste can have no idea; but we are not thence to conclude that they feel any pain or sorrow from the want of an enjoyment which they never knew, any more than we feel pain from not possessing some sixth or seventh sense which Providence may have given to some higher order of beings, but denied to us. The man who has a taste for moral excellence, who is captivated by the beauty of benevolence, and thrilled by the sublime raptures of devotion, has a felicity altogether unknown and even inconceivable to him whose highest gratifications are those of a selfish, sordid, and animal description. The happiest man, that is, he who has the most undisturbed and permanent enjoyment, and which is most independent of the frowns and smiles of fortune, is he who, in conformity to the precepts and example of our Lord, lives soberly, righteously, and piously—who trusts in the mercy of God—confidently believes that all things co-operate for the everlasting benefit of the faithful, and that glory, honour, and immortality will be their reward in a world to come. He quaffs that divine stream of life and joy of which he who drinks shall never thirst any more. They who have tasted this bliss-imparting stream

may deem their lot peculiarly blessed, and never can they be sufficiently grateful to the Author of all good, for having so ordered the circumstances of their lives that they may freely drink of its salubrious springs. But let them not conclude that they who have not been so richly blessed are therefore neglected, overlooked, and abandoned to misery, by the Father of mercies. Though he may have been less bountiful, he has not been unkind to the heathen nations, nor denied them many sources of felicity. The tender mercies of God are over all his works. The most distant and inhospitable regions are not left without witness of his eternal providence and inexhaustible bounty. He sends them rain from heaven with fruitful seasons, and fills with food and gladness the hearts of the children of men, wheresoever they are scattered, or by whatsoever name they are called.

From not adverting to the truth which is so often repeated, that it is become most trite, that a man's happiness or misery is placed not in external circumstances, but in the state of his own mind, we are led into the grossest mistakes. Were it true, as some seem to imagine, that God had confined happiness to a certain sphere, and denied it to all who are without that sphere ; that

he had given it to the wealthy, and withheld it from the poor, there might be some room to question the equality of its distribution. From the prejudices of education, the false estimate which we make of the value of things, and our constant determination to judge by appearances, we are led to think felicity inseparably attached to power and grandeur, and to situations of eminence, emolument, and authority. We imagine that she delights to dwell most in the palaces of the magnificent, that she carouses at the table of luxury, walks in the splendid retinue, glitters at the levee, and rolls in a chariot. That she may be found in these situations it would be idle to deny, but it would be still more so to maintain that in these alone she must be sought. She may be found in the cottage as frequently as in the palace, and on the straw couch of the peasant when she has deserted the downy pillow and the purple pavilion.

Were we to make a fair estimate of the goods and evils of life, and candidly examine the different states of mankind, we should find happiness attaching herself exclusively neither to one nor another, but visiting almost every condition alike. Man, in any situation, is capable of only a certain measure of enjoyment; and place him in what circumstances you will, he cannot receive more

than his capacity. Were happiness to accumulate with the acquisition of those things by which it is erroneously supposed to increase, then indeed might we infer that he who is most amply replenished with this world's goods must be the most happy. But let us not view those who appear to be most worthy of admiration or envy, through the delusive splendours which surround them, but approach nearer, that they may be seen in their true colours and just proportions. Strip off all disguise—lay open the inner man—and the bright visions which fancy forms of their superior felicity will vanish, when you see them defiled with guilt, and corroded by care. Are there no rivalships and contentions around the great to disturb their tranquillity, no envy to turn them pale, nor ambition to mislead, deceive, and precipitate to ruin? Are there no contests in which defeat confounds, no strife for pre-eminence in which inferiority overwhelms with mortification? Is it the peculiar lot of the noble to be exempt from disease? Will fever or plague, in their dreadful visitations, spare them, or the angry elements cease to ravage at their command? Will old age decline to scatter his snows on the temples that are girt with a coronet? Does discord never enter their habitations nor evil passions dissolve the strongest and most precious ties, nor revenge

arm with desperation, nor guilt lay them in an untimely grave? You may find as much misery among the great and powerful, as among the poor and lowly, and more in proportion to their numbers, inasmuch as they are less under the control of those statutory restraints on the passions which are felt by those of more humble condition. Not that power and grandeur and great opulence may not contribute much to the happiness of their possessor, when they are employed as wisdom and benevolence direct. But all depends on this. Every gift of Providence becomes a blessing or a curse, according to the affections with which it is secured, and the manner in which it is employed. The same talent which conducts one by wisdom and discretion to the highest and most enviable distinction, may drag another by his folly and wickedness to a scaffold.

If many of those who appear most happy, are, in reality, little to be esteemed such, we shall also find those who are in the most humble state, too obscure and too far removed from public view to elicit any attention, living in the possession of as much happiness as it is reasonable to expect in this uncertain state—filled even to the full measure of their capacity of enjoyment—possessed of that “contentment with godliness”

which the Apostle pronounces to be "great gain." He who knows nothing of the cares or the pleasures of great power and opulence, can feel no pain from the want of them. The savage who depends for his subsistence on the chase, does not repine for the want of corn-fields and orchards, nor languish for the amusements or occupations of civilized society. He would prefer his dark forests, wild savannahs, and smoky hut, to all the refinements of polished life. Neither do we suppose, unless it should be in the flights of a young and uncontrollable imagination, the splendour of oriental pomp and pride would contribute to our real good. Our tastes and organs of perception must be suited to the objects presented to them, otherwise they cannot be the vehicles of any pleasure. The dim eye perceives no beauty in colours, nor the deaf ear sweet sounds in music. Well, therefore, did the sage Barzillai decline the invitation of David to accompany him to Jerusalem, and taste the delights of a court. "How long have I to live," said he, "that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old, and can I discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat or drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing-men and singing-women? Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own

city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother." Often may it be truly asserted that ignorance is bliss; and surely no one will hesitate to admit that the peasant is more happy in the circle of his own little family, in the contentment of his humble roof, and the temperance of his frugal board, than the man who is placed in a high situation, to feel the torments of ungratified ambition and unsuccessful intrigue. "Better," said the wise man, "is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith." Better to pass our days in the most obscure retreat, in the exercise of the kind affections, in unity, peace, and domestic love, than in the most gorgeous palace, with such guests as ill-nature, discord, and envy.

Such is the natural constitution and pliability of the human mind, that every one soon learns to accommodate himself to the circumstances in which he is placed, and herein is manifested one of the most beneficent designs of Providence. The galley slave at length becomes reconciled to his lot; he finds the labour of the oar to be only an exercise, drives away care with a song, eats his coarse meal with thankfulness, and on the hard bench tastes the sweets of repose.

When God placed man upon earth, he surely intended him for happiness; what other end could an infinitely wise and beneficent Being have in our creation? Had it been otherwise, he would not have given us for our habitation a world so beautiful and fertile; nor have endowed us with such a variety of instincts, tastes, and affections, all of which contribute so much to our gratification. No, had he designed this world to be the abode of misery, as we are sometimes told, and as it is often depicted—a Being armed with omnipotence would not have failed in his purpose. He would torment us with the rage of hunger without giving bread to appease it, and consume us with thirst without supplying the fountain in which it might be quenched. Instead of offering an abundance which perplexes choice, he would smite the fields with sterility, and make our heavens brass and our earth iron. Instead of loading us with tender mercies, he would seize us with the pangs of raging pain and tormenting fire—confine us to-day in regions of ice, and hurry us back to-morrow to the horrid vicissitude of flame. But instead of this he has given us mercies without number—all that can gratify appetite—delight the senses—exercise the understanding—a temporal paradise here and the hope of immortal joys hereafter. But all this it seems is insufficient—

man, by his impiety and folly, labours to frustrate the ends of his creation, and resolves to be unhappy, though surrounded by all the means of making himself blest. He abuses the gifts of Providence, and distils poison and death from the very sources whence he might extract life and health. He creates an infinity of artificial wants, and is enraged because he finds it impossible to have them satiated. For the gratification of his revenge—for the bubble fame—for the hope of adding a spot to territories already too large for his occupation, he grasps the sword and carries devastation through lands which Heaven made fertile, and blames the Almighty for the havoc which he has himself created. He curtails his days by intemperance and guilt, and complains that life is but a span. He contrives a thousand modes of self-torment, and then cries out that, because man is unhappy, God is unjust to the offspring of the dust! When will he cease to charge God foolishly? If he is unhappy, let him explore the cause in himself. He may find it in his exorbitant desires and ungoverned passions—in his folly, his crimes, and his impiety. God is debtor to no man, yet does he give us all things freely to enjoy—food and raiment—the sunshine and the shower—the earth for our sojourn—and heaven for our eternal abode. But this is not enough—we would

have the visions of fancy realized, and all the wild and inconsistent wishes of our heart gratified. Fools not to perceive that our misery springs from the indulging of passions which reason commands us to subdue, and that the very gratification of our most cherished desires is the cause of our most serious and lasting ills!

Whom has the voice of wisdom, in all ages and climes, pronounced to be happy? Not the ambitious,—not the proud,—not the sensual,—not the powerful or the merely wealthy; but those who govern themselves well,—who limit their desires to their circumstances,—who with fidelity fulfil the duties of their situation, whether it be humble or exalted,—who cultivate the benevolent affections,—endeavour to serve God cheerfully, receive and enjoy the blessings he bestows with grateful hearts, and submit with resignation to every dispensation of his providence, with perfect confidence in his wisdom and goodness, and believe that, under his righteous direction, all things will have a happy issue. “Blessed,” says the Psalmist, “is the man,”—not who wears a crown, or wields a truncheon, or sits highest in the assemblies of the people,—but “who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the

scornful : but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night." "Blessed," said the Saviour of men, "are the poor in spirit," the humble, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, and they who hunger and thirst after righteousness. He has shown us the true sources of happiness ; and all human experience can testify to the truth of his doctrine, that it is to be found in the cultivation of pious affections, and the practice of the moral virtues. Cherish these, and whatever may be your lot—whether it may be cast among the great or the lowly, you will find the pursuit of happiness successful.

As for those afflictions which interrupt the current of human felicity, and which come immediately from the hand of God, religion enables us to sustain them, and teaches us to consider them as the means adopted by Providence to edify, to correct, to convince us more strongly that our only dependence is on God, and to detach our affections from the things below—to fix them on the things above. The gospel, in the most consolatory language, assures us, that God loves whom he chastens—that he deals with us as the most tender and affectionate of parents deals with his children, and that even when he most grievously wounds and afflicts us, he is employing the most salutary

means for our recovery, perhaps, from some moral disease. He grieves us but to bless—he deprives us of a present delight to enhance the joy of its restoration. God has invited us to be happy—he has not only given us more blessings than we can enumerate, to facilitate and sweeten our journey through life—but he has sent his only Son to lead us to eternal happiness in a world to come. He has placed within our reach such joys as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man^r to conceive—joys which are freely presented to all, and from whose attainment no man is precluded, for God careth for all alike, and all may obtain his favour, which is better than life, by obeying his commandments. Let us therefore not sit down with the dark-minded, the misanthropic, and the superstitious, to murmur and repine—to accuse the ways of Heaven—to find fault with the works of creation, and malign as deformed and evil what his own sacred volume informs us he created beautiful, and pronounced to be good. But let us rejoice in the work of his hands, and praise the consummate beauty of his creation, and cherish gratitude for his unnumbered and unmerited mercies, and bless him even for the chastisements he inflicts, not in the arbitrary spirit of a tyrant, but with the lenity of a tender physician, and the

kindness of a generous benefactor. God is good, and if we do not labour by our perversity to frustrate his designs, he will lead us into all bliss. To save ourselves from the indulgence and intrusion of those anxious thoughts which are too apt to disturb our peace, let us pre-occupy our minds with pious and edifying reflections, and follow the advice of the apostle, exhorting us to be diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Cultivate the social dispositions, and let us be charitable in our opinions and judgments—keep a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man, a mind untainted by bigotry and superstition and those theological doctrines which libel human nature, and arraign the justice and mercy of the Most High. Let us be cheerful and contented, and kindly affectioned one to another—acting faithful to the great commands on which hang all the law and the prophets, and looking for salvation beyond the grave—then we may know by experience that happiness has her abode even here, and look forward with a certain hope of partaking its fulness in the kingdom of God; of which that all of us may be judged worthy, may God of his infinite mercy grant. Amen.

VI.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

LUKE xvi. 32.—“The rich man also died and was buried.”

It was a favourite opinion among the Jews, that worldly prosperity is an inseparable attendant of virtue ; and they were prone to attribute every calamity to which man is subjected to the immediate displeasure of heaven, for some transgression of its laws. Hence their question in the affair of the blind man, whose sight our Saviour restored, “Hath this man or his parents committed sin, that he was born blind ?” Our Lord employed a part of his ministry to remove prejudices of this nature, and on the present occasion he shewed, by a striking and apposite parable, that we judge most erroneously, when we determine concerning the happiness of men by their external condition. He brings into view two characters of very different disposition and circumstances—the one a rich sensualist, the other a despised pauper, and

shews, notwithstanding the strong prejudices existing to the contrary, that the ultimate destination of the latter was infinitely to be preferred to that of the former; and that a life of virtuous poverty is much more happy, especially in its final result, than a life of opulent and vicious indulgence. He has lifted up the curtain which hides the future world from our view, and given us a glance into those regions which are the abodes of endless pleasure or pain. He has thus shewn us the danger of living to ourselves alone—the bliss which will assuredly follow a virtuous life, however dejected by poverty, or bowed down by affliction—with the unpardonable folly and irremediable loss of neglecting to profit by those means of salvation which the Saviour has bestowed.

“There was a certain rich man,” said he, “who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.” The Saviour of the world has not recorded the name of this man, either because the parable was made for the occasion, or he chose to avoid the invidious charge of a personal allusion, or did not think his name worthy of being preserved from oblivion, though that of Lazarus is embalmed in the immortal records of the gospel. This man was

gifted with opulence, which, instead of employing it in the active duties of benevolence, he lavished entirely on his own gratification. He lived the life of a voluptuary, delighting in the ostentatious display of dress, in which he vied with the magnificence of kings, and abandoned to the pleasures of the table, regardless of the condition of those who had a claim on his compassion, if not on his justice. With all the means of being a liberal benefactor to the poor, and with every excitement to stimulate his gratitude to the great Bestower of all, he was selfish and uncharitable—impious and unbelieving. These vices brought upon him the condemnation with which we shall presently find him visited, for it does not appear that he could be charged with any of those more enormous crimes which are cognisable at a human tribunal. He was no extortioner, nor adulterer—no murderer, nor thief. There was no harm in possessing riches which were probably his patrimonial inheritance—nor in a taste for costly apparel and a sumptuous board, provided it had not been carried to useless and profligate excess. Providence sends its blessings to be enjoyed. If it gives the shell-fish its purple dye, and the fleece the property of imbibing it and communicating genial warmth to the body, it does not prohibit us either from the ornament or comfort which they

afford. For the use of man does the olive teem with oil, and the grape with wine—the flock browses on the pasture, and the kine are fattened in the stall. But all the bounties of heaven are to be employed as wisdom and virtue dictate—not as incentives to evil passions—not as fuel to lay on the altars of vanity and pride—not to pamper the glutton, or inebriate the drunkard. When we become forgetful whence our blessings flow—when we express not and feel not gratitude to the Giver of all—when no place, public or private, bears witness to our devotion—when we withhold our hand from him that is ready to perish—and suffer self to freeze every warm and generous emotion of the heart, we prove ourselves undeserving the mercies we have received, and cannot fail to incur a righteous condemnation.

Lazarus was, in every respect, the opposite of the character described; sunk as far below the common line of human comfort, as the other seemed exalted above it. Instead of being arrayed in purple and fine linen, he had not clothing wherewithal to hide the sores caused by some loathsome disease, insomuch that he became an object of compassion to the very dogs; and instead of faring sumptuously, he was desirous of being fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's

table. Though nothing is said of his morals and disposition, it may be inferred, from his final acceptance with God, that they were such as became his forlorn and destitute situation ; that he was a modest and unassuming pauper, not querulous, rapacious, nor loud, as his brethren too frequently are, but exhibiting an example of the rare union of extreme indigence and trust in the divine mercy—of suffering and resignation. I say rare union—for it is only too notorious that great poverty, as well as redundant wealth, has an immediate tendency to corrupt the heart ; and that it exposes to temptations, which nothing but a sense of God upon the mind can successfully resist. Well, therefore, does Agur beseech the Almighty to remove poverty far from him, lest it should tempt him to put forth his hand and steal, and take the name of God in vain.

Though Lazarus was an object of real distress, and therefore capable of exciting emotions of pity in every feeling heart, it does not appear that he received any assistance from the man whose crumbs he implored. The time, however, at length arrived when his sufferings were to close ; when death, the last best friend of the wretched, came, as the angel of Providence, to relieve him ; to strip him of that diseased frame, that oppres-

sive burden of mortality, under which he groaned; and to free his spirit as a bird from its cage, or as a prisoner from his dungeon. He died, and in departing from this life, he had nothing to regret, but everything joyous to anticipate, for death was to him, as I trust it will be to us all, a blessed change—arenovation of his being—the commencement of everlasting felicity. This great and happy change is expressed in a few words, which would furnish an ample field for imagination, but on which it is unnecessary to expatiate. “He died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom.” Abraham was the father of the faithful and the friend of God. To be carried to his bosom was an expression employed by the Jews to indicate the happiness of the righteous after death; and it was peculiarly applicable on the present occasion, as implying that Lazarus was admitted to the same familiar intercourse with the blessed, as a guest at the banquet. For it was usual for guests to place themselves at table in a recumbent posture, each with his head in the bosom of his neighbour; an instance of which is noticed in the evangelist John’s account of the last supper. “Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom, one of the disciples whom Jesus loved.” Thus, or in a mode analogous to this, are the spirits of the righteous welcomed to the mansions

of bliss. Thus was this forlorn outcast of the earth, he whom the selfish epicure would have disdained to set with the dogs of his flock, admitted to that happy state where dwells the fulness of joy for evermore.

The rich man also died. Death levels all distinctions. He respects the purple and fine linen no more than the beggar's rags. The rich and the poor meet together—the Lord is the maker and destroyer of them all. They lie equally undistinguished beneath the clods of the valley, and it would baffle the most ingenious analysis to discriminate the dust of a king from that of a mendicant. Whether Lazarus had a grave or not, is unmentioned. But when the rich man died he was buried. His funeral rites, it may be presumed, were solemnized in a style suited to his opulence. It is proper and becoming to show all due respect to the dead, though to them it is of no consequence at all. They see not the funeral pomp; nor hear the lugubrious dirge; nor read the monumental inscription. But what is their state hereafter? This is the question in which all of us are deeply interested. Was his future state a prolongation of the felicity he enjoyed here? What became of the sensualist? Did blessed spirits come floating on their wings of downy

gold to greet his liberation from this mortal coil, and transport him rejoicing to the kingdom of the happy? Did they place the palm of victory in his hand; array him in robes of light; bind his brow with a crown of amaranth; and conduct him, amid the hallelujahs of the celestial hierarchy, to the throne of God? We find the answer to these questions in the awful words of the Redeemer himself. "In hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments,"—hell the abode of anguish and irremediable despair. And to aggravate his misery, he sees Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom, receiving the consolation of all his past sufferings. Now might he justly deem the situation of the neglected pauper most enviable, and think a life of affliction well repaid by a state of eternal joy. In the agony of his torments, he cried out:—"Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." But the hour of mercy had elapsed. His doom was irrevocably fixed—the day of trial had passed away, and what remained for him now, but to deplore the irretrievable consequences of his guilt and folly? In vain did he call Abraham father—he had found himself unworthy of being deemed his son. He had no claim on the parental kindness of the Patriarch, and even the small mitiga-

tion of pain that would be conveyed in a drop of cold water is denied him. How willingly would he have accepted this service from Lazarus? His humbled spirit would now welcome the beggar, who had sat at his gate, as the angel of mercy. But Abraham said, "Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented." This, however, was only an aggravation of his calamity. The remembrance of the blessings he had enjoyed would render his feelings for their loss more poignant. Our apprehension of the good but makes the evil worse. He had received his good things (as who of us have not?)—an abundant supply of those blessings which are most esteemed among men, and are thought most essential to human enjoyment, everything that contributes to corporeal indulgence and the more elegant pursuits of the mind; whatever enabled him to gratify the wishes of a benevolent heart; to act as the almoner of God; and made him a blessing to the poor and destitute. But of all these advantages he had made a most unprofitable use; wrapt up in his own selfishness, without seeming to remember that there is a God; without reflection on the future; and without doing a single act expressive of gratitude to Heaven, or of his being actuated

by any of the common feelings of humanity. Lazarus, on the contrary, had received evil things; nakedness, hunger, and disease; a complication of the most grievous distresses which nature dreads; but he bore them, it is presumed, as trials of his faith and patience; and found, by happy experience, that the transient afflictions of time, are followed by the permanent joys of eternity. "Besides all this," continued the Patriarch, "between us and you, there is a great gulf fixed: so that they who would pass from hence to you, cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence." There can be no intercourse between the saints of light and the fiends of darkness. The bounds of their respective habitations are fixed—firm as a wall of adamant, and separated by an unfathomable and impassable abyss. While we yet linger on this side of the grave, we may turn to our right hand, or to the left; we may take the path that leads to the gates of Zion; or pursue the downward way which will as infallibly lead to the realms of everlasting woe. But when we once pass the irremeable bourne of death, the power of choice is gone. It remains for us to be judged according to our works. It will be too late for us to solicit admission into the mansions of peace, when the gates are barred against us; or to flee from the wrath to come,

when all the avenues of escape are closed. While, therefore, a moment is left, let us repent and reform; improve the time to come, and prepare ourselves, by a zealous discharge of our moral and religious duties, for an abundant entrance into the abodes of the happy.

The necessity of making this preparation cannot be urged too frequently, nor in too forcible terms. For notwithstanding the proverbial uncertainty of life, and the repeated exhortations which are given to reflect on death and judgment, we are all too ready to dismiss such serious reflections, and in the multiplicity of our worldly occupations, let the one thing needful be forgotten. We indulge a secret unbelief in departing from the living God. The most awful and affecting truths of religion are addressed to us in vain; or if they should make a slight impression, we hope that the event will not prove so dreadful as it is depicted. There was the source of the sensualist's misery and condemnation. It appears that he had despised the solemn truths of religion—that Moses for him had published the commandments of God in vain—in vain had the Prophets exhorted him to judge the fatherless and plead for the widow. He had said in his heart, like a brother sensualist, mentioned in the gospel,—“Let me eat, drink,

and be merry, for to-morrow I die." As he lived the life, he hoped that he should die the death, of a beast, and be no more; but when he lifted up his eyes in hell he found his mistake. He then became sensible of the truth of those solemn doctrines which he had neglected and despised. Baffled in his desire of relief, he is next represented as beseeching Abraham to guard his brethren against incurring a sentence similar to his own. "I pray thee, father," said he, "that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come to this place of torment." But there is no petition granted in that abode of misery. "They have Moses and the Prophets," replied the Patriarch, "let them hear them." As if he had said,—God, by the dispensation of his holy will, has already done enough for the conviction of every reasonable mind. The light which has been revealed is amply sufficient to guide the steps of men aright. Let them follow that—nor hope that God will make a new and extraordinary dispensation in their behalf, if they have the folly and ingratitude to disobey that faith which he has promulgated for their salvation. "Nay, father Abraham," replied the sinner, "but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." He foolishly imagined, as do many even at this day, that God might employ

some more certain mode of converting transgressors—that some physical force might be used to work on their fears, and terrify them into obedience—forgetful that religion is a business of the understanding and the heart, and that it is the voluntary devotion of love and gratitude which God regards, not the extorted offering of superstition and terror. Well, therefore, did Abraham reply, “if they believe not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” If they are resolute in rejecting that evidence, which is the strongest that the subject will admit—evidence written by the finger of God, and confirmed by a series of miracles, the most clear and the most convincing,—it is not to be supposed that any more satisfactory demonstration of the truth could be afforded, or if it could, that it would prove efficacious. The same obstinate infidelity which springs in a mind corrupted and debased by the indulgence of evil desires, would repel every new argument, and be as determined in rejecting the testimony of a spirit from the dead, as that of the Prophets and Apostles, and all the inspired messengers of God.

Some of us, however, may be disposed to think differently: we imagine that, if it would please God to allow any one of our departed friends to

revisit the earth, and make a full communication to us of all that is to be heard and seen in the world of spirits, every shadow of doubt must immediately vanish from our minds, that we should feel the power of religion much more forcibly, and become more constant in virtue, more animated in devotion. But this is all a delusion, and the more it is considered the more palpable will be its fallacy. In the first place, it may be doubted whether any one of us would have the resolution to hold a conference with a spirit from the dead. The very sight would paralyze all our reasoning powers, and render us utterly incapable of profiting by the expected supernatural communication. It is notorious that of all the objects of human apprehension none is so terrible as a departed spirit—that none so completely unhinges the soul and drives it to the verge of distraction. In the second place, if such a spirit should appear to us, we could not tell whether it was a minister of light, or fiend of darkness—whether a friend or a foe—whether its intentions were wicked or charitable, to direct and edify, or to mislead and delude. When it vanished how could we be assured that it was not some horrible mockery of imagination? In the third place, supposing it a benevolent spirit, it could not give us a clearer revelation, nor more satisfactory evidence of every important truth in

religion, than has been already given us by the Son of God himself. It could not warn us more strenuously against the fatal consequences of sin, nor invite us to obedience by the promise of more splendid rewards. What then could it do—or could we expect it to do, that has not been done? It could only repeat what is already known, and reiterate truths which are familiar to the minds of children. Further, still, if one from the dead did appear to any of us, his appearance would be useful only to the individual. What benefit would his communications be to those who were not equally indulged with a visit from the departed? We cannot be so unreasonable as to suppose that our testimony should be credited if we hesitate to place the most implicit confidence in that of the prophets and apostles, who sealed the truth with their blood, and who have claims to belief ten thousand times more powerful than any which we can allege.

It seems that the only proof which infidelity wished or could require of the truth of religion, at the time that our Saviour spoke the parable which I have endeavoured to illustrate, was the actual resurrection of a person from the dead, and such a proof it pleased God to bestow in the person of Christ himself,—a proof infinitely more convincing

than an apparition rising from the tomb could possibly be to any of us. And what renders it so, is its having been long predicted,—its being so frequently and distinctly declared by Christ to the disciples, and its being confirmed by circumstances so notorious, that it was impossible there could be any deception or mistake. Our Saviour was crucified before hundreds and thousands of witnesses, and when he appeared after his resurrection, it was not on one or two occasions, but on a variety,—not to a few, but to five hundred brethren at once,—not for a short period, but for the space of forty days, during which he imparted to them more of his heavenly instructions. The great object of his ministry was to instruct men in the duties of religion, and prepare them, by a life of righteousness, for the kingdom of God. He constantly directed their thoughts to a future state, and gave us to understand that our rewards hereafter will be proportioned to the judicious use which we make of our talents here. He warned us against the inevitable punishment of guilt, and showed that a man would be profited nothing, though he should gain the whole world if he lost his own soul,—a reflection which we should carefully cherish, and which should be ever present to our minds, to guard us against the seductions of the world, and the various temptations by which

our virtue is endangered. In the parable before us, he has shown, in a way well calculated to affect the imagination,—to raise a salutary fear on the one hand, and inspire a cheering hope on the other—that a life of selfish indulgence must be followed by endless torments—of virtuous suffering by unspeakable bliss. In confirmation of these solemn truths, and to take away all ground for that unbelief of future retribution which the wicked indulge, he himself abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light. So that the sinner has no possible excuse for continuance in sin, derived from the plea that the doctrine of futurity is not sufficiently demonstrated. It is clear as the sun, and could not be rendered more plain, though he were to receive a particular revelation by one come from the dead.

Let us, my brethren, profit by the instruction conveyed in the parable. Should it please heaven to grant us abundance of this world's goods, avoid the example and the consequent punishment of the wealthy sinner, by such a use of the gifts of Providence as wisdom and benevolence dictate. Should we be tried by misfortune, affliction, and disease, let us possess our souls in patience, relying on the divine mercy, and hoping that all things will work together for our eternal good.

It is wise and prudent always to reflect on the end of every undertaking—but above all on our latter end—that it may be that of the righteous—that we may pass from a state of anxiety and tribulation, to that of uninterrupted and boundless enjoyment. Let not prosperity intoxicate, nor adversity cause us to despond; but in every situation act faithful to the divine laws, and look for that recompense of reward which God has promised, and which he will assuredly bestow on all who own his name and follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

VII.

F R E E G R A C E.

LUKE vii. 42.—“And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.”

A CERTAIN Pharisee, named Simon, desired Jesus “that he would eat with him.” As our Lord lost no opportunity of doing good, nor denied his presence and instruction to any who were sincerely desirous of profiting by them, he readily complied with Simon’s request. “And he went into the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him, weeping.”

Several of our commentators suppose that the woman mentioned here was Mary Magdalene ;

others, that she was Mary the sister of Lazarus : whereas there is not only no proof, but strong reasons against supposing that she was either. We are informed, indeed, by the evangelists Matthew and Mark, that our Lord's head was anointed (not his feet) by a woman, whose name they do not mention ; and it is stated in John, that " Mary anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair." The time, the place, and all the other circumstances connected with that transaction, as recorded by them, are different from those recorded in the passage before us. That the " woman who was a sinner" in the city of Nain, or Capernaum, was Mary the sister of Lazarus, who resided in Bethany, and who was an intimate friend of our Lord, can scarcely be imagined. Neither can it with any reason be affirmed that she was that Mary who was named Magdalene, from her dwelling in the city of Magdala, and who was a woman of rank, opulence, and, as far as can be ascertained, of unblemished reputation, though she had the misfortune to be harassed by some mental distemper, so grievous that, according to the physiology of the age, she was supposed to be possessed by seven demons. The two chief points of resemblance in the stories are the alabaster box, and the name Simon,—the former an article in general use, the latter a name common

among the Pharisees, insomuch that it became necessary to mark it by some distinctive epithet, as Simon the Leper, Simon the Canaanite, and Simon Peter. Those institutions called Magdalene Asylums, are so denominated from the erroneous supposition that the woman who was a sinner in the city of Nain, or Capernaum, was the same as Mary Magdalene,—a false imputation on her character, and a wrong to her memory,—though this error, like a hundred others more serious, has become so rooted in the public mind, that we may almost despair of ever seeing it corrected.

It is stated in the text that the woman was a sinner, by which term we understand one who is living in the practice of sin, or a habitual violation of some known duty. It is, however, by no means necessary to suppose that she was a sinner in the worst acceptation of the term. She may have been guilty of various aberrations from female decorum without having sunk degraded into a state of abandoned profligacy. Nay, it is possible that she may have been only a Gentile, for with the Jews all Gentiles were called sinners, in contradistinction to themselves, the holy people of God. She must have known the character of Jesus, not only from public report, but, in all probability, from having seen and heard him,—from

having witnessed the raising of the widow of Nain's son, and joined in the admiration of the people, when they said, "A great prophet has risen up, and that God hath visited his people." We are even led by a consideration of what now occurred, to suppose that she had formerly accosted the Saviour, and that her present conduct was only the consequence of the veneration she had before felt and expressed for his superlative virtues. The Pharisee may have been an acquaintance of her own, and therefore, though unbidden, she thought herself privileged to enter his dwelling, and, accordingly, she made her way into the room where they were sitting or reclining at table. But her courage, which had supported her thus far, began to fail, and she found herself unable to express the thoughts which she had been revolving in her mind. When she saw Jesus, the Lamb of God, the holy and undefiled, the conviction of her unworthiness became more strong. She had not resolution to present herself before him, but, from a feeling of innate modesty, she stood, silent and sad behind him, weeping,—a monument of penitence and contrition. Her tears flowed rapidly, and fell on his unsandalled feet, as he lay, according to Oriental custom, recumbent at table. She no sooner observed this, than she stooped down, and did wipe them with the hairs, or long tresses,

of her head, and “kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.” She had intended, agreeably to the manners of the East, to pour the ointment or perfume on the head of Jesus, as a mark of most respectful homage. But now she suspects that this might be an act of too much freedom; and, in proof of her humility and self-abasement, mingled with high veneration for the Saviour, she pours the fragrant balsam on his feet. All this passed in perfect silence. She made no address to Christ. She did not even breathe his name; but let her looks and acts, more eloquent than words, declare the thoughts and emotions of her mind and heart. And well were they interpreted by him who knew what is in the heart of man. He saw her, conscience-stricken, penitent, disenthralled from the tyranny of sin, regenerated,—the power of virtue becoming triumphant in her affections,—and he deemed her thenceforth worthy of being admitted as a subject of his kingdom.

Far different were the thoughts of the Pharisee. He imagined that Jesus, being all purity, should have shrunk from the hand of the woman, as from the touch of contamination. He may have thought that even to speak to her would be a defilement; and being impressed with this notion, notwithstanding all he had seen and heard of Jesus, he

immediately concludes, that, because he did not rebuke and repel the female penitent, he could be no prophet. "This man," said he to himself, "if he were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman she is that toucheth him, for she is a sinner." Thus hastily and erroneously did he judge, without considering how infinitely superior to his own was Christ's knowledge of character,—that a special object of his divine mission was to call sinners to repentance,—and that not the whole, but the sick, require a physician.

Though Simon did not give utterance to his thoughts, Christ knew them full well, and showed him the unreasonableness of them, by an appropriate example. To fix his attention closely on what he was about to state, he said, "Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee." Simon replied, "Master," or "Teacher, say on." Then Jesus proceeded thus,—“There was a certain creditor who had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.”

It has been not unreasonably conjectured, that our Lord had healed the Pharisee of some light infirmity, and the woman of one more grievous, and that each of them had expressed thankfulness in some degree proportioned to the magnitude of the benefit conferred,—the Pharisee, by asking Jesus to his house; the woman, by the superior expression of grateful feeling, which has been noticed, and which our Lord more amply describes, by comparing her conduct with that of Simon, while he justifies himself for receiving those marks of her gratitude, which caused Simon to question his pretensions to the character of a prophet. Turning first to the woman, in recognition of his welcome acceptance of her kindness,—he then addressed the Pharisee, and said unto him, “Seest thou this woman”—her whom thou considerest as utterly reprobate, and lost to all sense of modesty and shame? Yet has she exhibited more lively proofs of repentance, of good feeling, of virtue seated in her heart, than thou, with all thy sanctimonious pride and pharisaical self-esteem. “I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet,” though it be customary to receive strangers by such an act of hospitality; “but she hath washed my feet with tears,”—the tears of godly sorrow and overflowing gratitude,—“and wiped them with the hairs of her head.” Thou hast not

received me with the usual salutation of our country,—a kiss on the cheek ; “ but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.” Thou hast not conformed to the usual courteous practice of anointing my head with oil,—a cheap and common fluid ; “ but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment,”—a rare and precious perfume.

There is a remarkable beauty and delicacy in this vindication of the woman’s conduct. As our Lord had all the more amiable feelings of our nature in their greatest purity and refinement, he could sensibly feel and appreciate the sentiments which prompted her actions. He generously attributes the accidental dropping of her tears on his feet, to kind intention, as if her design was to bathe them ; and shows that in every act of courtesy, she exceeded the Pharisee, and he does this, not so much with a view to reproach him for any casual neglect, as to show how much more worthy she was of approbation. At the same time, to prevent a wrong construction of her conduct, he takes care to attribute it to its proper motive—to gratitude for the favour shewn to her by the Saviour. “ Wherefore I say unto thee,” continued our Lord, “ her sins which are many are forgiven her ; for she loved much.”

Our Saviour leaves it to Simon himself, to make a more direct application of the story of the creditor and his two debtors, and the following conclusion results. If Simon, who is represented by the debtor who owed the less sum, was frankly forgiven his smaller offences—his debt of fifty pence,—the woman, who is represented by the debtor who owed the larger sum, is as frankly forgiven her greater offences—five hundred pence. Both, observe, are frankly and gratuitously forgiven, because they had nothing to pay. If Simon was grateful for having his small debt cancelled, much more grateful was the woman for having her large debt cancelled. The words, “for she loved much,” lead the generality of readers to an inference that is altogether erroneous, and to which I request particular attention. Her sins were no more forgiven because she loved much, than the debtor was forgiven his debt because it was enormous; but she loved much, because her sins were forgiven, just as the debtor loved his creditor for his great generosity in remitting his debt. But by a misunderstanding of the passage, the effect is put for the cause, and the cause for the effect; for, as the orthodox Methodist, Dr Adam Clarke, says, “In the common translation, her forgiveness is represented to be the *consequence* of loving much, which is causing the *tree*

to produce the *root*, and not the root the tree." By this misunderstanding, the great and all-important truth is concealed, that the universal Creditor,—that Divine Being who has given us life, with all its enjoyments, and to whom we are indebted more than words can express,—has declared to us, in the great Charter of Salvation, that he frankly cancels our debts,—forgives our transgressions,—without demanding any payment, equivalent, or satisfaction, on the simple condition of sincere repentance and amendment.

In another passage of Scripture (Matt. xviii. 23) we read of two debtors, one of whom owed ten thousand talents, and the other one hundred pence. The former, being unable to discharge the debt when demanded, humbly entreated his creditor to have patience with him, and he would pay all. The creditor, being humane and kind-hearted, had compassion on him, and at once forgave him, without even asking any guarantee, or promise, or expressing a wish for future payment. Though the sum was enormous, and though he might justly have had recourse to severe measures, he did not feel that he was under any obligation, or that he would be chargeable with departing from the rules of strict justice, if, instead of enforcing his demands, he should remit them altogether. In

this case, so far from meriting to be charged with injustice, he would deserve the praise of generosity, as every one, though possessing but a small share of common sense, must admit. The man who was thus forgiven had a debtor who owed him one hundred pence; but, instead of following the example of his generous master, in frankly forgiving him, "He laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not." No, he was too just. He could not endure that justice should relax her hold, or forego her rights. What! would he be guilty of so great an offence as to let the debtor escape before he had satisfied the bond, and paid the uttermost farthing? Forgive frankly indeed! O, no! He would forgive nothing; but "went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt."

Now, my christian brethren, which of the characters here described may be considered as properly representing that Great Being to whom we are indebted for all we have, or can ever hope to enjoy? There can be only one opinion on the subject. There is not one who has the heart or understanding of a man, who does not feel indignant at the

merciless conduct of the unforgiving creditor. And yet it is but too notorious that in one species of what is called orthodoxy, the Father of mercies is represented as so much under the control of inflexible justice, that he cannot forgive any offence, however small, until he has received ample satisfaction so called. Our Lord discoursed often and largely on the subject of forgiveness; but did he ever say or lead us to suppose that, before a man could be forgiven, he must make satisfaction or atonement either by himself, or a substitute? Never. On the contrary, he speaks approvingly of the creditor who forgave his debtor from pure feelings of benevolence. That creditor, when his debtors had nothing to pay, might have cast them into prison, or sold them as slaves; but he frankly, gratuitously, unconditionally forgave them both. He required no satisfaction, but did such a kind and generous action as every man must approve—as the Son of God himself approved. And cannot the Father Almighty do the same? Shall mortal man be more just—more beneficent than God? A man more pure than his Maker?

When our Lord teaches us to pray for forgiveness, does he inform us that we are to expect it only in virtue of a satisfaction made to the Almighty, whose laws we have transgressed? No,

but on condition that we forgive those who have trespassed against us. "For," said he, "if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

When Peter came, and said, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?"—what was the reply? Did our Lord say, in the spirit of certain creeds, not even once till he shall make due reparation and atonement? No, but "I say not unto thee until seven times—but until seventy times seven."

Again he said to the disciples, "Take heed to yourselves. If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him, and if he repent forgive him." If he repent—observe, not if he satisfies your injured honour, or appeases, by some costly gift, your exasperated ire. "And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him."

Again, when our Lord in his last agonies on the cross prayed that his murderers might be pardoned, on what principle did he offer up his petition? Did

he expect his request to be granted in virtue of an infinite satisfaction and atoning sacrifice, which he was then making to the offended majesty of the Most High? Nothing like it. He prayed that they might be forgiven merely on account of their ignorance. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

And what say the Apostles? Is not *their* doctrine of forgiveness in perfect harmony with our Lord's? Does not Paul magnify the free grace of God, by affirming that it bringeth salvation to all men? to all, observe, not a predestinated few. "God commendeth his love towards us, that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly," not in place of the ungodly; died for the good of those who were living without God in the world. Love to men was the motive power with the Almighty, to send his Son to rescue and redeem us from all iniquity—and hence the Apostle asks,—“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, (for us *all*, observe, not for a select few), how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

Again, when he is recommending the practice of forgiveness, he desires us to be “kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another.” Not, as the verse

is erroneously rendered in our common translation—"even as God for Christ's sake"—but as God *in* or by Christ has frankly forgiven you, from his own free grace—for his own *mercy* sake. This verse alone is sufficient to overthrow the whole doctrine of satisfaction.

The great model of all excellence proposed to our imitation by the Saviour, is the Father Almighty. He desires us repeatedly to act on the same principles as he who is kind and bounteous to the wicked and ungrateful, and sends his rain on the just and unjust; and to do good hoping for nothing again, that we may be perfect, even as our Father who is in heaven is perfect. Is there any one instance in Scripture to shew that God acts from what certain systems of false and barbarous theology, call satisfaction, in demanding an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, and not from pure disinterested benevolence? Not one. "What man is there of you," asks our Lord, appealing to the natural feelings of the human heart, "whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone, or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children (and for no reason but that they are your children), how much more shall your Father, who is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him."

From what we learn of the moral perfections of God, from the light of nature, still more from the positive declaration of Holy Writ that God is love, and from the command to love God with all the heart and mind and soul and strength, we should derive a conclusive argument that God is gracious, full of compassion, of great mercy, and ever willing of his own free grace frankly to pardon. By the very affections which God himself has placed in our bosoms, we are hindered from loving that which is not amiable and worthy of being loved. We could not, even if we would, love a tyrant—a harsh task-master—a Pharaoh who demands the accustomed tale of bricks without straw—nor a creditor who, having no indulgence for his debtor's inability to pay, exacts the uttermost farthing. Now, if God were truly represented by any such character, it would be impossible to obey the command to love him. The idea of a substitute paying for us, or suffering in our stead, takes away all obligation from us to love the creditor or the judge who can admit of substitution; and whatever gratitude or sense of obligation we feel, must have for its object him who acts as our substitute: and, accordingly, it is notorious that those who regard the Son of God as paying and suffering in place of themselves, do regard him with an affection and veneration far beyond what they feel to be due to

the Father of all. In the same way, in a certain class of religionists, more homage is paid to the Virgin Mary, or some favourite saint, than to the Supreme Being, just as in human government, the prime favourite is courted, flattered, coaxed, and bribed; while the prince is an object of dread or hatred—and if any shew of respect is exhibited towards him, it is from fear of his displeasure, and not from esteem and love.

What causes the love of one human being to another? Is it not always some amiable virtue real or imaginary? Love produces love, friendship produces friendship, affection and esteem produce affection and esteem. But what is produced by opposite sentiments? Hate generates hate, enmity multiplies enmities, and one sin is the parent of another. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? We love the benefactor of mankind, the patriot, the philanthropist, all who contribute to the improvement and happiness of their species, or who peril their lives and fortunes in our behalf. Were we debtors, and had nothing to pay, we should love the creditor who frankly forgave us. Now, let us extend the idea. We love God, or should love him, because he is good to all—because he is good to each of us individually. We love him precisely for the same reason that

the woman who was a sinner loved much—because our sins, which are many, are forgiven us on the easy condition of repentance and amendment. Now, suppose that when Christ came he had told us that his God was a God of wrath, a being of stern inflexible justice to whom we were infinitely indebted, that the debt must be discharged, or else we must live for ever under his tremendous curse—would this be a good argument for obeying the injunction to love him, or would it be possible for us to obey it? Suppose again that Christ said he would be our paymaster—our substitute to satisfy the demands of divine justice—that he would stand between us and the avenging thunder, and secure us from the gulf wide opening to swallow us up? Would this be an argument for obeying the command to love God? I trow not, but for indulging a widely different sentiment. From the false and exaggerated descriptions which may be read in books of Calvinistic divinity, of the fierce immitigable wrath of the Almighty, not to be appeased without the sacrifice of a being equal to himself, one might be led to conclude that their design was to excite feelings, not of love but of dread and aversion for the Author of our being, a design in which there is only too much success. For such descriptions form the staple of the eloquence of a certain class of

declaimers, by which they agitate the minds and alarm the fears of weak-minded men, women, and children, and to be sure there is something very exciting—awfully tremendous and appalling in the pictures which they draw of the Father of the universe, in his ire emptying on the head of his blameless Son all the vials of his wrath—holding him up as a curse and a spectacle of shame to the astonished world. Who can, without emotion, behold the agonies of an expiring God? Who, without terror, contemplate the fury of exasperated Omnipotence? But how do such representations harmonize with the character of the kindest, best, most gracious, most benignant of beings? Did he who was in the bosom of the Father, the chosen messenger, the beloved Son, he “in whom,” as it is written, “the Father was well pleased”—sanction such representations, or teach us by such arguments to love our Creator? Did he ever tell us that he came to act as our substitute, that he would pay all our debts, that he would satisfy our inexorable creditor, that he would extinguish the burning fury of an implacable and merciless judge. What read we in the volume of Inspiration? “God is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.” What did Christ, when entering on his ministry, read in the synagogue of Nazareth, declaratory of the object

of his mission? "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me (not as a substitute for sinners, but) to preach the gospel (good tidings of salvation) to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives (in the bondage of sin), and recovering of sight to the blind, (to impart a knowledge of divine truth to the ignorant, to bring life and immortality to light by the gospel), to set at liberty them that are bruised (in mind and conscience by the tyranny of priestcraft), to preach the acceptable year of the Lord," the year of jubilee, when the true worshippers shall be free to "worship the Eternal Spirit, in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him." Those were the grand objects of Christ's mission; and well and nobly did he fulfil all its requisitions. His whole life and doctrine were in accordance with these announcements. His embassy was an embassy of love from the Author of good, and all his teachings were admirably adapted to promote that love to God, which is emphatically declared to be "The first and the great commandment."

As to the justice of God, what is it but a modification of benevolence? Justice in God must be the same as justice in man; for man is the image of

God, only that in man it is necessarily imperfect ; in God, void of all error, weakness, and imperfection. Neither God nor man can justly suppose all sins to be equal. We might as truly say that a wart or a mole hill is equal to the Alps or the Andes. We hear of a certain legislator who held some such opinions ; for he annexed the punishment of death to every crime, alleging that the least deserved it and the greatest could suffer no more. His laws were therefore said to be written in blood. But to impute such a canon of legislation to the King of heaven is the highest pitch of blasphemy ; and there is not only no shadow of proof of such doctrine in the Scriptures, but decisive evidence against it ; and on no principle of equity can it be maintained that offences are great or little in proportion to the rank or quality of the being offended. Dares any man affirm that it is a greater crime to rob a rich man than to rob a poor man—to take a lamb from the flocks of the proprietor of a thousand hills, than to take his only ewe lamb from him in whose bosom it lay, and unto whom it was as a daughter ? Both acts are unquestionably wrong ; but if we are to make a comparison between them, it is surely a more heinous offence to rob a poor man of his little all, than a rich man of what may be abstracted without being missed from the multitude

of his possessions. To take Bathsheba was a crime of deep dye; to murder Uriah, still deeper. It is more sinful to mislead the blind, than those who can see. There is a difference then in the criminality of transgressions, and justice says there should also be a difference in the penalty. The gospel too, says this—"he that knew not his Lord's will, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes." The priests of various denominations, we know, maintain that offences against their craft, which offences they call sacrilege, are more heinous than all others; and therefore, are more relentless and cruel in having them punished; and deeming God to be like themselves, they affirm that all sins against God—and the worst of these is what they call HERESY, that is, dissent from any of their favourite dogmas—are to be estimated not by the weak, imperfect, peccable nature of man, but by the omnipotence, eternity, and infinite nature of the Creator. They should have studied their Bible better, and learned that the judge of all the earth will do right, that he will not reap where he has not sown; nor gather where he has not strawed. He demands not of his creatures that which, by the very constitution of that nature which he has given, it is impossible for them to yield. His justice has its own weights and measures to pro-

portion rewards and punishments to the deserts of his subjects. The Judge of all the earth will do right. He will not punish the blind for not seeing; nor the deaf for not hearing; nor the lame for not walking erect; nor the finite for not being infinite; nor the heathens, who never heard the name of Christ, for not being Christians; and "to assert and maintain the contrary is pernicious and to be detested." The Judge of all the earth will do right.

As to forgiveness, may not God, if he pleases, absolutely and unconditionally forgive the greatest transgressor, without any imputation on his justice; nay, not only without such imputation, but to the praise of his goodness and mercy? May a powerful monarch, merciful too as he is powerful, freely pardon the greatest offences against his royal prerogative? May he stretch out his sceptre in amity to men in actual rebellion against his throne, when he might justly unsheath the sword to cleave them down, and be praised and loved for his clemency; and shall it be said that the great Monarch of the universe may not, without violating some principle of justice, pardon the transgressor? Has any prophet of the Most High taught us that to obtain pardon of our sins, we must offer thousands of rams and ten thousand

rivers of oil; that God will be pleased with a bloody sacrifice, and that a holocaust of our first-born will be a proper expiation for the sins of the soul? On what condition did Jehovah declare, by Solomon to the Jews, that he would forgive? "If my people," said he, "which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and forgive their sins, and will heal their land" (2 Chron. vii. 14). God required then, and he requires now, no sacrifice, but the sacrifice of our sins on the altar of obedience, and to deny this is to deny him free grace—to take away from the King of kings that pardoning mercy which constitutes the highest glory of the princes of the earth. May a mother frankly pardon the follies of her child—may you, "a miserable sinner," as perhaps you say you are, pardon the servant who has betrayed his trust; or the prodigal son who has wasted your substance in riotous living; and may not the Maker and Father of all shew similar indulgence to his rebellious slave—to his offending offspring—without being under the necessity, like that of heathen Jove under the mandate of fate, unless he obtain what is called satisfaction, of casting the offender into the inextinguishable flames of hell? What satisfaction can synods and creedmakers give to outraged

reason, and contradicted Scriptures, for such monstrous inventions? To me, it seems an awful presumption, a flagrant impiety, to affix any limits to the mercy of the Creator. If his justice be infinite, so, also, is his clemency; and who shall dare to affirm that it extends so far, and no farther?

The immoral tendencies of the Calvinistic doctrine of satisfaction, are (to use its own language) most "pernicious, and to be detested." Not to speak of the notion so degrading to the character of the Supreme Being, that he can be *satisfied* like a weak and capricious tyrant among men; how does such a belief act on the disposition and conduct of those who hold it? As the master, so is the servant—as the teacher, so is the scholar—as the general, so is the soldier—as the God, so are his worshippers. We are enjoined in Scripture, to act on the plan of the Creator, and from similar motives. The tendency of right notions of God, is to lead us to the practice of the noblest virtues—of wrong notions, to lead to the greatest vices. If God be so extremely just that he cannot remit the smallest claims of justice, should we be less rigorous? If he must have satisfaction, so should we; and it would almost seem to be on this principle, that the man who thinks his honour touched

by a word, or a jest, demands it of the offender at the point of the sword. On this principle, the creditor throws his debtor into prison, there to rot and to die, unless the debt be discharged. If it be righteous in God to punish the innocent in place of the guilty, can the tyrant of the earth be blamed for doing the same, and inflicting misery on millions for the fault of one? Some princes, to guard their crown from the designs of conspiracy and treason, have passed decrees, that not only the leaders, but their whole families to the remotest branch, though guiltless, should be exterminated. This we regard as atrocious cruelty; yet do theologians, without the least scruple or remorse, ascribe such conduct to the Father of all; and brand as heretics, those who dare to question its rectitude. Weakness, and the consciousness of an insecure title, or of meriting a people's vengeance, make tyrants cruel. But God is omnipotent. He dreads no rebellion or insurrection. He "regards no man's person, neither does he stand in awe of any man's greatness." What he wills is right, and must stand for ever fast.

The doctrine of satisfaction is totally repugnant to that of free grace. It supposes God to be changeable—capable of being operated on by such motives as determine the conduct of the worst of

our species, that he is vindictive, capricious, and having once demanded one infinite ransom, he may, on some future occasion, be disposed to demand another. It is said by those who hold it, that it is a comforting doctrine, that it affords them sure grounds of confidence, and that believing it their salvation is secure. But what if their belief is ill founded and a delusion? No doctrine that impugns the justice, the merey and free grace of God, can be true. As to comfort, what doctrine is so comforting as faith in the superintending providence of the greatest, wisest, best of beings? What ground of confidence so firm as the Rock of ages? What hope so strong and lively as that which springs from a knowledge of the paternal character of the Deity? And is it not affronting to the Divine Majesty to say that there is any being in existence more kind, more merciful, more ready to forgive than he, and that what *he dared* not do for us, has been achieved by another? That doctrine belies the character both of God and his Christ, and it contradicts the express language of Holy Writ as to the Son of God himself, whom it designates as the chosen of the Father, as **THE SAVIOUR**, the Beloved, the Reconciler, not of God to man, but of man to God. The death of Christ may be regarded as a sacrifice made to propitiate man to God, and not God to man, for God requires no

propitiation ; and is it not written that “ he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all ? ” — Christ was the free gift of God to a guilty world ; “ and how shall he not,” asks the Apostle, “ with him also, freely give us all things ? ” Again, says the same Apostle, we are “ justified freely by the grace of God,” and then he tells us how, or by what method we are justified, viz., “ through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation (or rather a mercy-seat) through faith in his blood,” not to satisfy his wrath, not to atone for Adam’s transgressions, nor our own, but “ to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.” Take heed, brethren, to the words of the Apostle. — He says that “ God set him forth.” God was in this, as in all things, the great prime mover. God set him forth to be a propitiation, or mercy-seat ; therefore, God is the propitiator, or the dispenser of mercy, by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is to us as was the mercy-seat of Jehovah to the Jews.

Many and great mistakes on this subject have originated in false interpretations of the sacrificial language of the New Testament, especially where it is employed in speaking of the death and the blood of Christ. On this topic there is no time

now to enter, I must therefore attend to a more general argument.

We are told, and great pains are taken to inculcate the belief, that God, consistently with his attribute of infinite justice, cannot forgive any infraction of his laws till that justice be satisfied ; and that, it being infinite, the satisfaction must be infinite also, and hence the necessity of a second being equal in power and glory to make satisfaction to the first. Now, let us for the sake of argument admit, for a few minutes, this most irrational, unscriptural, and groundless assumption, and see what follows. As every human being is a sinner, every human being requires a substitute ; nay, as every sin merits infinite punishment, there should be as many substitutes as there are sins, or else justice must relax her claims. But from this consequence the advocates of the doctrine shrink, because only one substitute can be found, and he must satisfy for all. There is a departure from the fundamental principle of the system here ; justice is compelled to relax her claims, and it is discovered that, though one must satisfy for all, it is only a very small portion of the all, a handful of people, called the elect, that derive any benefit from substitution.

But who is the substitute? We are told it was the Second Person of the Trinity, who is equal in power and glory to the First; that he consented to bear the punishment due to man. But the punishment due to man, the Confession informs us was "torments without intermission in hell-fire for ever." Did the Substitute bear, and is he now bearing, and will he continue to bear for ever this punishment? The answer, I presume, must be in the negative, and, therefore, there is another flaw in the system. Our Lord's sufferings were terminated in a few hours, and so far from being incarcerated in the place of torments for ever, he was speedily exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on High.

Another difficulty meets us. Since the persons of the Godhead are all equal both in natural and moral perfections, how happened it that the justice of the second and third persons did not require satisfaction as well as the first? The third person seems to have been neutral, but the second stands in direct opposition to the first, and while the Father demands justice, the Son pleads for mercy—the Father, the everlasting God, can neither suffer nor die, but the Son does both, and yet we are told that the Son is one in substance, and equal in power and glory to the Father—and that they

are but one God! Yet the very advocates of the system find it impossible to speak of them but as of two Gods—possessed of attributes and actuated by principles as diametrically opposed to each other as the elements of the primeval chaos. Verily, the house is divided against itself—and such a house, by the Saviour's own testimony, cannot stand. It has a self-destroying principle in itself, and must come down.

There is another difficulty still. They tell us that Christ bore the punishment due to our sins—but what is the proper punishment of sin? Remorse of conscience. This, in the strong figurative language of Scripture, is called the undying worm, and the unquenchable fire. Did our blessed Saviour suffer this? He could not, it was impossible, for he did no sin, neither was any guile found in his mouth. We may be told that, notwithstanding this, he was “made sin” for us. But what is the meaning of this expression? It means that he was treated by his enemies as though he had been a sinner—as a malefactor—a victim to the malice of the high priests and rulers, and ostensibly as a rebel to the Roman Government. None, I repeat, but he who is actually a sinner can suffer the punishment of sin. A man may be stretched on the rack, or consumed in slow and torturing

flames; but if his own conscience acquit him of the imputed crime—if, while he is burned as a heretic he feels conscious that he is loyal to his God—he can smile at death, and, though treated as a sinner, rejoice as an angel of light. Peter suffered the punishment of his sin when the denial of his Master was forced on his recollection by the crowing of the cock, and when he went out and wept bitterly. Judas suffered the punishment of sin when, goaded by the stings of conscience, he committed suicide; but Paul, when cruelly maltreated, bound, imprisoned, scourged, and stoned almost to death, only rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer in the glorious cause for which at last he died. Stephen, when expiring beneath a shower of stones, enjoyed a blissful vision, for he saw the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God. And Christ, so far from feeling like a conscience-stricken sinner, expiring under the fury of divine wrath as a victim to inexorable justice, (horrible imagination!) passed through the whole of his trial with calm, unruffled composure, and died, magnanimously confiding in the mercy and omnipotence of him who he knew would raise him from the tomb. His last words were those of cheerful confidence, which he uttered with a loud voice, that all might hear and understand—“Father, into thy hands I commend

my spirit," and thus "for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame."

Another difficulty still remains. The doctrine of substitution—of vicarious suffering and imputed righteousness—is a monstrous delusion. Virtue and vice are as completely personal, as belonging to the individual, as hunger and thirst. Can a starving pauper be filled by a rich man faring sumptuously? Can your own sense of music and painting be gratified by your neighbour going to the concert hall or picture gallery, to hear and to see for you? Can you appropriate to yourself another man's health and strength, his genius, his spirit and imagination? Some savages think that the courage and other virtues of the enemy whom they slay, enter into their bodies and become a part of themselves. This, you say, is a foolish idea and worthy only of a savage; but it is not more foolish than the belief that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to a certain class of believers; or that his sufferings exempt them from the penalty of transgression, for it is written that "every man shall bear his own burden," and "every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own (not to another's) labour." It is also written in the laws of Moses—"The father

shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the father." If not put to death in this world, much less be damned in the next. "Every man shall be put to death for his own sin."

Men have been led into egregious mistakes on this subject, by considering moral offences as similar to debts in mercantile transactions, and consequently capable of being transferred from one to another. It is a matter of no consequence at all to a creditor what person pays what is due to him, provided he be paid. This is a matter well understood. But even here the person who contracts the debt is responsible for the integrity or punctuality of his sureties, or bill-endorsers. In moral offences the case is different. These cannot be removed from one to another. An innocent man cannot expiate the offences of the guilty. Though a thousand lives were sacrificed to wipe away the guilt of one murderer, they could never render him guiltless. The law of Moses allowed "no satisfaction for the life of a murderer." What should we think of a judge, who, having condemned a criminal to capital punishment, should propose to let him escape, provided any good citizen should voluntarily come and suffer execution in his stead? On what principle could such a substitute be re-

ceived? And though a hundred such substitutes were offered, the guilt of the offender would not be rendered one iota less. What God requires of the sinner is not a substitute. He demands no sacrifice but the sacrifice of our sin; a change of heart and mind from evil to good; "a broken and contrite heart God will not despise;" but he does not, nor did he ever, place any value on the most costly offerings, farther than as they were an indication of the pious and grateful feelings of those by whom they were offered.

The vulgar doctrine of satisfaction ^{is} founded chiefly on the belief that bodily suffering is an atonement for mental and moral transgression, that certain modifications of matter, produced by the scourge and the chain, can rectify the aberrations of the mind, that the immortal gem of the soul is shaped and changed by the impressions made by brute violence on the casket in which it is lodged. Nothing can be more contrary to fact,—racks and tortures and faggot fires can no more change the complexion of the mind, than the waters of the ocean can wash the Ethiopian white. Corporal punishments do, no doubt, prevent the repetition of crimes, but do they actually reform the criminal? Do they not but too frequently harden his heart and make him more obdurate

and more difficult to be reformed? It was once a common practice, under such reformers as Calvin, to burn heretics—to consume the body for the good of the soul, as the hypocritical murderers pretended, as if burning could do aught but root more deeply the doctrinal opinions which it was vainly employed to extirpate.

No man is, or should be, accounted truly virtuous who is restrained only by the dread of punishment from violating any or all of the commands in the Decalogue. The fear of hell's torments is the great argument employed by preachers of a certain class to influence their hearers. They address themselves only to the lower and meaner propensities, and describe the place of torments with as much circumstantiality as if they had themselves experienced all its horrors. Such descriptions, however they may affect weak and superstitious minds,—and they do often most painfully affect them—have no congeniality with the spirit of Christ. Fear and terror may prevent crimes, but they do not create virtues. A chain on a thief's leg will hinder him from going beyond a prescribed length, but it will not make him an honest man. No theft will be committed where there is nothing to be taken. To make men truly virtuous other arguments must be employed than the rope and

the scourge. The superior principles of the constitution must be addressed: their moral sentiments must be cultivated—they must be taught, not to vilify, but to respect the worth and dignity of their immortal nature. They must be drawn by the cords of love to venerate and obey that Great Being whose name is love.

Had the Pharisee, who inferred from Christ's mild treatment of the woman who was a sinner that he was no prophet, been entrusted with the office of trying to reclaim her, he would probably have pursued a very different plan. He would have recommended pains and deprivations—a house of correction in this world, and the dread of a warm abode in the next. The Saviour, who would not crush the broken reed, nor quench the smoking flax, frankly forgave her; and his lenity acted powerfully and beneficially. Her conduct evinced the sincerity of her repentance; and a confident hope might be indulged that she would sin no more. How many can be moved and won by the voice of tenderness that are deaf and intractable to reproof!

Our Lord delighted to dwell on the inexhaustible goodness and ineffable love of his and our Heavenly Father. He encouraged us to love him,

by declaring what love he bore to us. "We love him," says the Apostle John, "because he first loved us." The more warmly we feel this divine affection, the more pious must we become; the more righteous, the more truly Christian in our conduct; the more circumspect, the more fearful of doing aught to merit the displeasure of so kind, so gracious, so bounteous, so indulgent a Parent. It is a base and degenerate nature that would abuse a benefactor's kindness—kindness, the very object of which is to lead us to the highest improvement, and the highest enjoyment of which we are susceptible—to happiness on earth, to the fulness of everlasting joy in heaven. May we, beloved friends and brethren, be ever influenced by the warmest sentiments of gratitude to our Heavenly Father; and if we only succeed, as succeed we may, in our endeavours to reciprocate his love as far as our imperfect nature will permit; if we can love him with only a ten thousandth part of the love with which he has loved us, we shall be among the wisest, happiest, best of his creatures upon earth, and may cherish an abiding hope, that what is begun below will be completed above, in the mansions of eternal beatitude and glory. Amen.

VIII.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD AS DISPLAYED IN HIS WORKS.

GENESIS i. 31.—“ And God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good.”

THE word Genesis signifies generation; and the first book of the Bible is so called because it contains an account of the creation of the world. This is a subject of great interest, and not less useful than interesting. That principle of curiosity which God has planted in our souls naturally incites us to inquire into the origin of things. When we contemplate the amazing magnificence of nature, it would argue a strange coldness and insensibility not to ask whence it arose. We see the firmament spread in glory above our heads, enlightened during the day with the splendour of the sun, at night illumined by the moon, or shining with the blended rays of innumerable stars. We see the earth adorned with the pleasing

variety of hill and valley, fertilized with streams, and abounding with fruits and flowers. Its interior regions are stored with mineral treasures for the use of man; and thousands of creatures, endowed with numerous sources of enjoyment, sport in the ocean, the earth, and the air. The whole displays such astonishing marks of contrivance and design, such an admirable adjustment of means to ends, such transcendent beauty, such infinite benevolence, as far surpass the powers of man to fathom, to comprehend or describe. What can we do but contemplate and admire? While we ask, not with sceptic doubt, but with pious wonder and gratitude, what hand arched the blue vault, and bade the planets run their courses rejoicing? Who kindled the lamp of day, and balanced the world upon nothing? Who animated the dust of the ground, and made man a living soul?

Investigations of this nature are not to be regarded as merely curious. They are replete with instruction, and lead to the most important conclusions. While they clearly expose the absurdity of all atheistical speculations, they teach to reverence and adore the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of the great Creator.

Few subjects have given rise to more various

speculations than the origin of the universe. Some have spoken of the eternity of matter—of the fortuitous concourse of atoms—of the eternal generation of plants and animals:—speculations into which it would be unprofitable to enter, and in which we should find no end, but be “in wandering mazes lost.” No hypothesis of learned cosmogonist or world-builder was ever so true, so beautiful, so simple, or so grand as the truth announced in the verse of Genesis, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” Before time began to be measured by the revolution of the heavenly bodies—before the sun, or the moon, or the stars, God lived infinitely blest in himself; and when it was his sovereign pleasure to create, he created, or from nothing gave existence to matter, and cast it into all the various forms, which challenge our admiration; and as nothing could be wanting to his felicity, it must be admitted that he created and imparted life to animated beings from no motive but the purest benevolence. Creation is the work of the Omnipotent alone. Other beings, by the powers communicated to them by the Giver of all, may change and modify the forms of matter, but they cannot create it. Man, with all his ingenuity, can no more form a blade of grass, or give being to a single particle of dust, than he could construct a new world and

kindle a new sun. The Creator of all things is God, and hence the sacred historian must have deemed it a matter of the first consequence in the commencement of his history, to fix the mind steadily on the works of creation, and hence on the contemplation of the Creator—as on these contemplations are founded the first principles of all religion. Therefore he is not contented with announcing the scriptural truth that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth; but he enters into detail, particularizes the chief objects which first arrest attention in the world around us, tells us how, according to the philosophy of the Jews, they successively arose to beauty and perfection, and causes the whole scene to pass in review before us, as a series of pictures conceived by the sublime genius, and executed by the masterly hand, of a most accomplished artist. Besides these general reasons, he may have had some special reason for entering into the details which he has given—and this seems to be to guard the Israelites against the idolatry of worshipping the creature instead of the Creator—for almost every object which he specifies as the work of Jehovah, was idolized by the heathens, and particularly by the Egyptians, among whom he dwelt so long. The lights of heaven, plants, animals, the leeks and onions, and the crocodile of Egypt,

were, all of them, the objects of idolatry ; therefore, he shews that all creatures from the sun in the heavens, down to the reptile of the dust and the herb of the field were formed by the Creator ; that they were placed under the dominion of man, and, therefore, could never become a proper object of religious homage.

You will observe in reading the sacred historian's account of the creation, that he never for a moment keeps out of view the Almighty Architect ; but represents him as issuing his commands and being instantly obeyed ; and everything, as it successively arose in the course of the six periods of time which he calls days, accomplishing, or fitted to accomplish, the designs for which it was created, and, therefore, pronounced by the Creator *good*. At first, the earth was without form and void, a mass of disorder, in which all the elements were confounded ; and which the same Power alone that called it into being, could mould into beauty and order. What a marvellously sublime idea does the inspired writer give us of the creative power of God, when he tells us that God said—“ Let there be light,” and there was light. He speaks, and it is done ; he commands, and the conception of his mind is embodied in his works. There is no labour, no preparation, no apparatus,

no consultation. The effect is instantaneous. The sun, the moon, and the stars appear in their proper station, the waters separate from the land, the mountains swell above the clouds, the ocean rolls in its destined boundaries, the ground is clothed with verdure, the pine towers in the forest, and the flowers exhale their fragrance on the breeze. But all the grand objects of inanimate nature would have been made for no beneficial purpose, unless there were creatures to enjoy them. In vain had the sun poured his brightness on the world, had there been no eye to behold it; in vain had the earth teemed with fruits, had there been no life to be sustained by their nutriment. Accordingly, God gave life to every being that lives or moves on the earth, in the waters, and in the air; —the lion gambolled on the plain, the eagle soared to the rocks, and the leviathan rolled his unwieldy bulk in the ocean. And God endowed them all with various instincts, assigned them their respective habitations, and supplied their appropriate food. The last work of creation was man. Him, God is said to have formed in his own image, *i. e.* an intelligent and immortal spirit, capable of storing his mind with knowledge, and regulating his conduct by the dictates of reason and conscience. To him, God gave dominion over the animal world, furnished him with innumerable

sources of pleasure and enjoyment, made him but a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with honour and glory ; and “God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good.”

The sacred historian, as if it had been his object to demonstrate the benevolence as well as the creative power of the Deity, represents God as surveying the work of each day’s creation, and seeing that it was good ; and when all was finished, contemplating the whole system, as if to observe that the parts were all in harmony ; and then, as if each part had acquired new beauty and perfection from its combination, it is stated of everything in the superlative degree, that “it was very good.” And could we but enjoy the same contemplation, and were we capable of beholding the system of the universe through all its ties and dependencies, we should join in the same conclusion.

But limited as our views of creation are, we are neither so blind nor so stupid as not to see and to feel that, as everything in the works of nature was good in its original formation, so does it continue ; and we have not less reason than king David of old, to assert that the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. The same power, and the

same beneficence which were employed in the creation, are still conspicuous in the preservation of everything around us. We are not to suppose, as some have vainly contended, that, when the world was once formed, it might continue to exist independently of its Divine Author—that having finished the work, he retired within himself to the enjoyment of his own undisturbed beatitude, and left the machine of the universe to its own movements, till its springs shall be worn out, and its wheels broken, and it fall back into chaos. This is all such an imagination as might originate in the brain of the fool who says in his heart there is no God. But it is as unphilosophical as irreligious, to suppose that anything ever did, or ever can, exist in a state of absolute independence or separation from God. He is not, as it is expressed in Scripture, a God that is far off and not near at hand, for he is omnipresent, and by the very necessity of his nature cannot be absent from any part of his creation. As he prepared the light and the sun, through him is this influence unceasingly dispensed. He causes the seasons to return at their allotted periods. He renovates, as by a new act of creative power, the face of the earth, clothes the fields with grass and the trees with foliage, and provides subsistence for the whole race of animated beings. In his hand is the soul

of every living being, and the breath of all mankind. "The eyes of all," says the Psalmist, "wait upon thee (O God), and thou givest them their meat in due season; thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." Should it please God to withdraw his presence from his works, if, for a moment, we can suppose that possible, they would fall into the most lamentable disorder—the fabric of the earth would be disjointed, the elements would break loose from the laws which bind them, and such ruin would ensue as can neither be described nor conceived. But, blessed be God, his mercies are everlasting, his goodness is unchangeable and inexhaustible, he rejoices in the works of his hands, and preserves them in all their original beauty and perfection from generation to generation. That which was good in the beginning, remains good till the present hour. Very good is the sun, and the light, and the heat, beautiful and good the blue sky, the glittering stars, and the showery bow; good the air and the winds, the dews and the rains, the summer and winter, spring-time and harvest; good are the mountains, the valleys and the plains, their ores and their gems; good the rivers and seas, the fruits of the ground, the pomegranate and vine, the wheat and barley; sweet is the odour of flowers, rich the fragrance of the spice tree,

beautiful the raiment of the lily; good are the beeves of the stall, and the flocks of the fold, and the fishes of the stream; melodious is the song of the birds, joyous the insect's hum; good too is man when he fulfils the design of his creation, and obeys the laws which God has given for the regulation of his life and conduct. He is "fearfully and wonderfully made," and what are all his senses but so many inlets of enjoyment, what innumerable gratifications are prepared for his palate, how many sweet sounds vibrate like enchantment on his ear, what infinite diversity of scenes in ocean, earth, and air rush upon his sight. Good are those intellectual powers by which he is made capable of knowing God, and of reading those characters of his wisdom and beneficence which are stamped upon all his works; good are those instinctive feelings and moral affections which have been rooted in his heart; sweet is the smile of infant innocence; tender and good the love of a mother for her child; good those virtues which adorn the character of a father, a brother, a friend, a patriot, a philanthropist; delightful the indulgence of those emotions which swell in the bosom of gratitude and devotion. In what spot of the universe is goodness not conspicuous? It is in the light which we behold, in the air we breathe, in our food, in our raiment. It drops

upon us from above, it springs up beneath our feet. Wheresoever we rove, or wheresoever we rest, we are surrounded as with a flood, by the exuberant mercies of the Creator. As he formed, he preserves us; and “in him we live, and move, and have our being.”

The sacred writers frequently direct our attention to the contemplation of God as our Creator—aware that such contemplation must inspire every mind that indulges it with sentiments of gratitude, of love, of admiration. It embraces all the attributes of God, especially his wisdom, goodness, and power; for what but infinite wisdom could have planned the matchless glories of the universe, what but infinite benevolence thought of communicating life and happiness to innumerable orders of creatures, and what but infinite power realized the conceptions of such wisdom and goodness?

It would be well, if amidst the theological controversies raging around them, men would sometimes withdraw from their windy storm and tempest, to follow the example of the inspired writer, and read the character of the Deity in the great volume of his works, and not suffer their views to be limited, and their judgments dis-

torted by the false representations of theologians, who draw their caricatures of the Father of All from their own dark imaginations, from prejudice, passion, and theological hate; and from texts of Scripture, misunderstood and misapplied, and profaned by the unholy meaning annexed to them. They depict the Father of All, (not perhaps in so many words, but by their unscriptural doctrines), as partial, inexorable, unjust, the friend of an elected Jew, who has adopted their own contracted notions, and the merciless avenger of all whose creeds differ from theirs. Their views of the divine character, seem borrowed from certain pagan superstitions; but they shame and outrage even these, when from the worker they proceed to the work, and describe the world as a mass of horrible ruins, the abode of all wickedness and all misery, smitten and withered and tormented under the curse of God—descriptions from which the heart revolts, and which every page in the volume of nature, and every page in the volume of inspiration contradicts. A writer who was filled with the spirit of God, the sweet psalmist of Israel, instead of blaspheming Jehovah, by saying that the earth lies under his curse, exalts and magnifies him by saying the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. Instead of maligning the Creator, and impeaching his liberality, he exclaims

“O taste and see that the Lord is good;” and again, he affirms that “the Lord is good to all,”—to all, observe, not to a favoured few, and instead of saying that the earth is smitten with his curse, he says “his tender mercies are over all his works.” Sometimes his mind is so filled with a sense of the Creator’s goodness, that he seems to labour under some difficulty in giving it due expression, as when he exclaims, “How excellent is his loving kindness! how precious are his thoughts to the children of men! how great is the sum of them!” A single perusal of the 104th Psalm might draw similar exclamations from every mind capable of being touched by pathetic description and sublime imagery, blended with a pure and lofty spirit of devotion. Many pictures, as noble and magnificent as ever poet feigned, or painter drew, and calculated to excite admiration, gratitude, love, for the power, the wisdom, and benevolence of the Deity, are to be found in Job and the books of the Prophets, as well as in the Psalms. Many of our blessed Saviour’s most happy and beautiful illustrations of his doctrine are taken from natural objects, from the fowls of the air or the lilies of the field. Will any one dare to say that the flower of which he affirms that its raiment was more glorious than that of Solomon, lay under the curse of God? Impossible! You see, then, how some of

the popular theological dogmas are crushed and demolished the instant they are brought to the test,—I need not now say the test of Scripture or of reason, but the native feelings of a man's own heart. Will any mother say of her babe, which she fondly cherishes in her bosom, that it was under the malediction of its Heavenly Father? If such a mother exist, her feelings are less worthy of envy than those of a lioness or she-bear; and these, if they could speak, with reason would tell her that they entertained more noble sentiments of that munificent Being who "giveth to the beast his food," and who fills the appetite of "the young lions when they roar after their prey and seek their meat from God."

When the Apostle Paul condemns the Gentiles for their ignorance of the true God, his condemnation is founded on their insensibility to those proofs of his existence which are stamped on the external world. "The invisible things of God," says he, "even his eternal power and deity are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." He deemed them inexcusable for their stupidity and blindness, in not reading and understanding the bright and intelligible characters impressed on the face of creation,—in not beholding the image of the Creator reflected, as from

a resplendent mirror, in his works,—in not rising from the effect to the cause,—from the thing made to the Maker. When the same apostle addressed the people of Lystra, and admonished them to turn from their lying “vanities, unto the living God, who made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein,”—he reminded them that “God had not left himself without witness;” and out of the thousand proofs which he might have selected in confirmation of his doctrine, what is the one which he presses as the most undeniable and convincing? The goodness of the Deity,—“He left not himself without witness in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” (Acts xiv. 15-17). To the truth of this statement every man’s heart and understanding must assent, if not wrapt in the coarse mist of prejudice, and the most callous integuments of what is falsely called orthodoxy,—that popular monstrosity,—that idol of the world, which hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, and fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith,—“By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive; for this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with

their ears, and should understand with their hearts, and should be converted, and I should heal them." If a man were actuated by the unhallowed wish to spread infidelity, impiety, and profaneness,—to lead to practical atheism, and drive men to despair, madness, suicide, he could not promise himself more success from the adoption of any other plan, than following the dictates of a cruel superstition,—listening to the suggestions of the spirit of Evil, and announcing that the world, or any part of the world, is under the curse of God.

From such blasphemous doctrines as this, it has been our felicity to be guarded by attending to the plain declaration of Holy Writ, that all is very good. We should reflect with unceasing gratitude, that God has placed us here in a beautiful and magnificent world, enriched with the treasures of his bounty,—replenished and blessed with his everlasting love.

Seas roll to waft us, suns to light us rise,
Our footstool earth, our canopy the skies.

Who formed us, fed, clothed, guarded us from danger, and brought us in safety to the present hour? Who has given us understanding and knowledge, and hopes full of immortality? Has not God been our Father in the most endearing sense of the term, and have not his very chastise-

ments been pledges of his love? Yes; the very calamities which we most deplore, under the overruling providence of the Almighty, are made to co-operate for the improvement and felicity of those who love him. The conflicts of the elements are necessary to the healthful organization of the physical system. Sickness is the effort of nature to expel a fatal distemper, and a salutary warning to prepare for another scene. Want is the spur to industry,—pain gives a zest to pleasure,—order springs from confusion,—and real good from apparent ill. The passions of men, like the elements of nature, are under the control of Omnipotence. They execute what God wills, and what he wills is right,—what he wills is good. He commands the lightnings, and they say, “Here we are.” He says to the raging billows, “Be still;” and when he sends forth his judgments, it is not in wrath, but in mercy; for it is written, “that mercy rejoiceth against judgment.” He marks an impassable boundary to the destroyer, and mercy is the angel that he charges to “ride in the whirlwind, and direct the storm.”

Let us learn to contemplate the character of the Deity in his works,—thence to acquire just notions of his divine perfections,—thence learn to revere, adore, and love him. The tendency of

such contemplations is to make the mind truly devotional. One simple inspection of a plant or animal, viewed with a regard to the hand that formed it, may be of more service to our religious character than a homily or a folio of metaphysical divinity. As the tree is known by its fruits, so is the moral nature of God known by his works. If they exhibit incontestable marks of power, wisdom, and goodness, then must their Maker be powerful, wise, and good,—for the maker is superior to the thing that is made. And what is there in the works of nature, from the illimitable range of suns and systems, down to an insect's wing, a blade of grass, a grain of sand, that does not exhibit the workmanship of God? What shall we say of the ear, so admirably fitted for the reception of sounds,—of the delicate structure of the eye, so incomparably adapted to all the purposes of vision,—of the fibrous structure of the brain, and the invisible ties by which matter is connected with mind? In all we behold such a wonderful adjustment of means to ends,—an apparatus so complicated, yet so harmonious,—so exquisitely finished, and so capable of accomplishing its object, as cannot fail to excite the highest admiration mingled with devotional awe. The more closely we examine any one of the works of God, the more wisdom do we discover,—the more good-

ness bursts upon our view. As when we ascend a mountain the prospect widens as we climb, till it is bounded only by the conjunction of the ocean and the sky.

It is not merely to gratify a laudable curiosity, or to widen the sphere of our knowledge, that it is commendable to meditate on the phenomena of nature, but for the excellent moral and religious effects which such meditations must produce. The mind borrows its complexion from the scenes with which it is most conversant. This is a well-known truth, and one to which too much attention cannot be paid by those who are engaged either in the education of the young, or the instruction and information of the old. The apostle gives his sanction to the proverb, that "Evil communications corrupt good manners." Those who are habituated to the converse of none but the good and wise, will become good and wise ; as those who mingle constantly in scenes of wickedness and impiety will become wicked and impious. So if we accustom the mind to contemplate the perfections of God, as manifested in his creation, we shall derive no small assistance to our endeavours to become perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect. You will observe that when our blessed Saviour gave this injunction, it arose from his

observation of the impartiality with which God bestows the natural gifts, as exemplified in the sunshine and the shower, which he sends both on the evil and the good,—the just and the unjust. Did we study the character of God, as revealed both in his works and in his word, and not through the cloudy and distorting medium of theological systems and confessions of faith, the mind would become liberalized, benevolent, and happy. We should rejoice that we are living under the paternal care of the greatest and the best of Beings; and while we cherished the warmest gratitude and love to our almighty and beneficent Benefactor, we should regard all the families of mankind as one blessed offspring of the same parent,—invested with the same rights, and destined to the same end. Cold and insensible must be that heart that is not touched by a sense of the numberless mercies of the Creator. Let us, my friends, frequently meditate on his works and ways, for the enlargement of our minds and the melioration of our hearts,—remembering that as from him we sprung, to him we are about to go; and that if we act faithful to his laws of nature and his gospel of grace, he will preserve the being which he gave through a happy eternity. To his holy name be ascribed all honour and glory, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

IX.

NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS.

ROMANS xii. 11.—“Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”

THESE are three precepts in which moral and religious instruction, according to the general style of the Apostle's writings, are closely blended; and in which a prudent regard for things temporal is connected with the higher and more important concerns of our soul. In the first of these precepts we are enjoined to avoid sloth in our useful and necessary occupations. The second, to be fervent in spirit, recommends order and zeal in our pursuits; or, to some it may seem intended as a caution against being engrossed by them too much, and to mingle with our attention to business, an earnest desire for spiritual improvement. The third, serving the Lord, implies that we should have the fear of God constantly before our eyes, and that we should walk blameless in his statutes and commandments all the days of our lives.

As to sloth, it is one of the greatest evils which a man can indulge, the most contrary to the constitution of his frame and the designs of nature. His power, both of body and mind, his wants and infirmities, his inclinations and pleasures, all point out the necessity of labour. Our hands were made to work, our feet to travel, our senses to act as handmaids of the soul, and reason to plan and direct the employment of all our faculties. As the exercise of the body promotes health, by dissipating noxious humours, and directing the animal spirits to their proper channels, so does the exercise of the mind keep our moral and intellectual powers vigorous and elastic, and capable of discharging their respective functions. But laziness is the bane both of body and soul. It enervates all our powers, and consumes them as rust consumes the plough-share and the sword.

Nature, through all her works, seems to point this moral lesson to the heart of man, that, if he would fulfil the designs of Providence, he must be active. The frame of the material world preserves its beauty and harmony by constant motion. How pure and crystalline is the water as it gushes down its rocky channel, giving nutriment to the plants which adorn, and a beverage to the animals which browse on, its margin ! But

when it stagnates in the lazy pool, it becomes the habitation of reptiles, and the receptacle of pollution. While the air is agitated by winds and tempests, it is the vehicle of health and enjoyment to man and brute; but when the purifying principles of motion cease to act upon it, it becomes the nurse of pestilence and fever. The cultured soil puts forth the pomegranate and the vine, and all the treasures of harvest; but when it ceases to be visited by the hand of toil, it is overspread with briars and weeds. How beautiful is the plumage of the bird which has the forest for its range—how glossy the hairy coat of the quadruped which roves at large on his native hills—how animated their looks and gestures; but mark the gloomy change produced upon them when slavery has made them the unwilling victims of sloth. Thus, may we see through all nature that exercise is necessary to the beauty, the health, and preservation of her creatures. To man it is even more necessary than to the rest. The lilies of the field neither toil nor spin, nor do the birds reap or sow, or gather into barns, but all these labours are imposed upon man. They are the imperative and unavoidable conditions of his nature, and, accordingly, if we consider him, either in his collective or individual capacity, we shall find that he is among the most active beings on the face of the

earth. It is not more natural for the blood to circulate than for a man to delight in active employment; and it is to his strong instinctive propensity to action that he is indebted, under Providence, for all the necessaries and comforts of social life. It was never the design of the wise Creator that he should acquire any real or estimable possession without some effort on his part to deserve it; and, thence, when the treasures of harvest load the fields of the industrious, and the riches of commerce flow into the ports of the busy, barrenness extends her empire over the farm of the idle, and poverty comes suddenly on the children of sloth.

The duty thus already pointed out by nature is strongly inculcated by the precepts of the wise in all ages, and by the institutions of revealed religion. We find it declared in the sacred volume that man should eat his bread in the sweat of his brow. A severe rephension is passed upon the slothful by the compiler of the book of Proverbs, and the temporal judgments by which they shall be visited, are in that book explicitly declared. The idle soul shall suffer hunger, and the sluggard, who will not plough by reason of the cold, shall beg in harvest, in the very season of plenty, and shall have nothing. Solomon enjoins us to do whatsoever our hand

findeth to do with all our might, and in the writings of the Apostles we find frequent admonitions to the same effect. The Apostle Paul has strongly declared his sentiments on this subject, when he says, that he who does not work should not eat—a truth in which it would be well that all should concur. Let every one who wishes well to his species, discourage idleness, and set his face against the drones that would consume the honey of the industrious hive.

Had not God intended man for a life of labour, he would have supplied all his wants in abundance without human care or foresight. The earth had teemed with plenty, and spontaneously ripened all her fruits for his use. But even in the garden of Eden, where this was actually the case, our great progenitor was not left without occupation, as he was placed in it to dress it and to keep it. On his banishment thence, he was sentenced to additional labours, and everything good and useful became the fruit of ingenuity and toil. God bestows upon us the principal blessings of life, not immediately, but indirectly, through the medium of our own exertions. Man in his naked and unimproved state is the most defenceless of animals, but by his skill in fabricating arms, he becomes the most formidable. His comforts and con-

veniences multiply in proportion to his diligence, and without this, there are a thousand blessings to which he must ever remain an utter stranger. Wealth and peace, riches and honours, wisdom and virtue, all spring from industry ; though they are all within our reach, they may be entirely lost by our supineness and neglect. Some writers on the origin of evil have maintained that it is necessary to give a zest to our pleasures, and, indeed, it will scarcely be denied that labour is the condition annexed by Providence to the enjoyment of our most common blessings. When do we eat with such a relish as when we feel the cravings of hunger ? When does the fountain taste so sweet as when we have been tried by thirst ? Or to whom is rest so grateful as to him who is subdued by fatigue ? Those viands, which the pampered and the slothful reject and loathe, are luxuries to the families of toil. And when repose is sought in vain by the lazy and effeminate on their couches of down, the toil-worn pilgrim enjoys refreshing slumber on the rock.

Let us not suppose that God will grant us his blessings unless we embrace the means which he has already bestowed for procuring them, unless we make our own industry co-operate with those causes which he has already established for effect-

ing the ends which we desire. We are commanded to pray for our daily bread, but we are not to imagine that even this request, small as it may seem, will be granted to the idle. We have experience to teach us that such a request is presumptuous, and that it will not be heard till their inactivity be laid aside. Neither manna from heaven, nor quails from the wilderness, will be sent to feed and encourage their indolence. God is too wise and too just to violate the laws which he has ordained for the proper government of his creatures, in behalf of such drowsy and undeserving petitioners. Let them work, and deem it enough that the great Bestower seconds their exertions. When God works a miracle, it is in behalf of the deserving. He gives victory to the man who has spirit to contend for it, and heaps honours on those who meritoriously aspire. But what glory or success is gained by sleepy and impotent wishes? "The soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing, but the soul of the diligent shall be made just."

Industry is the fount of wealth,—the great spring both of national and individual prosperity. Leaving out that time and chance which happen unto all, what, in the natural order of Providence, conducts so surely to that competence which forms an essential ingredient in the cup of

human happiness? It is true, indeed, that we sometimes fail in the designs which we most sedulously pursue, for God would teach by failure and disappointment not to trust entirely to secondary causes, but to look to him for a prosperous issue to all our undertakings. Accordingly, the industrious may not attain the distinction to which they aspire, and the sluggard may glide insensibly into the possession of riches. But these are anomalies or irregularities in the order of Providence—such irregularities as occur in all the departments of nature, but which by no means overturn or contradict its general principles. The experience of ages has ratified the truth of Solomon's observation, that "the hand of the diligent maketh rich, but drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags."

The next advantages which follow in the train of industry are honour and reputation. No industrious man is ever an object of contempt. On the contrary, all are disposed to praise and assist him. It is only the intentions of the idle and undeserving who wish for honours which they are not qualified to wear, and for which they have no spirit to contend, that are truly contemptible. Ask how all these have prospered, who rule in the councils of the nobles or the people,—who sit on the seat of judgment, and reap the rewards of professional or

commercial success. Was the good name, which is better than great riches, earned by a love of pleasure or repose? No; but by the exercise of their talents—by vigilance, study, and a prudent use of opportunity. These are the steps by which men climb to stand in the presence of kings. In the election of a candidate for any situation of dignity or trust, to whom but to him whose known activity and diligence best qualify him for such situation, are our unbiassed suffrages given? Whom would we appoint to be the manager of our own affairs, or whom would we raise to the chief honours of our household, but him whose activity in our service formed his chief commendation? There is a disposition in all mankind to reward and exalt the industrious—diligence renders a man useful; and that which is useful will not fail to be promoted. Besides, God himself, who is the great fountain of all dignity and honour, will recompense the proper management of the gifts which he has bestowed by additional trust and preferment: for it is written, that he who was faithful over a few things, was made ruler over many things, and desired to enter into the joy of his Lord. Suppose, however, that a good man is baffled in his honest and virtuous endeavours, he cannot be baffled with disgrace: glory will accompany his very fall. But without industry

what is any one to expect but shame, disappointment, and vexation ?

Another possession, still more valuable than the preceding, and which is also the gift of industry, is wisdom. This is that divine gift which Solomon justly prizes above rubies, and of which he says that all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto it. With whatever natural powers of understanding we may be born, without cultivation they will remain in a great measure useless. Observation and experience, meditation and study, the investigation of causes and effects, of first principles and their consequences, are all necessary to mature our powers, and give them a proper bias. And whoever depends on the force of original genius for the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom without these auxiliary exercises, depends on a broken reed. All those who have rendered themselves most famous for their literary and scientific attainments—the greatest scholars, philosophers, and divines, have been the most patient and industrious students. Knowledge is acquired only by slow degrees—by hoarding our ideas, and adding daily to the acquired stock ; but without diligence the hoard can never accumulate. The strongest impressions become faint in the lapse of time—the memory requires to be frequently re-

freshed in its knowledge of facts, once so familiar that we thought it impossible they should ever be forgotten, and the judgment that is unexercised, like a spring without motion, grows rusty and non-elastic. Genius is an oak of the forest, but study is the artist that must hew it into shape, and render it useful for the purposes of life.

It is a most erroneous supposition that wisdom is easily acquired, and therefore a slothful man shall wish for it in vain. It does not lie on the surface, and therefore superficial observers cannot behold it. It lies deep, and he that would find it must dig for it as for hidden treasures. It is vain to imagine that it will rise spontaneously to meet us. We must submit to toil, and offer some degree of violence to our nature, in stripping off the prejudices of custom, education, interest and passion, which obstruct our researches. Nothing is to be learned without the labour of thinking. Every man, whatever may be the native superiority of his powers, must submit to the ordinary process of acquiring wisdom, if he would become wise. He must read, reflect, meditate, and listen to the voice of instruction, and apply his heart to understanding: then shall he find that which he desires—for it is written, “I love them that love me; and they that seek me early shall find me.”

Virtue itself, that which is the beauty of the soul and the dignity of our nature—that inestimable possession which should be the great object of our ambition—the basis of our happiness here and of all our hopes through Christ in a world to come, is the growth of industry. Does any one suppose that he can be virtuous without vigilance, labour, and assiduity? He may much more reasonably suppose that he may become rich, honoured, learned and skilful in the arts. The greatest care is indispensable, not only to the formation of a virtuous character, but to the prevention of one that is vicious. Vice is a weed which springs in every soil, and without timely care it will insinuate its roots into our hearts. Virtue, on the contrary, is the produce of long and laborious cultivation, and its infant roots will be stunted in their growth or choked, without our timely care in eradicating the prejudices and passions by which they are in constant danger of being overpowered or dislodged. Now shall we suppose this to be an easy task? Is it to be accomplished by a wish or a solitary effort—or without circumspection, vigilance, and that fervency of spirit which the apostle recommends? Neither faith, nor hope, nor charity can be ours, without frequent endeavours to acquire them. It demands repeated efforts to create a habit of perfect reliance on the

will of God—of submission to his dispensations, and of keeping our corrupt and rebellious inclinations under the yoke of Christ. The best things are the most difficult of attainment: strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life. If we would pursue it we must be patient and persevering. But let not this discourage us. Great is the prize in view, and the higher we ascend the more smooth and easy will the path become. The temple of immortality is seated at the summit, and as we approach it the road will be strewn with flowers.

In pursuing our Christian course two errors are specially to be avoided,—that, on the one hand, of such devoted attention to business, as would make us regardless of our spiritual concerns; and, on the other, such exclusive application to devotional exercises as involves a neglect of our temporal affairs. From the Apostle desiring us not to be slothful in business, may be learned the great mistake of supposing that the Christian life is a life of indolence, or that the most ardent zeal in the duties of our Christian vocation is incompatible with useful and profitable employment. The spirit of the gospel, so far from being favourable, is in direct opposition to that maudish laziness and seclusion from the world, which, in the early

ages of the Christian church, so many thought necessary to the preservation of their sanctity. It was by no means the intention of our blessed Lord, when he desired us not to labour for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, to dissuade us from serious and industrious application to our temporal pursuits, but from inordinate attachment to them. His object, as he has elsewhere expressed it, was to induce us to make the kingdom of God and his righteousness the grand and prevailing motive, and every thing besides subordinate. As to sloth it incurred his severe reprehension. In the parable of the talents he has given an admirable illustration of his sentiments on this subject. The faithful and industrious servants who had doubled the sum entrusted to them, are commended for their diligence. But to him who buried his talent in the ground, and endeavoured to justify himself by frivolous excuses, his Lord said, in a style of merited rebuke,—“Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed; thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take, therefore, the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that

hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance ; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The error opposed to that which has been first noticed, that of devoting so much time to the world that none is left for the concerns of the soul, is of much more frequent occurrence. How many are so entirely absorbed by business that they cannot find leisure to attend even on the weekly ministrations of the word, or dedicate a few thoughts to the great subjects of salvation, death, judgment, and immortality ? And hence, might we properly be exhorted to be fervent in spirit, not only as the words apply to general ardour and activity of mind, but to the acquisition of spiritual treasures. This is a business in which there should be no sloth, for what can be of such real and intrinsic value as those everlasting riches which neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal ? What are all the joys this life can bestow if not accompanied by the divine blessing ? How uncertain, how transient, how incapable of gratifying the noble desires, the high aspirations of a soul that is formed in the image of God, and that can find in God alone, the

genuine source of happiness ! The Gospel allows abundant latitude, as much as any reasonable mind can wish, for the acquisition of food and raiment, and of everything else necessary to our present comfort. But it does not sanction worldly-mindedness, nor encourage a sordid disposition nor the sacrifice of all our precious time with our minds and hearts to mammon. It does not approve of our devoting whole weeks, and months, and years to the service of the world, at the expense of the service which is due to the living God. No, my friends ; it is expected of the Christian that he should try to instruct himself in Christian doctrine more and more perfectly, that he should be constantly endeavouring to imbibe more of the spirit of our great Master, and practise his precepts with increasing earnestness. This should be part of his daily task, and it would soon become his daily pleasure. He should manifest a zeal for the glory of God, and associate a feeling of piety and devotion with his most ordinary occupations. He who is diligent in business during the time that should properly be allotted to it, will also find ample time for pious duties without incurring any loss that he needs value or regard. But suppose he should incur such loss, that business multiplied so fast that he could not attend to it all without giving to it all his time, even that

which is claimed by a divine commandment as the property of the Lord—were it not more laudable to give up a portion of his business, or transfer it to other hands, than to set a dangerous example to his family and the world by neglecting the sanctification of the sabbath, and deserting his station in the congregation of the faithful? If six days be assigned for labour, shall we complain if one be appropriated for rest—that of the one hundred and sixty eight hours of which the week is composed, one or two are required to be spent in the service of him to whom we are indebted for the prolongation of our lives? Shall it be said that, for the sake of ratifying a bargain, or executing a deed, or for the performance of any other act in which the interests of humanity are not concerned, or where necessity will not plead our justification, we withhold our steps from the house of God, and so not only sanction the profanation of the sabbath, but give occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme? It is monstrous to think that such practices should be tolerated among a Christian people, and it is lamentable to find that any whose Christian opinions and example must have great influence on all within their circle, should expose themselves to such a charge of indifference or contempt of religious duties. What service is cheaper,

less burdensome, or more improving than attendance on public worship ; shall we grudge the short period of time which it demands ; we, who squander so much in idle pleasure, in frivolous employment, and trifling conversation ? Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Askelon, lest the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

I have now endeavoured, my brethren, to recommend to your consideration an important admonition of the Apostles, and to shew that many of the chief blessings of this mortal state depend on the industry with which they are pursued. This is a truth which cannot be impressed too strongly on the minds of the young, for what truth can be of greater moment to their prosperity, their virtue, their happiness, their salvation ? It is for the honour and everlasting good of every man to be diligent in his vocation, both temporal and spiritual. There is no condition, however exalted, free from many indispensable duties, whose faithful performance requires activity and labour. It is an egregious mistake that idleness is the privilege of greatness and wealth, for every man, from the king to the peasant, has duties which he owes to society and himself, incompatible with a life of sloth. In all the several rela-

tions of fathers, mothers, guardians, children, brethren, friends, citizens, members of the house of God, and of the great family of mankind, how much is to be done ! Eternal life itself is the last and great reward of industry, or as the Apostle expresses it, of patient continuance in well-doing. It is the gift of God—his own free gift—but not to the idle. He that would obtain the prize must run for it—he that would snatch the immortal wreath must press towards the mark. The fervour of his spirit must not languish, nor his zeal in the service of God wax cold.

God grant that we all so run that we may reach the goal in triumph, and to his name be ascribed everlasting praise through Christ our Lord. Amen.

X.

A WINTER SERMON.

PSALM cxlvii. 16, 17. "He giveth snow like wool, he scattereth the hoar frost like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like morsels. Who can stand before his cold?"

THE Psalm from which these words are taken, was composed according to some critics, after the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, or agreeably to others, at the first surrounding of Jerusalem with fortifications by David. It contains an exhortation to praise God, suggests various topics of reflection to promote the exercise of this duty, and recites several instances of the power, the justice, and goodness of the Deity, as displayed in the general administration of the laws of nature, the exercise of his moral government, and the particular dispensation of his statutes and commandments.

I. It asserts and illustrates the omnipotence of God, and shews his absolute command over all the elements of nature. A writer, inferior to the author of the Psalms, would have employed long

time and many words to demonstrate the infinite power of the Almighty, but the language of inspiration conveys the sublime truth in a single sentence. "He telleth the number of the stars, he calleth them all by their names." The same power, which governs and guides the secret movements of the whole material system, is remarkably displayed in the government of this terrestrial ball—in the regular vicissitude of the seasons, and the modes in which the various elements fulfil his righteous decrees.

To a contemplative and religious mind, every change in the external appearance of nature is an infallible proof of an omnipresent Deity. Whether the sun parches the thirsty earth, or the winter seems to desolate and deprive it of its beauty, the religious man beholds in such changes the operations of an all-beneficent Being—the means by which some of the most useful ends in the economy of nature, and ultimately in the destinies of man, are accomplished. He stretches his view beyond the present to the future, and where he cannot foresee any direct consequences to challenge his admiration and gratitude, he questions his own want of discernment, rather than entertain a momentary doubt of the wisdom and goodness of the Creator. The storm which shakes his habi-

tation, and the cold which congeals his blood, are considered by him as necessary links in the chain of God's kind providence. In the icicles which hang from the eaves of his dwelling—not less than in the lily which garnishes his fields—in the crystallization of a flake of snow—not less than in the more complex, and apparently more difficult organization of an animal—he sees marks of the sovereign beauty and wisdom which pervade and adorn every work of the divine Architect.

The succession of the seasons is a subject of perennial wonder and admiration; but our familiarity with them strips those feelings of their force. Yet, when we see a machine, which represents the celestial motions, the earth, the moon, the planets with all their phases, in their relative distances, and amusing variety of phenomena, we highly and justly extol the ingenuity of the mind by which it was planned, and the art by which it was executed. Yet, what is the most ingenious piece of mechanism ever devised, compared to the great machine of the universe? Here is a contrivance constantly before us which infinitely surpasses all that human power could effect in wisdom, beauty, and grandeur. And to us, constituted as we are, what wonders could Omnipotence itself display more calculated to awaken atten-

tion? But they are common, and therefore seldom regarded: the sun rises and sets while we are sleeping, or dreaming broad awake. The firmament displays the glory of God, but it is only to a few contemplative minds. The seasons roll round rejoicing; but the harmony of their voice is heard only by the ear of devotion. How many are there who feel nothing,—who see nothing to admire in the amazing scheme! But were one of the wheels of nature to be suddenly clogged, so as to suspend any of its operations, as the rising of the sun for a single day, they would be overwhelmed with fear and astonishment. Then would they prostrate themselves before Omnipotence, and pray that the order of nature might be restored. And does it argue a less degree of power, or evince less clearly the presence of divine agency to fix for ages the precise moment of the sun's rising and going down. The pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night did not demonstrate that agency more palpably to the Israelites of old. Even those irregularities in the seasons, and those vicissitudes of temperature, which we sometimes lament, are among the most striking ordinances of infinite wisdom. One important object which they serve, so far as respects their connection with man, is to show him his dependence on the Creator, and teach him not to trust too decidedly to an established order of

events, as if all things were under the stern unconditional decree of necessity and fate; or that it is not in the power of the Almighty to change, to modify, or annul the laws which he has himself established. Under the Jewish dispensation fruitful seasons were regarded as special instances of Divine favour; and why they should not still be so considered it would be difficult to imagine. Drought and scarcity were, on the contrary, attributed to the displeasure of God at their iniquities; and it would be well if all mankind would sometimes contemplate such visitations in a similar point of view. Solomon, at the dedication of the temple, prays that if there be famine or pestilence, blasting or mildew in the land, the people may avert the calamity by prayer and repentance. And it is perfectly agreeable to our knowledge of God, to conclude that he may so interfere in the direction of those secondary causes with which most of our inquiries terminate, as to arrest the evil which we deprecate, or produce the good we entreat. When famine approaches the land,—when the heavens become as brass, and the earth as iron,—when the rain of the land is as powder and dust, so that the soil does not give its increase, nor the trees yield their fruit, or if sickly seasons and pestilential vapours visit the earth, and cause a mortality among the peo-

ple, we may amuse ourselves in endeavouring to account, on natural principles, for such visitations. We may attribute them, if we please, to some unlucky aspect of the planets,—to some new spots on the solar disc, or the too near approximation of a comet to the orbit of the earth. Possibly these may be the proximate cause—but what causes them? Let us ascend to the cause of causes, and that is the hand of God. Pestilence and famine are the ministers of his will. When he chuses it, they go forth to execute his mandates, to spread consternation among the nations, and convince them that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. When he recalls them they obey his voice, retire into the darkness from which they sallied, and leave the world to be gladdened with new emissions of health and plenty. For though the Almighty may deem it necessary in his unsearchable wisdom, to exhibit his terrors to his rebellious offspring, to awe them into submission by his frown, when they are not to be won by his smile, he does not permit any irregularity to produce a permanent change in the grand and general results of his government. He fixes the circuit beyond which the disturbing force shall have no power to act. If he stay the current of his bounty for a season to let men know from what source they are supplied, he only suffers it to accumulate, that it

may afterwards flow down with more copious redundancy.

There are some who would seem to exalt the majesty of God, by supposing that he withdrew his presence from his works as soon as they were completed—that he fixed an eternal and unchangeable order of things, and then abandoned them to the direction of their respective laws. They would thus liberate the Deity from the trouble and vexation attending the constant superintendence of an intricate system—permit him, as did the Epicureans of old, to enjoy an undisturbed repose, and leave the wheels of nature to obey the impulse which they first received and roll on till they be worn out or exhausted. But how can we in reason conclude that any part of the divine works may exist in a state of separation from their Author? The presence of God is as necessary now to preserve, as it was at first to create them. The hand that formed must continue to regulate. He that first marshalled the bright array of the celestial host, that marked their path in the firmament, and kindled them with a ray of his glory, must still direct their courses and feed their fires. It is to detract from his greatness and to diminish the dignity that we would exalt, to suppose that the Creator can ever be absent from his creation—

much more that he can be encumbered or embarrassed by attending to such a multiplicity of works, or fatigued by the exercise of a perpetual vigilance. The Lord "fainteth not, neither is he weary." His spirit is diffused through the immeasurable whole. He is the breath of all that breathes, the life of all that lives. *Nature* is but the name for an effect whose cause is God. He maintains the eternal process by which all minds are supported and cherished. He sees the ages roll around him in endless progression. No difficulty frustrates his designs—no change exhausts his beneficence.

The distribution of the seasons is a contrivance so beautiful, and it shows such goodness in the great Creator, in providing for the gratification of that novelty in which we all delight, that we cannot sufficiently admire it. It is the theme of praise and wonder to every reflecting mind. Every season brings some new pleasure in its train, insomuch that it is frequently questioned which of the seasons is most to be preferred. Some delighting in the renovated appearance of nature presented by the returning spring; and others rejoicing in the gifts of a bounteous harvest; a third class prefers the warm and invigorating beams of the sun, or the leafy refreshing

shade of summer ; while a fourth deems the social joys of winter more to be prized than them all. But it is not every mind that has rendered itself capable of enjoying the pleasures of any one season. To many the year is distinguished by nothing but the changes of heat or cold, or the increase or diminution of their possessions. Mere animal feelings these, which have none of the characteristics of mind. In order to enjoy the pleasures which the seasons bring, a devotional taste is necessary. It is this only which can give us a true relish for them, which can prove to us that they really exist. It is the spirit of devotion dwelling in the mind, and thence diffusing itself over the face of universal nature, that gives a richness of colouring and beauty to every thing we behold. It is this which gives us to see the ever-living energies of an Omnipotent God,—to trace the strokes of his pencil in the hues of every flower ; to taste the gifts of his bounty in the aliment of every root and plant. To the man not possessed of some portion at least of this taste, nature is a rude and unanimated mass. He sees in it only the changes of inert matter ; the great directing mind is unfelt and unseen. He feels the rays of the sun and the cold of the winter, but he feels them as an animal without the consciousness of the divine agency—without the

workings of that reason which constitutes the man, and elevates him above the ox that ploughs his ground, or the sheep that browses on his pasture. He feels none of that elevation of thought, which raises a man in the scale of rational existence. He sees nothing in all the grand and magnificent display of wonders around him, but the work of chance, of fate, the visible effect of some latent cause, which he neither chooses to investigate, nor tries to comprehend.

But to the man of devotional faith, every season brings a succession of pleasing images, of grateful recollections, of present enjoyments. In the balmy breath of spring, he inhales the influence of divine love. In the budding of the blossoms, which like gems adorn the branches, in the fresh verdure which covers the face of nature, or the early flowers which lift their tender heads from the soil, as if rejoiced to escape from their bondage and hail the light of the vernal sun, he sees the silent but active influence of the invisible God. He beholds the renovation of the vegetable world commenced, and he commits his seed to the ground with the infallible certainty of its undergoing the change which will cause its reproduction and increase—relying with a perfect trust on the accomplishment of those laws which divine good-

ness has established for its growth. Nor is he deceived. In summer he finds that it has been visited by the prolific dews of heaven—that it has risen tall and erect from its earthly covering, and is hastening to fulfil the eternal decree in bearing thirty, sixty, or one hundred fold. In the increased heat of the sun he feels the warmer aspirations of Divine favour—and in autumn, when the valleys are covered over with corn, and the hills are clapping their hands for joy, he owns with grateful and devout heart the inexhaustible munificence of the great Bestower. Nor does he find winter; the season erroneously deemed gloomy, destitute of pleasure and instruction. We now behold nature assuming her grandeur, and swaying her sceptre with uncontrolable power. When do the heavens appear so magnificently arrayed with the glory of the Eternal as when they are rendered serene by the influence of frost? When is his power more strikingly demonstrated, than when he suddenly converts the running streams into pavements of solid crystal, and wraps the whole earth in a mantle of snow? It is now that the devout man beholds God travelling on the wings of the wind, or treading on the stormy deep—making darkness his pavilion, and surrounded with thick clouds of the sky.

Though nature at this season wears the aspect of sterility,—though she seems to have consigned the vegetable tribes to the empire of death, and to have deprived the animals of their wonted sustenance, let us look a little deeper, and what a fund of wisdom and goodness shall we discover,—what subjects of gratitude and praise. The flower and the shrub may wither, but the benevolence of God is perennial. It loses not its verdure and freshness. It flourishes beautiful and vigorous amidst every severity of climate; and where, at this moment, may it not be distinctly traced? The germs of vegetation are preserved from the destroying power of frost by the snows which enfold them as in a fleece. The weakest and most defenceless of the insect tribes are lodged in recesses which the eye of man cannot penetrate, and wait only for the breath of returning spring to awaken them to new life and enjoyment. Of the various animals which beautify the creation, and contribute to the support of man, some have winged their flight to sunny climes—some feed on the stores which their instinctive sagacity has hoarded—some in their secret dens slumber away the period of cold, and those which are destined to bear it, find that the liberal hand of God has not left their table unprovided, whether it be spread beside the plashy spring, or in the leafless covert

of the wood. That the wants of man have been considered and amply supplied, no one can require to be informed. In the dreariest regions in which his lot has been cast, though surrounded by a frozen ocean and mountains of thick-ribbed ice, he is not without his comforts and pleasures. Wrapped in his warm furs, and sheltered by his subterraneous abode, he lets the hurricane rage and the snow-drift fall unregarded. But in some of the northern regions winter is a season of commerce and amusement. The hardened surface of the rivers and seas present facilities to the traveller, and communications are effected by the means of frost, which in summer could not be attempted. In ages before iron railways were thought of, the frozen surface of lakes and rivers afforded to the sledge and the rein-deer a mode of passing, with the fleetness of the wind, through regions of sterility, where the labours and ingenuity of man to render them accessible would be employed in vain.

Thus has every season its peculiar uses, and thus is every element fulfilling the design of a Being whose goodness has no bounds. But were the Father of all ever to be actuated by any other than paternal feelings towards his creatures, how soon and how easily could he arm any one of the

elements with irresistible power to ravage and destroy ! They are the angels of his providence—the ministers of his righteous will. And fixed as they are to their prescribed province, and chained within limits which they cannot pass, how readily could he relax his grasp, and give them his awful commission to exercise their power unrestrained, to carry their dreadful havoc through all the terrestrial creation, and bid chaos return again ! How do they act, even now, without any visible interposition, when men defy their power, and, in spite of their hostility, attempt to subdue nature ! With heat on the wilds of Libya, and under whirlwinds of scorching sand, have warlike hosts been buried and consumed. On the frozen plains of the north have armies, laden with spoil and flushed with victory, seen their chivalry paralyzed, and the spirit of frost, like the angel of the Lord in the Assyrian camp, carry desolation through their unresisting ranks ; for “the Lord delighteth not in the strength of a horse, he taketh no pleasure in the legs of a man.” The caparisoned steed and the mailed warrior are feeble as the moth before the terrors of Jehovah. But “he taketh pleasure in those that fear him and hope in his mercy.” The Scriptures reveal to us the use which he frequently makes of natural agents, to accomplish some of the most striking effects in

his moral government. With flights of quails he satisfies the hungry Israelites, and with clouds of locusts lays waste the fields of Egypt. When Joshua fought at Gibeon, more of his enemies fell by hail-stones than by the sword. When Pharaoh pursued the children of Israel, a similar agent was made the instrument of his overthrow. A strong east wind passed over the face of the waters—the floods stood up as a heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea. The Israelites, confiding in their Almighty Protector, marched on secure between the crystal battlements of the consolidated flood. The Egyptians followed and entered the jaws of death. The breath of God relaxed the icy fetters which bound the ocean, and it rolled with overwhelming rage on the chariots and horsemen of the pursuing enemy. The depths covered them, and they sunk to the bottom as a stone.

God still continues to exercise a particular providence over mankind, and in a way which the ungodly consider as fortuitous, displays his marvellous power, and turns the way of the wicked upside down. He works miracles without seeming to violate the order of nature. He adds a new pinion to the feet of his messengers, and they arrive at the place of their destination before

they were expected. He imparts a spark of new energy to their operations, and their work is finished ere we suppose it had time to be commenced. "Who," we may ask in the words of the Psalmist, "can stand before his cold?" Whether we consider it with the philosopher as a mere deprivation of heat, or adopt the more common opinion that it is a positive quality, its effects are often tremendous, and we may reply to the question, that before it naught which partakes of life can stand. Whether it comes with showers of sleet or snow in its van, or creeps on, silent, secret, and invisible, to the accomplishment of its purpose, it exercises a power which embattled thousands can no more resist than they could resist the concussions of an earthquake, or the eruptions of a volcano,—the fleetness of the courser is arrested,—the legs of the warrior refuse their wonted office,—the streams of life stagnate in their channels,—the stillness of death pervades the heart. They fall like the leaves of autumn nipped by the frost, and scattered over the lawn,—a dreadful demonstration of the power, and, it may be, of the righteous judgment of God. Had man the same command of the element of frost as he has of fire, what a tremendous scourge would it become! But this the Eternal has kept at his own disposal; and blessed be his

name, his dispensations are wise and righteous altogether.

II.—Another topic to which the Psalmist directs our attention, and which is most applicable to the present season, is the bounty of God to our native land. “Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion: for he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee. He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat.” This description, in most of the years which we have witnessed, is not less applicable to our own island than it was to Palestine. Here, in the midst of winter, has the liberal hand of God made ample provision for all our necessary wants; and, in our warm and comfortable abodes, the inclemencies of the season are not only unfelt, but they serve to give a zest to our pleasures. For every enjoyment is heightened by contrast, as no one knows the luxury of food so much as he who has hungered, nor the sweets of repose like one who has suffered from fatigue. Winter too, independent of its peculiar pleasures, heightens all the beauties of returning spring, and it may well be questioned whether, if we had that eternal spring of which poets, and even philosophers and divines, have dreamed as having once existed, it would not by

its sameness and want of novelty soon cease to delight. But that there was no eternal spring even in Paradise, is evident from the fact recorded in Genesis, that God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven, to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years." The vicissitude of the seasons, therefore, was one of the original designs of the creation.

How many blessings are there to render winter a season of pleasure, of instruction, and improvement! The ties of society seem now to be drawn closer, and the feelings of mutual dependency more lively. The mind becomes more disposed to "rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep." The heart becomes more sensitive to the wants of our common nature, and benevolence exercises a more extensive influence. The domestic circle is completed,—the hearth emits a more cheerful blaze,—and books, conversation,—the song and dance—and tender offices of friendship afford employment in turn. The hail shower may patter on the window, but can find no access to our dwelling. The power of frost may cause the lakes and pools to stagnate, and the snow-drift block up the roads and arrest the speed of the traveller, but *we* seldom know aught

of the calamitous effects except by description. The kindness of God has fenced us round with bulwarks as impregnable as were once the walls of Jerusalem, and wrapt us in clothing as impassive as the warrior's mail to the rattling sleet. Shall we not be grateful for his goodness, and cause the voice of praise to be heard in our habitation? "Praise Jehovah, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion: for he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee. He maketh peace in thy borders."—How often in past years have we found special cause to thank God for the blessing of peace, when other regions have been laid waste by the desolating scourge of war—an evil generated by the iniquitous passions of man, and more terrible than any plague sent from the armouries of heaven! How often may we have thought that the angels of Providence had encamped on the waters that surround our shores, and rendered them impossible of access to the destroyer!

If, in some respects, one or two of past years may be regarded as exceptions to the general fertility of the land, and the comfort of its inhabitants, such rare exceptions may be intended by that beneficent Providence which extends over all, to be a blessing, and not, as many are inclined to

consider them, a curse. It is granted that the failure of the food, which usually sustains the great mass of our population, is a lamentable evil, while it lasts; but temporary—and not irremediable—nay, which may ultimately be productive of lasting and essential benefits. We are told by great authority, that, in the infernal regions, frost performs the effects of fire—we are sure it does so in some respects upon the earth, and we doubt not that it produces great moral as well as physical changes, and paradoxical as it may seem to affirm it, yet is it not a fact that it thaws and warms the frozen heart, and causes the springs of charity to flow in some bosoms where they were seldom if ever known to flow before? Does it not lead multitudes to feel for the wants, deprivations, and sufferings of their fellow-creatures, for whom they had previously very little sympathy or compassion? Has it not prevailed over their selfishness—melted the heart of stone, and turned it into a heart of flesh—and compelled them to obey the Christian command, to give of their abundance to the hungry and the naked? Does it not also promise to be the means of producing most beneficial changes on the social condition of the great mass of the people of this island—of fixing their attention on the best modes of improving their industrial resources—of introducing more profitable

plans of agriculture—of opening new sources of commerce—of multiplying and strengthening the reciprocal ties of kindness by which all the families of the earth should be united ?

III.—There is yet another topic to which the Psalmist directs our thoughts, and to which I must beg a moment's attention. He calls upon us to bless God for having given us the sustenance, not only of the bodily, but of the spiritual, life. "He sheweth his word unto Jacob, and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation, and as for his judgments, they have not known them." It is our boast that we have a revelation from heaven, for our instruction, our guidance, our support and our comfort, in all the troubles and perplexities of life. "The Lord reigneth—let the earth rejoice, and the multitudes of her isles be glad." Precious is the word of God—precious the gospel of Christ—precious that holy and cheering light, which enables us to see and to understand the object and design of the divine dispensations—to see that goodness pervades all the works of creation—that it dictates and presides over all the laws of Providence—that it is veiled under the severest judgments—that it blesses while it smites, and heals where it wounds—that substantial benefits result from apparent or temporary evils—and

that the winter of our days—the desolation of death, shall be succeeded by a perennial spring—by the resurrection of an eternal year.

Human life, in its various stages, has been often compared to the seasons, and its winter is old age. The snows of time scattered on the temples, the faded lustre of the eye, the wan hue of the complexion, shew the propriety of the comparison, and point many a moral reflection to the heart. Old age resembles winter, not only in external appearance, but in possessing enjoyments peculiar to its climate and season. “The hoary head is a crown of glory when found in the way of righteousness.” It challenges the homage and respect of mankind.—“Unto it men give ear, and wait and keep silence at its counsel.” And what renders it thus a season of enjoyment, of honour, of esteem, and even of envy? The provision laid up for it during the preceding period,—the fruits of reflection, of experience, of wisdom, and of virtue,—that food of the soul, which, like the fruit gathered from the tree of life, preserves the spirit’s immortality, and secures its triumph over the grave. What a lesson is this for youth and for manhood! My young friends, if ever you would arrive at the winter of your existence in peace, render that winter by your piety and virtue a season of bless-

ing, respectability and repose, the bestower of comfort, and the harbinger of an immortal youth. Now is the season of preparation; now is the acceptable time of the Lord. God grant that all of us may duly profit by such reflections, and to his name be ascribed everlasting praise. Amen.

XI.

THE PURSUIT OF WISDOM.

PROVERBS xvii. 16.—Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?

WISDOM, that grace so frequently recommended in the book of Proverbs, is a possession of such value, that, in the opinion of Solomon—the wisest, the richest, and most voluptuous of kings,—nothing deserved to be brought into comparison with it. “It is sweeter,” said he, “than the honeycomb, and more precious than the ruby, or the fine gold of Ophir.” But, notwithstanding the just and glowing encomiums with which he honours it, and his frequent admonitions to make it the principal object of pursuit, so accurate an observer of human nature as he, could not but see, with regret, how much it is neglected or despised; and how many preferred walking in the way of folly or iniquity to those paths which he had described, and which, from his own experience, he knew to be the only ways of happiness and peace. Thousands who have it amply in their power to acquire this most excellent gift—who have all the means of

storing their minds with religious knowledge, and becoming shining examples of moral and religious integrity, may be seen setting all their superior advantages at nought, and resolutely determined to frustrate every plan that has been devised for their good. And hence he is prompted to ask the question in the text, "Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?" To what end are the fountains of knowledge opened if men will not drink? Why is salvation offered if they obstinately refuse the terms by which it is to be secured?

It is no imputation on the wisdom of Providence to have bestowed its gifts on those who abuse them. The blame is not that of the Giver, but of those who receive. His is the praise of benevolence, generosity, and an earnest desire for human happiness—theirs the sin of ingratitude, indolence, and perversity. Providence has done, and will continue to do its part; if men will not do their's, against whom should our reprehension be directed? His light shines brightly and equally upon all, but if we choose to forsake its guidance and wander into by-ways, where we stumble on till we are ingulphed or precipitated—who or what is to be charged as the cause of our disaster?

The question in my text might be applied to a great number and variety of circumstances in life, and they would suggest to us not only the propriety, but the duty of making a judicious use of whatever advantages we enjoy, whether they refer to the improvement of the mind or heart—our temporal estate, or our spiritual welfare. In worldly matters who is not sensible of the egregious folly of overlooking those opportunities which are thrown in our way of advancing our fortune, or extending our profitable connections? Who is not ready to acknowledge, that, if men would improve those profitable times and chances (so called) which happen to all, there would be less poverty, less wickedness, and less misery in the world? The majority of those evils, which we feel and deplore, would be avoided or prevented. And did we embrace those means which are presented to us of making progress in virtue, and in the attainment of Christian perfection, we should become examples of moral and religious integrity. Here is the proper province of wisdom—the great field in which every one may make some successful exertion. In secular affairs no man is beyond the reach of disappointment—but who labours without effect to become both wiser and better?

We are often disposed to join with Solomon in

asking for what purpose have particular advantages and privileges been bestowed on our fellow-creatures, when we see them so grossly perverted and abused? At the same time we fancy, that if we were in their situation, with all their means and facilities of improvement, we should employ them to a more judicious purpose—avoid those errors by which they are misled, and proceed in a much straighter and more compendious way to the attainment of those goods which we ought to pursue. Now, it would be a more edifying exercise if, instead of imagining what we should do in the situation of other men, we were to examine whether we have made the most of our own—whether we are, at this moment, improving the circumstances in which we are placed to our greatest profit. What if we should ourselves happen to be classed with those whom we censure? What if the very same sloth which in others we condemn—the same neglect of opportunity—the same abuse of privileges—the same spiritual blindness and inconsistency, should prove our own condemnation? Let us take care that we have not been withholding the price which should be paid for wisdom—hiding our talent under a bushel—neglecting good and pursuing evil—building airy castles and forgetting the fabric that we should have been founding on a rock.

That we have all enjoyed, and that we are still continuing to enjoy, many real advantages, which, if properly employed, would lead to great moral superiority, is not to be questioned. I know not that there is a single circumstance, temporal or spiritual, instrumental to this design, which has been denied us. Our country, our religion, our particular persuasion, our education, and our worldly estate, all combine in uttering the same language, and depriving us of all those excuses which are commonly made for deficient practice. We cannot complain, as many might, that Providence has cast our lot in a land of ignorance and barbarism, that schools of education are not accessible to the many, that temples for religious instruction are not open to all, that the gospel is a sealed book, or that living examples of virtue are wanting to lead us; on the contrary, our line has fallen upon pleasant places, and in the general distribution of the families of mankind, we have been placed in that very clime, on that very spot, which our own unbiassed judgment would have preferred. We have the blessing of living in a Christian country—in a great metropolis, distinguished by learning, liberality, and refinement. Here religious freedom spreads her banners, and invokes us to worship God in whatever mode we deem the best, without any restriction on our

forms—without any shackle on our conscience. If a heathen philosopher thought he had reason to bless the gods that he was born a Greek, and not a Barbarian, how much more reason have we to bless God that we were born Christians and not Greeks? What a flood of light has the blessed and glorious gospel poured on the human understanding—how far superior in its salutary effects, both on the mind and heart, to all the philosophy of the heathens—and how accessible to the ignorant and illiterate—how invigorating, even to the babe and the suckling, who may drink of it to satiety, even at the fountain-head! Not only have the springs of God's favour been opened to us in his holy word, but it has pleased him to raise up pastors and teachers to enforce his laws, by the various means of exhortation, persuasion, and rebuke; to alarm the guilty, breathe confidence into the timid, strengthen the weak, and stimulate all to lay hold on eternal life.

But lest these general means of improvement should be inefficacious, others more particular and more persuasive have been employed to imbue us with the love of virtue, and lead to the practice of true holiness. Many of us have had pious parents to instruct us in the knowledge of God's holy word—to pour religious instruction on our

infant minds—to lead us in our riper years to the hill of Zion—to guide us by their example, and enrol us among the disciples of the Lord Jesus. We have been early impressed with a sense of the heinousness of sin—of its vile, degrading, and destructive nature—of the perdition, temporal and eternal, with which it is accompanied. If we run into iniquity—pollute our hands with the wages of unrighteousness—or defile the temple of God, whose temple we are, by the introduction of any unhallowed passion—we cannot make ignorance our excuse. We must have repeatedly heard—we must have repeatedly seen—that the end of the wicked is destruction—that they are scattered like chaff before the storm—and their memorial perisheth for ever; while the righteous flourish, fair and beautiful, like a tree planted by the river—whose roots are twined round the rock of ages—which defies the warfare of the elements to do it injury—and brings forth fruit in due season. We have had religious friends too, and companions, perhaps, in whom we might behold living proofs of the beauty and happiness of virtue, and by whose influence, had we not resisted it, we might have been led to the highest moral pre-eminence. Not only the example of the living, but the pious writings of the dead, had we only listened to them, would have contributed to this good work,

warmed our bosoms with a portion of their fire, and inspired us with noble emulation to excel.

Moreover, the temporal circumstances of far the majority of us, have been such as amply enabled us to improve the advantages which have been mentioned. We have not, as is the lot of many, been ground to the dust by poverty and oppression—compelled to perpetual conflicts with misfortune, nor had our lives, like those of the Israelites in Egypt, embittered by hard bondage, in mortar and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. But we have been like the same people in the days of their prosperity, blessed in our basket and our store—in the fruit of our cattle and the fruit of the ground—with abundance of corn, of wine, and of oil. We have had not only the comforts, but the luxuries and elegancies of life—time and leisure—a warm chamber—a comfortable fireside—our cup filled, and our table spread, as if it were done by enchantment, without any care of ours—friends, conversation, books—in short everything which reason could demand—nay, all that fancy could wish, to encourage, persuade, and assist us in the great task of Salvation.

Needs it be added to all this, that nature, in

planning the constitution of your minds, has to many of you been peculiarly bounteous—that she has granted you superior mental powers, capacious memories, solid judgments—ten talents, perhaps, where others can boast of only one—a good natural temper, and, what is to be preferred before all talents, however brilliant, and all accomplishments, however rare, benevolent dispositions—a devotional taste—a capacity for religious feelings and impressions—in short such capabilities of improvement, that nothing but culture can be wanting to lead you to that perfection to which our Saviour pointed, when he enjoined us to be perfect, even as our heavenly Father is perfect.

All these, my brethren, and more, far more, than we could hope to enumerate, are the advantages which most, if not all of us, have enjoyed. It remains with ourselves to determine how far we have improved them—and to lay seriously to heart the obligation imposed on us to labour industriously in the task of moral cultivation, that thus we may adorn the doctrine of our Saviour upon earth, and prepare for becoming the inhabitants of his heavenly kingdom. That we do feel the force of this obligation, and that we have been at some pains to improve both our minds and hearts, is not, I trust, to be questioned. That we have been

advancing from weakness to strength, from the first dawn of the morning towards the fulness of perfect day, might no doubt be demonstrated. But, notwithstanding, it can at no time be useless to enquire whether we have fully profited by our advantages and capabilities—if we have done all that it is our duty to do, and if we were on the eve of our departure from this world, we should have nothing to regret for gifts abused, talents perverted, or opportunities lost. We should not sit down contented with having made some progress, but aim to get still higher and higher on the holy hill. Why should he be satisfied with mediocrity, who may attain to excellence, or with being second in the spiritual race, when by a little exertion of strength he might be first? Our blessed Redeemer was not contented with mediocrity in his disciples. He would have us to be constantly aspiring after the highest excellence,—to carry every virtue to its due extent,—and to practise it on principles of the greatest purity. If ye love them that love you, or do good to them that do good to you, what thank have ye? Do not even the publicans—men who are under the controul of no religious principle whatever—do even the same? It is a miserable and a degrading superiority, not to be as other men are, extortioners. unjust, adulterers, or even as this or that less

culpable offender. Our ambition should be to rank among the most meritorious of our race. This is the proper field of our ambition, which when thus directed, becomes a noble passion. It would lead us not only to surpass many of our fellow-creatures, but to match superior natures in the career of virtue. "He," says the apostle, "who contends for mastery" in the Olympic race—he whose highest glory is a chaplet of barren leaves, that will soon wither away, prepares himself for the contest by exercise and temperance. How much more should he who contends for the prize of wisdom—the amaranthine wreaths of paradise gathered from the trees of life and knowledge, strain every nerve to conquer!

Of the guilt and misery of those who abuse the special favours which they have received from heaven, no argument is wanting to convince us. We are disposed to blame those who do not make a proper use of any gift, whether it came from nature or art,—though it be only the use of a pencil, or the management of a musical voice or instrument. Wherefore is the envied power bestowed,—the power of delighting the eye with a skilful mixture of light and shade on the painter's canvas, or of laying to sleep by sweet sounds such evil spirits as disturbed the peace of Saul, and awakening

devotion in the soul, if no eye be permitted to see, nor ear to hear it employed. It is the mode in which it is directed that gives value to every faculty, as it is use which gives a true splendour to gold. But what is the neglect of an accomplishment, compared to the abuse of the moral power,—to the defilement of the heart, and the prostitution of the soul? The ruined farm, the broken wall, and the crop of weeds, indicate the folly of sloth; but what are these to those more melancholy indications of spiritual indolence,—the prejudices and vices which, like briars and thorns, overspread the mind, and the breaches that are made by temptation in the citadel of life. How will a man answer to God for the neglected state of his soul,—that precious tenement,—that beautiful vineyard which he had moistened and fructified with the dews of his grace, when it produces only corrupt fruit? Is it for nought,—or for worse than nought,—that so many special favours have been granted,—so many opportunities of growing wise thrown in our way, and such a variety of means employed to add a new disciple to the truth? Shall prophets have spoken, and saints have lived, and martyrs died, and shall the Son of God have taught, and prophesied, and wrought miracles and led the way to heaven in vain? In vain shall he have unfolded the counsels of the

Most High, exposed himself to a life of shame, and a death of torment, for our edification? Shall the Lamb of God have died, and we remain insensible of the greatness of the sacrifice?

Much of our irreligious supineness and neglect arises from not meditating more frequently on the Word of God, and from want of a heartfelt conviction of the ineffable and everlasting happiness with which the pursuit and attainment of wisdom are accompanied. For, in matters of less moment, we are not indifferent. Whatever concerns our worldly comfort and prosperity immediately engages our attention. We are also induced by nature to admire beauty, esteem goodness, and applaud generosity. Now, were we fully inspired with an idea of the beauty, goodness, pre-eminent excellence, and never-fading honors of religious wisdom, how should we lament that we had not more early courted her smiles! It was remarked by a heathen sage, that if virtue were to appear in an embodied form upon the earth, she would captivate the eyes and the hearts of all beholders, and fix them upon her charms by an indissoluble spell. Let us pursue the idea, and suppose that celestial wisdom were to appear among us in a visible and tangible shape, invested with powers of persuasion passing human, and

armed with the irresistible authority of truth, how should we crowd to listen to her instructions! And suppose she were to assure us that she had a possession that could render all mankind happy,—that if we could make it our own, it would exalt our nature—cause us to become the most amiable of beings—dear to mankind, to ourselves, and the great Creator—that it would arm us against all temptations, strengthen us to support every misfortune, and supply an inexhaustible spring of hope—that it would show us where to find that real elixir of life of which philosophers have dreamed, and which alchymists have laboured to discover—that precious vial, which gives its possessor eternal youth—that magical stone which converts whatever it touches into something yet more valuable than gold; what would we not give to gain this treasure,—what prayers and entreaties, what gentle violence, what constant importunities would we not employ to be entrusted with it for the shortest season? Such a visitant then has appeared, far surpassing in moral beauty and perfection, what I have attempted to describe. Such a possession too is his—a talisman which bursts the chambers of death and opens the gates of heaven, and it is offered freely and indiscriminately to all for a certain price. The visitant is the Lord Jesus Christ, he by whom the Eternal

Wisdom spoke—the gift is immortality, the price is obedience to the holy precepts of the gospel.

Here then is an object truly worthy of our pursuit, and entitled to our most serious care. If we would gain the character of wisdom, and shun the imputation of folly—an imputation which all men should justly avoid; we cannot too soon commence our exertions to secure it. Who would not wish to be thought, and to be in reality, wise? We may be wise then, not merely, however, by wishing it, but by paying the price which is in our hand, and by which only it can be bought. Let us devote our hearts to wisdom, make it the principal thing—read its precepts by day—meditate on them by night—dig for it as for hidden treasures—seek and ye shall find—knock and it shall be opened unto you. If we suppose that it will come unsolicited, we indulge a vain and foolish expectation. It is not to be had for nothing. It is too precious to be bestowed either on the idle or the undeserving.

It seems to be a law of Providence, a law of consummate wisdom, and well suited to promote the great ends of our existence, that everything valuable should be obtained only at some price,—at the expense of watchfulness, labour, investi-

gation, the proper use both of our bodily and mental powers, and of the peculiar advantages of our respective situations. Patient industry, self-denial, and risk in speculation, are often the price of commercial prosperity. Study is the price of learning,—attention and assiduity of eminence in every art and profession. Some, indeed, are more favoured than others,—their times and opportunities are more frequent and more seasonable; and the assistance derived from nature or art may be more extensive. But how often do we see men who have none of the ordinary facilities of improvement, or of acquiring those benefits which are generally pursued, in defiance of all difficulties and by the mere force of industry and perseverance, advancing gradually to wealth, honour, knowledge, dignity; while others, who enjoy the easiest and most obvious means of getting beyond them in the same paths, employ them to no good purpose,—but as if determined to show how far they could go in frustrating the kind designs of Providence, obstinately persist in their folly till they are undone. The more bounteously God has dealt with his creatures, the greater is the folly and the sin of abusing his favour. Let those, therefore, who are highly gifted, beware how they neglect or abuse the gift that is in them. But let those who think themselves among the least

favoured, remember that industry supplies the place of *genius ;—in works of charity, a mite may be acceptable, when a large sum would be only a profanation. The tortoise in the fable, the slowest of animals, reached the goal in the race, before the fleetest creature that, depending on its swiftness, loitered by the way.

If we would be either wise or happy here, or eternally blest hereafter, we must labour to become so, nor vainly hope that the choicest blessings of heaven will be spontaneously showered on our heads. The price of wisdom is in the hands of every man, and it must be paid, or it never can be ours. Notwithstanding what some persist to urge, with respect to the inefficacy of all human services, and the enormously false doctrine that our very best actions partake of the nature of sin, the whole scheme of Providence, as it stands displayed both in nature and revelation, proves that without something done on our part, a task performed, or a price paid, there are divine blessings which we cannot obtain. True, it is written that eternal life is the gift of God. But to whom is the gift promised? Not to the sinful and impenitent, the profligate and the idle ; but to those who seek for it, to those who labour to deserve it by patient continuance in well-doing. The reward

of the disobedient is tribulation and anguish, but honour, glory, and immortality of all who do the will of our heavenly Father. God requires from every one of us a task proportioned to our power, and it is as incumbent on *him* who has but one talent to employ it well, as on him who has ten. The slothful servant who formed a different opinion, and excused his idleness, on pretence that God was a rigorous master, who gathered where he had not strawed, and reaped where he had not sown, suffered the penalty of his error by being cast into outer darkness, where there was weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

The price to be paid for wisdom and all its attendant blessings is not a splendid exhibition of talent, or of extraordinary virtue ; but a constant, sincere, and effectual obedience, a daily tribute of good works and pious meditation, of alms and of prayers, a heart of integrity, and a life without reproach. Now this is a debt not to be discharged without industry and exertion. We cannot successfully follow any of the most common occupations of life without pains and assiduity. Shall those gifts which perish be attainable only by vigilance and toil, and difficulty and danger ; and those which are immortal, and more to be prized than sumless treasures, be had for nothing ? The idea

is preposterous. It is contrary to all the analogies of nature, to the clearest dictates of the gospel, and to all the conclusions of reason and experience.

I have now, my brethren, endeavoured to lay before you some of the advantages which as men and as Christians you possess, the folly of neglecting them, and the price to be paid for the wisdom which makes wise to salvation. Need I exhort you to lose no opportunity of improving your peculiar advantages, of promoting your growth in every Christian grace, and of paying a constant and daily tribute of devotion and good works to the Father of mercies? David prayed that the Lord would so teach him to number his days as to apply his heart unto wisdom. He saw, from the rapidity with which life passes away, that no time ought to be lost. We are hourly drawing nearer to eternity, and therefore our exertions should be quickened. Let it not be our condemnation that we, who are children of the light, are less wise in providing for our eternal happiness than the children of the world for the meat that perisheth. Great is the price which is often paid for things most hurtful and ruinous. Health, fortune, reputation, life, and the immortal soul, are foolishly exchanged for the short and fleeting gratification of

some sinful desire. What, then, should we not give for wisdom, which secures the possession of all those gifts, reduces every evil thought and passion into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and renders us for ever happy? By the price paid for wisdom, we are not impoverished but enriched.

The reason that fools despise instruction is implied in the words of my text, "they have no heart to it." There is the source of their obstinate perseverance in folly. When our hearts are engaged and interested in any pursuit, how eagerly do we exert ourselves to obtain success? What labours do we spare—of what dangers are we afraid? The soldier has his heart upon honour, and he seeks it at the cannon's mouth. The sailor's heart is upon gain, and he pursues it in the face of the tempest and the breaker. The statesman's heart is fixed on power, and for this he submits to bodily fatigue and mental anxiety—for a day's popularity he condescends to court, to flatter, and to bribe. The dews of night and the cold of the morning, the midnight watch and the perilous journey, are no obstacles to those whose hearts are bent on dissipation. Let religion engage our affections—let us become enamoured of the beauty of truth as displayed in the gospel, and we shall soon glow

with its spirit, be ready to join in the encomiums given it by Solomon, and think that the ruby and the topaz, the diamond of Golconda, and the fine gold of Tarshish and Ophir, lose their value and dwindle into cheap and vulgar insignificance by the comparison.

God grant that all the instructions of wisdom may sink deep into our hearts, influence our conduct, and prepare us for a participation of immortal felicity, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

XII.

FRIENDSHIP.*

PROVERBS xxvii. 10.—“Thine own friend, and thy father’s friend forsake not.”

As I have not the honour of belonging to your association, I am but ill qualified to expatiate on its particular excellencies. But if I understand the nature of your profession aright, I am to consider you as a great fraternity united to each other, not only by the common ties of country and religion, but by obligations peculiar to yourselves. As such, allow me to address you, and recommend to your consideration and practice, such a course of conduct as will most firmly cement that friendship which should, and which I trust does subsist, between all the members of your association.

There are many, I am well aware, who look upon friendship as a name, a thing much spoken of, but seldom felt. They who think that all our actions originate in some selfish principle, con-

* This Sermon was originally addressed to a Masonic Lodge. Its subject, however, is sufficiently general to justify its publication. ED.

sider the best cemented friendships as no more than a junction of interests, which the first visit of adversity to either party will dissolve. How often, they exclaim, does the poor deluded man who relied most firmly on the protection of his friend, find, in the hour of misfortune and trial, that he only indulged a vain delusion! When he hoped to meet the usual warm embrace, and to hear the voice of consolation, how often does he meet repulsive looks and unmerited reproach! And how often does he hear himself censured for hastening those misfortunes which he fondly imagined would have been relieved! He finds all those who glided with him down the smooth stream, who partook his triumph and enjoyed the gale, desert him when he must encounter the torrent, and behold him, without making an effort in his behalf, braving its impetuosity alone, or sinking to be forgotten in its whelming waves.

It is indeed to be lamented that instances of violated friendship are so frequent, but it is not thence to be inferred that there are none which are as permanent as they are honourable and sincere. The infamy which attends the false and perfidious friend shows that such characters are not so numerous as we should at first suppose; for when a vice becomes common, it ceases to be an

object of reprobation. Who that forsakes his benefactor in time of need is not stigmatized with disgrace? Is he not driven from the society of the good as an ingrate? Can either wealth or power save him from merited contempt? No, they only aggravate his crime, and expose him to more severe censure. Experience will tell us that friendships, which death alone could terminate, have existed, and that they still exist is no unreasonable supposition. There are no doubt thousands at this moment ready to bear every extremity by flood or field in defence and support of those connected to them by the strong and indissoluble bonds of amity. There are men who would not only bear every adversity, but court death in the most formidable shapes rather than disobey the dictates of friendship. The hearts of you, whom I now address, will bear witness to the truth of this declaration. Let us, then, proceed to a brief consideration of those requisites which are absolutely essential to the character of a perfect friend.

Very little reflection here will tell us that virtue is the primary qualification. This is the great source whence all the true joys of life are derived. Without it there is no society, no happiness, no friendship. Men may be connected together by

the coarse ties of interest—they may prosecute their plans in concert—they may swear fidelity and attachment, but unless they be truly virtuous, they never can be truly united. Without a fixed and unalterable regard to the laws of God, there is no man to be trusted. Without this, the gratifications of sensual pleasure will allure some to forsake their dearest friends; the prospect of aggrandizement, or the splendour of a bribe, will induce some to abandon their associates; while a mean regard for personal safety will prompt a third class to betray their sworn brothers. How many, in the unsuspecting sincerity of their souls, have been led by specious promises to the brink of a precipice, and thence hurled to destruction by the very hand in which they vainly confided! How many have fallen the victims of most shocking perfidy, when the least inquiry into the character of those by whom they fell might have saved them from irretrievable ruin!

Let every man, then, in the choice of his friends, first investigate their moral and religious character. If they be impious and profane, selfish or pusillanimous, they are not qualified to partake his joys and sorrows, to console him in affliction or assist him in distress. They cannot defend him from the shafts of calumny, nor save his fair fame from

the aspersions of malignant spite. How, indeed, is it possible that he who has no love for his Maker, can harbour a sincere regard for his creature? Does he who fears not to violate the laws of God, feel any respect for laws of human institution, but such as the prison and the rope most effectually secure? Can he, whose bosom is never warmed with devotion to the universal Benefactor, cherish any lasting sentiments of esteem for a mortal? What ties can be regarded by him who has snapped asunde: those of conscience; or what friendship cultivated by the man who is at enmity with heaven and himself?

Not only a regard for religion, but for those moral precepts respecting the due government of the appetites and passions with which it is essentially blended, is necessary to promote the union of souls. No man who is a slave to any ignoble passion, or depraved desire, can be a true friend. How is it to be imagined that the voluptuary, the drunkard, or the debauchee are qualified to enjoy the most ennobling pleasures which thrill the human heart, when they have corrupted and depraved their nature by their abominable pursuits. Possessed of a power to govern themselves, and unable to moderate their wild desires, though for their own manifest advantage, how can they think,

act, or suffer for their neighbour? They may promise, or they may swear, but what obligations can bind the man who spurns at the mild restraints of religion? If luxury invite, or passion stimulate, their vows are all forgotten, they plunge headlong into licentiousness, and in the love of rioting and intoxication, betray the confidence of the dearest associate.

If the prevalence of the passions be destructive of friendship, a total freedom from their influence is little less dangerous. The man whose blood flows in an equal tenor, neither accelerated by hope, nor retarded by fear, is certainly not well qualified to be a friend. He is too cold to love any one as his own soul: he can neither burn with indignation for the wrongs, nor glow with transport at the felicity, of another. A sympathetic warmth and generosity of soul are distinguishing characteristics of a friend—not the sudden and impetuous starts of an ill-governed mind, but the permanent influence of well established virtue. Stability and consistency are also equally essential. The man who is swayed by caprice and prejudice, and who is too flexible or too compliant to maintain his own opinion when sanctioned by reason, is not deserving of confidence. What reliance can you place on him who he is as fickle as the wind—uncertain

what he should choose or reject—unconscious why he should love or hate—and who is impelled forward this moment by some vain suggestion of the fancy, and the next driven back by some idle phantom of fear?

A real friend is constant and unvarying as truth. He knows the value of those on whom his friendship is fixed, and does not rashly listen to the malicious insinuations of the envious and uncharitable. He is inflexible in maintaining one character: he is the same abroad and at home, in prosperity and misfortune. His affections are not to be alienated by the breath of popular dislike. He will adhere more closely to his friend when he is abandoned by the rest of the world, and seize the hour of misfortune as the most favourable time for proving the sincerity of his affection. It is then only indeed he can shew the extent of his love, that he can advise, console, and assist. How inestimable is a friend like this,—can anything be compared to a possession so precious, or is any evil to be lamented so seriously as its loss!

Poor is the friendless master of a world,
A world in purchase for a friend is gain.

Though there are none of the ties by which man is united to man, more strong and binding than

friendship, it has notwithstanding its limits beyond which it should never be carried. Our obligations to virtue are more important than any other. No idea of romantic affection, no human consideration whatever, should tempt to their violation. If your friend require you to do for him what is incompatible with your honour and integrity, give him a prompt and determined refusal. Your first duty is to God, and your neighbour has a claim only upon the second. "If thy brother," said Moses to the Hebrews, "the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him." Every thing is to be risked,—forfeit his friendship, incur his resentment, rather than commit a deed that may wound your conscience and fill you with remorse. When he wishes you to depart from your duty, he is no longer your friend—the mutual ties by which you have been bound are now dissolved.

In addition to those primary requisites of true friendship which have been mentioned, several subordinate qualifications are necessary to preserve and cherish it, such as an openness of tem-

per, candour, ingenuousness, sincerity, and good nature. Cool reserve soon annihilates affection and represses the advance of love. We may admire sublime virtue and conspicuous talents, but if they be connected with a haughty and supercilious deportment, they can never win our love. We may contemplate them at a distance, but feel not disposed to make a near approach, as we admire the stupendous grandeur of a precipice from afar, but tremble to walk beneath its shade. There must be a mixture of love and affection, as well as esteem to constitute real amity, and these are to be excited not by virtues that astonish, but by graces calculated to please. But there is no requisite for which there is a more frequent use, than forgiveness of disposition, and it is impossible for any friendship to subsist long, where there is not a mutual indulgence granted to those little follies and indiscretions, which are inseparable from human nature. There is no such thing as perfection to be found upon the earth: every man has his fault, and wherefore should we be rigorous in persecuting or censuring each other? Why should we try to establish a law against ourselves by being intolerant and censorious? If we are harsh and unforgiving, do we expect to be treated with lenity and indulgence? Or are we so pure—so immaculate that we can brave and despise the

investigations and the censures of the world? Have we no fault that requires forgiveness, no secret imperfection which we would wish our friend to overlook? Let that mercy, then, which we would claim to ourselves be granted to our brethren of mankind. It is not required of us indeed, nay, it would be a matter of just blame, to grant our indiscriminate indulgence to every indiscretion even in a brother. It is our duty rather to admonish him of his faults with freedom and with seriousness, to represent to him the folly of his misconduct, and lead him back by love and persuasion to the ways he has forsaken. In this duty we should avoid all harshness and asperity, overweening pride, and contemptuous superiority. Nothing is more fatal to friendship than this: let us therefore pity when we are constrained to blame, convince him that it is not our own gratification, but his good, which we wish to promote, pardon his invincible errors, and on all occasions be more disposed to justify, than criminate or condemn.

Thus we perceive how many amiable qualifications are requisite to constitute a true friend. He must be pious, generous, open, affable, meek, and forgiving. There are many such noble characters in the world. There might be multitudes were men only more anxious to cultivate the benign af-

fections of their nature : and did not vainly imagine that, by confining their joys and sorrows, their pleasure and pursuits to self, they would best promote their happiness. No fiction is more extravagant and erroneous. The joys of friendship are the most exquisite and delightful.

In all the dewy landscape of the spring,
In the bright eye of Hesper on the morn,
In nature's fairest form, is aught so fair
As virtuous friendship ?

It was justly observed by a celebrated ancient writer, that it multiplies our pleasures and divides our griefs. Without some kindred bosom to share our joys and sorrows we should be forlorn, though, in the possession of all the power and riches in the universe. If we enjoy good fortune—if honours increase, and ambition be gratified—what real pleasure is there in them if we have none dear to us to rejoice in our prosperity ? If we be visited by affliction, and adversity with her attendant evils assail us, how intolerable is our lot if we have no affectionate friend to sympathise in our distress, and alleviate the burden of our woe ? Be it yours, then, my friends and brethren, as you value your felicity, to cultivate those dispositions that qualify you for being true friends. I am persuaded that, by doing this, you will most effectually promote your honour and happiness. Let brotherly love continue,

and love one another with pure hearts fervently. Love not in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth. Let peace, sobriety, and order characterise your conduct. Shew the excellence of your religion by the virtue of your lives. Let it be seen and heard that it has had a due effect in polishing away every asperity from your temper, your language, and your conversation. Be examples to other men of whatever is holy, just, true, and of good report. And now, may God of his infinite mercy keep your heart and mind in the knowledge and faith of gospel truth, and train you up by a course of holiness, for enjoying the bliss of the saints of light. Amen.

XIII.

J U D G E N O T.

MATTHEW vii. 1, 2.—“Judge not that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

THE object of our Saviour, in this injunction, is to repress a censorious and uncharitable spirit in judging of the opinions and conduct of our neighbours. He saw and had bitter experience of the proneness of men to form rash decisions, and pronounce unjustifiable condemnation on each other, and with the wisdom and benevolence which characterised all his words and actions, forbade the indulgence of such an odious practice, by a dread of its effects recoiling on themselves. “With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.” If ye are mild and lenient, ye may hope for mildness and lenity—if harsh and austere, expect harshness and austerity. By your own laws ye shall be tried. By your own sentence shall ye stand justified or condemned. It is a

fair principle that the defrauder should be weighed in his own balance, and the tyrant lashed with his own scourge.

The prohibition in my text cannot be supposed to extend so far as to preclude us from forming any judgment or expressing any opinion of others; for while we live in a social state this would be altogether impossible. The business of life could not be conducted without some knowledge of the character, temper, and disposition of those with whom we associate. What we know we communicate, and what we feel we express. But we more frequently utter the dictates of the passions than of the understanding, and love or dislike, and consequently praise or blame, without having sufficient grounds for doing either. According to the prevailing temper of our own minds we incline to the side of eulogy or satire. A benevolent disposition sees much to admire and commend, when another of different constitution can discover nothing that is worthy of the slightest encomium. There are few, indeed, who are not in some degree blinded by the mists of passion—biassed by motives of self-interest—deluded by false representations—or misled by party spirit and the prevailing reports of the day. Their judgments, therefore, must often be erroneous,

now marked with dark hues of malignity and ill-nature, and again blazoned with all the rich colouring of partiality and panegyric. Hence, those who may merit some portion of praise, are often extolled beyond all bounds; while those who may not be free from some share of blame, meet with a condemnation altogether inconsistent with justice and candor. How seldom is the true medium observed in judging a neighbour's character? His friends embellish it with every virtue—his enemies throw his most brilliant points into the shade. By those he is surrounded with light—by these, enveloped in darkness—a saint with one, and a demon with another.

As no danger, however, is to be apprehended from too prevalent a disposition in mankind to judge too favourably of each other, no exhortation will ever be found necessary to counteract its effects. It is from their propensity to form severe judgments—to pass unmerited censure, and to condemn with harshness on light and insufficient grounds, that we are to dread danger. This is the propensity which our Saviour condemns, and which it is the duty of every moralist and divine to expose.

No possession whatsoever can, or ought, to be so

dear to a man as his reputation—the approbation of God and his own heart always excepted. He may be so circumstanced, indeed, as to render the risk of losing the favour of the world necessary to the preservation of his moral, his religious, or his political integrity. How many, for the sake of Christ and the Gospel, have incurred all the obloquy of the malignant, and all the persecution of the intolerant and remorseless? These, however, are cases of comparatively rare occurrence. In the common course of life a good name is not only, according to the declaration of Solomon, to be preferred to great riches, but, by feeling minds, it is often preferred to life itself. For what enjoyment is there in life if deprived of those very circumstances which render it a blessing? It is a treasure to which every one has as full and indisputable a right as to the air which he breathes, until he forfeits it by misconduct. He derives it as his birth-right from God himself, and all the happiness and prosperity of his life may depend on its integrity. What can compensate for an injury offered by malice and slander to a possession so inestimable? There is less guilt in robbing a man of the fruits of his honest industry, than of his good name. The wealth of which he is dispossessed may be recovered by industry, or the ground which he has lost in some favourite pur-

suit, re-occupied by additional exertion. But what can restore to him that passport to the esteem and affection of society, which is taken from him with his good name? What can heal the wounds inflicted by malevolence and falsehood? The situation, even of the man who has forfeited his reputation deservedly, is so deplorable, that he becomes an object of compassion to all the benevolent. In losing his good name he loses every thing estimable, and from being considered as a valuable and exemplary member of society, he becomes an object of pity or of scorn—abandoned by his friends—insulted by his enemies and reproached by himself. His star that once shone bright—the Lord of the ascendant—perhaps goes down in storm and darkness. He is torn up by the roots—his branches are laid prostrate and withering on the ground, and the dew of heaven shall refresh their beauty and renovate their vigour no more.

Reflection on the value of a good name, and the cruelty and injustice of robbing any one of a treasure so precious, should make all exceedingly cautious how they touch it. Nor should a sense of the difficulty of forming a true judgment, founded as such judgments must be on a knowledge of the motives and principles of actions, as well as of actions themselves, be less influential.

Now, what branch of human science is not more easily acquired than an accurate discernment of the heart with all its springs and impulses? Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart; and to him alone it belongs to see its movements, and interpret its dictates aright. How frequently are the most experienced and sagacious deceived? How frequently are we deceived ourselves in the investigation of our own motives? How then can we judge fairly those of other men? Of the best known, and most conspicuous characters in the world, what two individuals will form precisely the same opinion? It is no easy task to judge truly of the merit or demerit of those who have long since descended to the grave, and concerning whose honour or shame we cannot be particularly interested; how much less easy is it to form a fair judgment of those whom we know not from authority so respectable as history, but from vague report and conjecture; of those too in whose favour we have reason to be partial, or against whom we may have imbibed some groundless prejudice! When a man accused of a crime is arraigned at the bar, when witnesses are examined, and every circumstance adduced which tends to exculpate or condemn, is it always easy to come to a clear decision? How often has a most unfounded accusation been enforced as

just, and a strongly asserted falsehood employed to bring ruin on the guiltless! Prisons have echoed to the groans of the righteous, and scaffolds been dyed with the blood of the innocent.

It is the part of a good judge to be perfectly unbiassed, to be free from all prejudice and passion, to be cool, steady, deliberate, capable of nice discrimination, quick to discern the truth or falsehood of evidence, and fearless in pronouncing sentence according to the sacred dictates of conscience. Now, suppose a man to have all these requisites, and, moreover, to be put in possession of every circumstance and proof which a case will admit, does he always find it an easy matter to ascertain the truth? Does he never incur any risk of uttering a judgment which a being of superior order would see to be unjust? How much then should a consideration of this kind induce men to be cautious—to suspend their opinion—to wait till time shall unravel what is intricate, or illumine what is dark,—and above all to beware of asperity and injustice. Yet, in what part of human conduct are they less circumspect? They not only judge, but they censure and condemn on the slightest grounds; in matters too which they do not profess to understand, and in some in which they are expressly forbidden by the Gospel to in-

terfere. They subject their neighbour's pursuits, his mode of life, his thoughts, his opinions all to a rigorous scrutiny which terminates in his condemnation. But what is most preposterous of all, they impute to him sentiments which he would disavow, and censure him for upholding doctrines which he would be amongst the first to impugn. They drag him before a tribunal whose lawfulness he does not acknowledge, a spiritual inquisition to which he owes no allegiance, and whose decisions he feels to be unjust, encroaching on the prerogative of the Almighty, and assuming a privilege which belongs only to the Searcher of hearts.

Among the innumerable instances of rash and erroneous judgment, none is more prevalent than that which has for its object the religious tenets of others. It is lamentable to witness the great length to which some are led by a spirit of intolerance and bigotry. Boldly presuming on the infallible truth of their own tenets, as if they were the favoured and elected race who had been rescued from the dominion of error, and gifted with an influx of celestial light, they look on all who are out of their communion or creed as outcasts from the divine favour, doomed to eternal wrath. And when admonished of the uncharitableness of

such a sentence, they contend that it is not they, but the word of God, which condemns what they disapprove. Thus is the religion of the Saviour of mankind made a pretext for the very illiberality which it condemns. But had they studied more profoundly in the school of Christ—had they imbibed the true evangelical spirit of his gospel, they would see, perhaps, that those very unfortunates whom they condemn, are in as fair a way of salvation as themselves; that it is not a Christian principle to sentence to everlasting reprobation for errors of opinion, especially when conscientious—that righteousness of life is of more estimation with God, than a creed termed orthodox—and that the prayers and the alms even of a devout heathen, like the centurion, may rise as an accepted memorial to the throne of God, when the addresses of the self-justified Pharisee shall only expose him to derision and shame.

Zeal for the glory of God is the grand principle by which many would seem to be actuated, when they pass uncharitable judgments. But is not God's glory best promoted by peace on earth and goodwill among men—by mutual conciliation and charity—by humility, meekness, and the other Christian virtues? What idea does it give us of the efficacy of the Gospel and its meliorating spirit

to see the society in which it is presumed to flourish, distracted by conflicting opinions—brotherly love expatriated by the rage of polemic controversy, and the vocabulary of invective exhausted in mutual recrimination? What must we think of the man who, professing himself to be a follower of the meek and lowly Jesus—of him whose yoke was easy, and whose burden was light—of him who came into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved—to hear him continually abusing his Christian brethren—delighting himself with the horrible pastime of dissecting their religious character—and finally delivering them over to Satan? Is this the way to promote the glory of God, or extend the kingdom of Christ? Such unhallowed zeal is ruinous to the house of God. It may promote a particular interest, but it is injurious to the great cause of Christ. It may impose on the ignorant and terrify the timid, but it can make no proselytes among those whose minds are expanded with Christian knowledge, or strongly built up in the faith which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For a man to set up himself or his opinions as an example for all others to follow, is justly regarded as the height of presumption. It betrays an arrogance and self-conceit, most unbecoming

the frail and imperfect condition of mortality, disgusting to man—offensive to God. For who are those that are righteous in their own eyes, and despise others? They are found in all ages to be those precisely who are farthest from all true knowledge and sincere love of God. Such were they in the days of Isaiah—a people who said, “Stand by thyself; come not near me; for I am holier than thou.” Of a people speaking in this bold style of self-approval, to the contempt of their neighbours, it might be supposed that their piety and moral righteousness justified the panegyric. But the case was far otherwise; for, notwithstanding their haughty boasts, they were a rebellious people, which walked in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts—a people that provoked the Lord to anger, continually to his face—that sacrificed in gardens, burnt incense upon bricks, and conformed to the other idolatrous practices of the heathen. Such, too, were the Pharisees in the days of our Saviour,—proud, boastful, arrogant, and hypocritical. They alone, by their own account, understood the law and the traditions of the Elders, and complied with every ceremony of their ritual; they fulfilled all righteousness forsooth, in scouring their pots and platters, and in making frequent ablutions; and they who did not do likewise were unholy and unclean. But our Lord exposed the

vanity of their pretensions—he stripped off their specious disguise, and shewed them to be like the monuments of the dead—richly adorned and beautiful without—but within full of dead men’s bones and rottenness.

Were men to contemplate themselves in the same light as they are seen by others, or were they to follow the great Christian rule of doing unto all as they would have all to do unto them, how much would such a practice tend to their moral and spiritual improvement? Then they would act from principles of candour and justice, and cease from their harsh judgments and illiberal aspersions. Is it gratifying to any one to have his actions misrepresented, and his motives, which are known only to himself, malignantly scrutinized? Does it please him to have his virtues branded with the attributes of vice—his beneficence styled ostentation—his religion hypocrisy—his patience pusillanimity? Assuredly not. Wherefore, then, should he assume a right which he denies to another? Wherefore ascribe to a neighbour what he would indignantly repel from himself? Or is any one so perfect, in all points so armed and so invulnerable, that he may assume a liberty of condemning and wounding his neighbour with impunity, and without any dread of retalia-

tion? If such a character were to be found, he would be far indeed from indulging a privilege to which his superior virtue might give him a right. For the best men are the most clement, and it is universally true, that none are so harsh and censorious as those who are most open to reproach. They who wish to reduce all excellence to their own servile level, are ever found in the train of the illiberal and malignant. As if conscious of their being entitled to no indulgence themselves, they resolve to give none to their neighbour, but by aggravation or diminution—by imputing and inventing they soon bring down the most exalted virtue, and tarnish the purity of the most irreproachable innocence.

The sinfulness of such practices is seldom considered with the seriousness it deserves. Yet, one of the commandments of God is levelled against it—thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour—a commandment which is violated as often as we impute to him opinions and doctrines which he disavows. Our Saviour, too, has expressly enjoined us not to judge, by the risk we must run of incurring the very condemnation which we pronounce. “As ye judge ye shall be judged,”—a righteous sentence which we may see partly, sometimes fully, executed even in this imperfect

state. The uncharitable are ever treated and judged of with the most severity. A natural principle of retaliation arouses mankind against them, and while they are levelling their shafts at their neighbour's repose, they are exposing themselves to his reprisal. The great law of reciprocity, by which men render unto others, not according to the golden rule on which the law and the prophets hang, but as they actually do, is exerted against them in all its vigour,—an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth—for such is the spirit of the world, and what reasonable objection can they who have commenced the warfare make to such a system? The law is their own. If they throw down a challenge it will be taken up, and when they are worsted and disgraced in the conflict, whom have they to blame? They cannot be suffered to deal round their arrows, firebrands, and deaths, without experiencing some of the bitter consequences of their temerity and guilt. It is agreeable to the whole tenor of providence that the crafty should be caught in his own snares, that the merciless should feel the castigation of his own rod, and the calumniator be wounded by his own envenomed shafts. To whom then is the rigid censor, or iniquitous judge a greater enemy than to himself? He provokes the hostility of men, and when he comes to the awful

tribunal of his God, what has he to expect? Will the unfounded reports and bitter persecutions, by which he manifested his zeal for God's glory plead in his behalf? Will the injured spirits of those whom he wounded and traduced appear as his intercessors at the great tribunal? No, my friends, the doctrine taught by Christ is that "as we judge we shall be judged." The scheme of righteous retribution has commenced already, and it will be carried to perfection in a world to come.

Be it ours then, my friends and brethren, to be just and honest in our judgments, to incline to the favourable side of human conduct, and always show more pleasure in discovering something that merits praise, than in dragging to light what had better be concealed. It is a bad and perverted taste, which is gratified only in detecting deformity, and expatiating on blemishes. Let us "blame only where we must, and be candid where we can." A sense of our own imperfections should render us lenient to those of others; and from a selfish view to our own good alone, if we have no nobler motive, we should practise forbearance and mildness—for as we judge we shall be judged—as we forgive we shall be forgiven—as we are merciful and compassionate we shall be treated

with mercy and compassion. If we cannot discover an entire freedom from error, an infallible judgment, and an untarnished virtue in ourselves, wherefore should we expect them in others? The most estimable characters have their faults, as the sun has spots; but it is only by his own light that they can be discovered. On the other hand, the least estimable of our neighbours may have some redeeming qualities to rescue them from total condemnation. Render, therefore, unto all, the merit due to their particular virtues, and withhold from none the honour or applause to which they may have an equitable claim. Wherefore should a difference of religious sentiment provoke to jealousy or strife, more than travelling by different paths to the same country? Are we not all stretching towards the same goal, and anxious for the same immortal prize? Is it not our mutual interest, as it is our duty, to assist each other, to bear one another's burdens, raise the fallen, strengthen the weak, console the afflicted. Those who have erred and gone out of the way are more the object of pity than of blame, for who would willingly err in the grand concerns of salvation?

May our conduct to one another, and to all our brethren of mankind, be such as may induce a

cheerful submission to the Saviour's sentence—
“As ye judge ye shall be judged,” and in the
great day of reckoning may all of us experience
the happy effects of having followed those pre-
cepts of our faith which enjoin clemency and for-
giveness, brotherly kindness and charity, through
Christ our Lord. Amen.

XIV.

PREPARATION FOR COMMUNION.

1 CORINTHIANS xi. 28.—“ Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.”

CORINTH, to whose Christian inhabitants this epistle was addressed, was a mercantile city of the Greeks, eminently distinguished by its opulence, luxury and refinement. A church had been founded here by the ministry of Paul, consisting probably of a numerous assemblage of converted Gentiles. It fell into great disorders, which it required all the influence and authority of the Apostle to rectify. Among these was their mode of solemnizing the Lord's supper, the object and design of which they seem to have totally misunderstood or perverted, insomuch that their assembling on that occasion, tended rather to their injury than their spiritual improvement. “ I praise you not,” says he, “ that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse.” He then reproves them for the heresies

or divisions, and factions which they had suffered to grow up among them, and particularly for their mode of celebrating the eucharist, in which they committed some great abuses, connecting it with a scene of rioting, contention, and excess. For "in eating every one taketh before another his own supper, and one is hungry and another is drunken. What, have ye not houses to eat and drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not." He then gives them an account of the first institution of the ordinance, as he had himself received it from the Lord, and shows that its true object was not to satisfy the demands of hunger and thirst, but to show the Lord's death till he come. That is, in other words, to announce, or make a declaration of the Lord's death till he come to raise the dead and judge the world. From which words it is evident that this rite was intended to be perpetuated from age to age, as a standing memorial of the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Saviour. "Wherefore," he continues, "whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup unworthily," *i.e.* in the irreverent and profane manner in which they were accustomed to do it, "shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord,"—or of an abuse of the elements represent-

ative of his body and blood, and so of dishonouring the memory of him who instituted the ordinance. Much stress has been laid upon this text, and from not understanding or applying it properly, many vain apprehensions have been excited in the minds of communicants, as if any, though the least, species of moral infirmity, or consciousness of error, should debar them from the table of the Lord, or involve them in the sin of profaning a sacred rite. But it is evident that the unworthiness of which the Apostle speaks is the celebration of the rite in a manner different from the original institution, in their using the sacramental bread and wine promiscuously with their common food—and their converting a sacred solemnity into a convivial repast. “Let a man examine himself,” he continues. Now the nature of the examination which he desires, may be learned from his previous censure of their misconduct. He does not mean a general examination of the whole of their past lives,—a strict scrutiny of their motives, principles, and actions,—but an examination of their manner of celebrating the institution, compared with its genuine and original design,—“and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup,”—*so let him eat* does not mean simply, as the expression may seem to imply, then, or after the examination,—but *so* means according to,—*i.e.*, according to that

examination of the true object of the solemnity, let him eat. "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily,"—or in the profane and riotous manner before noticed, "eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning," or rather not discriminating "the Lord's body" from ordinary food. In this translation *damnation* is a harsh term, vulgarly mistaken for eternal reprobation in the future world. It is the most unfortunate and unhappy term that could be employed; for it conveys a false and dangerous meaning of which the Apostle had no idea, and has often, I feel persuaded, been a stumbling block in the way of numbers who would willingly have come to the table of the Lord, had they not been deterred by such an obstacle. The original *κρίμα* signifies judgment, or punishment of another nature, as is apparent from the following verses. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep,"—that is, many by their profanation of this rite, by their eating and drinking to excess, have brought upon themselves the usual consequences of all intemperate indulgence—they have become sickly and diseased, and have either died, or are in danger of a premature death. "But if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged;" or, "if we would examine ourselves, we should not be punished." If we made a proper distinction between the Lord's supper and an

ordinary entertainment, we should be subject to none of those penalties that have been mentioned. But if, in consequence of any irregularities, we have suffered those punishments which the Almighty in the regular course of his providence inflicts, we should consider them as intended to correct and reclaim; and if we be timely wise, repent and reform, we shall not be condemned with a guilty and idolatrous world. "Wherefore, my brethren," continues the Apostle, "when ye come together to eat (the Lord's supper), tarry one for another, and if any man be hungry, let him eat at home, that ye come not together to *condemnation*" — *κρίμα*. Here is the same word which, in a former verse, is rendered *damnation*, translated by *condemnation*. Had the translators been consistent, it would have been rendered, in both places, by the same term. If the former were to be approved, we should read the latter passage thus: "When ye come together to eat, tarry one for another, and if any man hunger, let him eat at home, that ye come not together unto *damnation*." But this was too obviously erroneous, and therefore, at the expense of consistency, the translators adopted the milder term.

There is nothing, therefore, in the words of the Apostle, to excite any kind of apprehension in

the minds of Christians at the present day, when the excesses which incurred his reprehension of the Corinthians are totally unknown. It is not likely that any individual, much less any assembly of Christians, will now confound a spiritual rite with an act of common conviviality. The rite itself is simple, social, solemn, expressive—free from all ambiguity and mystery—level to the capacity of children, easily understood, and as easily practised; though much care has been taken to perplex and embarrass it with additions of human invention, to make it an object of terror to some, and a source of presumptuous confidence to others, though it has been loaded with barbarous epithets, and mingled with much superstition and idolatry. From the words of our Lord at its first institution, “This do in remembrance of me,” and from those of the Apostle Paul, “Ye do shew forth the Lord’s death till he come,” it is sufficiently evident that it is altogether of a commemorative nature, intended to represent, by the most striking and appropriate emblems, that body which was broken, and that blood which was shed for the remission of the sins of many. It would be an easy matter, by the aid of a little imagination, to darken what is clear, and perplex what is simple; but, if the Scriptures be our only guide, we shall not easily discover anything puzzling, or mysterious, or beyond the reach

of the most ordinary comprehension, in this beautiful and affecting solemnity. Our Saviour's object was to institute a perpetual memorial of himself, justly concluding, as we may well suppose, that whatever did this most effectually, would also promote obedience to his precepts, and encourage us to follow his example. For every religious service is valuable only so far as it is calculated to improve the mind, promote our virtue, and exalt our devotion.

That it is a duty incumbent on all the followers of Jesus to celebrate this rite, will scarcely be questioned by any who have properly considered the subject. The imperative words of the Institution itself, and the universal practice of the Christian church since its commencement, shew its importance and demonstrate its obligation. This obligation is founded, not on any of the common principles of moral and religious duty, but on the positive and express command of Christ himself; and from this very circumstance it is entitled to a more than ordinary degree of attention. The moral virtues are recommended to us by various considerations—by the dictates of nature—the arguments of reason, which address themselves to men of all ages, countries, and religions. But this is a duty founded on the appointment of Christ

alone, and obligatory only on his disciples. Our compliance is an act of pure obedience, arising from affection to his character, and respect for his authority. It is an act which is exclusively Christian—a distinguishing part of our religious profession—without which our claim to the name of disciples of Christ, seems to many invalid or incomplete. Men of other religions—Heathens, Jews, Mahometans—worship God as well as we. They have their temples, their altars, and their ceremonies—they value and they recommend the moral virtues. But this mode of commemorating Him who taught us to worship the Eternal Spirit in spirit and in truth, belongs exclusively to Christians. It is the seal of their union; and from its first institution until now, has been deemed a grand discriminating badge of their name and profession.

That our Saviour is entitled to the most affectionate remembrance—that he has a claim on our gratitude, our affection, and the devout homage of our hearts, is what no one, who has properly studied his character, or is impressed with a sense of the blessings derived from his ministry, will venture to dispute. We record with praise and veneration the names of those who have rendered service to mankind by discoveries, inventions, and improvements in the arts. We erect columns

and statues to the memory of the statesman and hero. The author of a people's freedom is extolled in the panegyric of the orator, and immortalized in the song of the poet. But none are deserving of higher praise or more grateful commemoration, than those who have polished and adorned life by their virtues—who have given a splendid example of benevolence, of fortitude, of self-devotion to the cause of God, and who have generously sacrificed their fortunes, their comforts and life itself, to their fellow-creatures' good. Now of these, there is no name under heaven to be compared with that of Jesus; for he was, of all benefactors, the most beneficent—of all guides to man's felicity to the supreme good, the most unerring. His doctrine, his precepts, and his example have had greater, more extensive, more beneficial influence on human legislatures, and in promoting all public and all private virtues, than those of any, or all other benefactors of mankind. Superior to Solomon, whose wisdom was the theme of universal admiration, he uttered such sublime discourses as, even by the testimony of his enemies, never issued from the mouth of man. Superior to the Prophets who spoke the oracles of divine truth, according to a prescribed measure of inspiration, the Spirit was poured upon him without measure, and he surpassed them all in the splendour and

excellence of his revelations. Superior to Moses, who broke the yoke of Egyptian bondage, and led the people of Israel towards the promised land, he broke the yoke of sin—demolished the power of Satan—triumphed over the kingdom of death, and achieved, not the political restoration of a people, but the spiritual redemption of the world. Superior to all who have ever taught, or suffered for the felicity of others, he stands pre-eminent, unrivalled, and alone, as the sun in the vault of heaven—the light of the world—the well-beloved of God—the Son of the Eternal Father, the express image of his person, the Saviour of men—full of grace and truth, inviting and encouraging us to approach him—to tread in the paths he has marked out for us upon earth—and finally mount after him to those abodes of ineffable and everlasting joy, to which he is himself exalted, and of which he has enabled us to become the inheritors by faith and obedience.

It is objected by some, particularly by those who are reluctant to conform to the instituted duties of our faith, that such a character is too pure and too exalted, and requires too high a degree of virtue, for such unworthy creatures as they profess themselves to be, to sit down as guests at his table. It is no doubt most becoming in all to

entertain the loftiest notions they are capable of forming of the purity and excellence of the Redeemer, and at the same time to be humbled by the melancholy contrast of their own imperfection. But these sentiments are carried to a blameable excess, when they deter us from the very means that should be pursued to render our imperfection less. We should consider that the Saviour does not require of us what his perfect knowledge of our nature shews him our incapability of bestowing—an untarnished purity, and sinless obedience. What was his conduct to sinners during his sojourn on earth? Though justly indignant and meritedly severe against the obdurate, the remorseless, the hypocritical, the proud, the pharisaical, and the impenitent; though against these he could utter denunciations of wrath, and array the terrors of the Lord; to those who besought his mercy, and expressed sorrow for their transgressions, was he not uniformly kind and tender? It was not in his nature to break the bruised reed, nor extinguish the rekindling flame of devotion in the heart of the penitent. Did he not say of the despised publican, who smote on his breast, saying “God be merciful to me a sinner,” that he was justified before God more than the haughty pharisee, who extolled himself? Did he not mingle with publicans and sinners for the express purpose of

reforming them ; and was not this his language to the disconsolate and broken-hearted—"Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest ; come and take my yoke upon you and learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls?" Wherefore, then, is the most mild and indulgent of Masters to be regarded as rigorous and austere ; or as exacting perfection of those who require his aid ? Or, why is the plea of unworthiness to be adduced as an excuse for abstaining from his table, unless that unworthiness consist in a settled determination to sin ? He who feels a sincere contrition for his past misdeeds, and has formed resolutions of amendment, should not hesitate to avail himself of the means supplied by a solemn rite, of confirming his repentance, and securing his return to God. We are all weak and sinful, and therefore have the more occasion for the aids of grace, and the ministrations of the word and ordinances, to preserve us from becoming worse, or assist us to become better. Not the whole, but the sick require a physician. Those who weep are to be comforted—those who hunger and thirst after righteousness to be fed. The fallen are to be raised, and the dead to be made alive.

I do not, however, insist on these considerations

with a view to encourage a presumptuous confidence, or undo the effects of a salutary caution. I would not desire any to approach with unwashed hand to touch the bread of life, nor while living in a wilful contempt or violation of other Christian duties, without a desire to reform, to participate in this service, because in such a case it would be only a solemn mockery. But I would remove from delicate and scrupulous minds those apprehensions which they may unreasonably entertain of their not being in a proper moral or devotional frame of mind for engaging in such a service, and which may be more the result of too much sensibility, than the conviction of a wounded conscience. A sense of his own deficiency is always becoming in a Christian, when it operates so as to make him seek more earnestly for the aid of Divine grace, not when it separates him from his Maker, and renders him neglectful of his religious duties. It is beneficial and laudable when it prompts him to implore God to search and to prove him, to enable him to understand his errors, to detect his secret faults, and guide him in the way everlasting.

While some are led by a sense of their unworthiness to refrain from this ordinance, others follow their example from some such vague and

undefinable notions as make the timid or superstitious afraid to be in solitude, or in the dark; as if it were connected with something of awful and mysterious import, and to be approached only with fear and trembling. Such notions, being all the offspring of a perverted imagination, should be dispelled as speedily as possible, for there is nothing more awful and obscure in the rite than in our customary acts of devotion. Others, again, seem to think it superfluous or useless, or at least not obligatory, because a man may practise Christian virtues without respect to Christian ordinances. As to its obligation, that has been already shewn—as to its superfluity, to suppose it superfluous, is to impeach the wisdom of its Founder, of him who is the Author of eternal salvation to all who obey him. He who desired that he might be baptized by John the Baptist for the sake of fulfilling all righteousness, did not deem *that* an idle ceremony which has served for so many generations as an irrefragable witness to the truth of his religion. But supposing it were, the command to observe it is argument enough with a Christian for his compliance. It is not, however, to be imagined that its observance is not accompanied with the most powerfully beneficial effects on the thoughts, the temper, and the conduct. The meditations which it leads the mind to indulge,

the devotional sentiments it inspires, the virtues it inculcates, and the example it exhibits, all tend to render us that which it is the highest and most laudable object of ambition to become, conformed to the image of Christ. But how can those who make not the experiment judge of its influence and operations? Let them consult the experience of others, and they may learn that it is one of the most delightful offices of religion—that it soothes the turbulent passions to peace—that it infuses hope into the bosom of despondence—fortifies the heart against temptation—devotes the soul to God, and brings it into a more immediate intercourse with heaven. Could those who doubt its effects or question its utility, be prevailed upon to join their Christian brethren with all their hearts, in its celebration, and persevere in it, time after time, they would dismiss their doubts and join in extolling its benefits. I would therefore exhort those who neglect this duty to examine most strictly the grounds of their neglect, and see by what valid argument it can be justified. If they find that they hold an untenable position, and act in defiance of the express injunction of the Word of God, is it not the part of wisdom immediately to renounce their error, and hasten to enrol themselves by a sacramental obligation among the disciples of the Lord?

To these considerations let me add how incumbent it is on all, especially on those who have attained to some distinction in society, whether by fortune, or station, or reputation for knowledge and skill, to give a good example to others, and how pernicious an effect their neglect of religious duties must have on the minds of those who look up to them as guides and directors. We all know how one is led by another, not only in the common, but in the most important transactions of life, and that much of the good or ill which we behold in the character of individuals originates in their imitation of the models placed before them. The pupil resembles the teacher, and the child the parent. Where the one is immoral or irreligious, it would be vain to expect virtue or piety in the other. A wise parent, therefore, who studies the good of his offspring, will take care to lead them in the way they should go, though he should not himself be led to it by any motives of a more evangelical nature. But that which is first done from a principle of duty, is soon repeated from feelings of pleasure. What can be more beautiful or becoming than to see a husband and a father coming with his family to the house of God, and joining in the same solemn acts of devotion? I would appeal to the heart of any such if he has not felt on such occasions, the greatest satisfac-

tion and delight—a delight more permanent and pure than should be derived from seeing his sons and daughters in the highest circles of fashion, the most lively of the gay, or the most admired of the beautiful. Yes, to see them in those ways of pleasantness and peace, which lead through a life of virtue to the temple of immortality, must, of all spectacles, be the most gratifying to the paternal bosom. What a pleasure does he lose, and what a duty does he neglect, who does not, with his family, assume his station among the disciples of the Lord; and what excuse will he offer to his God for withholding from them the benefit and the influence of his example? I would ask such a man if he ever hopes to hold communion with God and the Saviour in his heavenly kingdom. If he says no—to pursue the argument would be needless. But if he does, as the inspired Word of God teaches him to hope and believe he shall, wherefore decline to commence on earth that service which is to be consummated in heaven? Shall we neglect or omit our duty here, and yet dare to expect the fruits of obedience in a world to come.

I conclude, my brethren, by exhorting you all to lay these considerations to heart, and to embrace the first opportunity of commencing or renewing

this duty. I have shown that it is imperative and obligatory, and that there is nothing formidable or forbidding in its aspect, to prevent the most humble disciple from compliance. He who said, "Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not," gives every encouragement to draw nigh and participate the offered blessing. I would therefore admonish parents to bring their children, as soon as they have a proper notion of the institution, to its celebration. Good impressions cannot be stamped on the young mind too early. It is owing to their not having been brought to the table of the Lord in their youth, that so many, in more mature years, have an almost insuperable reluctance to approach it; and to prevent such a consequence, while the season is favourable and the opportunity inviting, let them be embraced. Suffer it not to be said that God has spoken to the disobedient, or that Christ has prepared a spiritual banquet in vain, or that we, like the ungrateful company who were invited to the marriage feast, plead nugatory excuses of business or of pleasure to justify our non-attendance. Were an earthly prince to spread the board, happy would those be deemed who should be asked to become his guests. Then would be seen what bustle and preparation, and crowding and dress, and equipage and parade. To be suffered near his person would

be thought an unequalled honour,—to obtain his smile would be regarded as the summit of human felicity. Yet the favour of princes is capricious, and the smile of the great is hollow and deceitful. But here we are invited to share an honour greater than any that an earthly potentate can bestow,—to hold communion with the spiritual world,—to perform a duty by which we may gain the favour of the King of kings. It demands no sacrifice but that of the evil passions by which human happiness is destroyed,—and it offers life eternal as the recompence of obedience.

God grant that all of us may approve ourselves worthy disciples of the Lord Jesus, and that in due time we may be admitted to everlasting communion with him in the world of spirits. Amen.

XV.

THE END OF LIFE.

PSALM xxxix. 4.—“ Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.”

THIS is a most useful petition to God which every man, who wishes to live and die as a Christian, should frequently repeat. Nor should he repeat it only, but have the instruction it contains deeply inscribed on his heart, so that it may become a permanent motive for the active performance of his various duties. Of the shortness and uncertainty of human life every one is, in the abstract, so perfectly assured that it may appear as superfluous as trite to remind him of it. The language of David and of Job on this topic, is reiterated from age to age; and, however imperfectly our practice corresponds with the expression of our sentiments, we are still ready to exclaim—“ Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower and is cut down;

he fleeth also as a shadow and continueth not." If some few survive the allotted period of three score and ten, how many, whose numbers baffle computation, depart before half that period be told, nay, before it can well be said to have commenced! For death assails man in every stage of his existence. His shafts fall thick and indiscriminately on the old and young; and though he had no such emissaries to execute his decrees as disease, accident, famine, and the sword, he has a most powerful and invincible auxiliary in time. With time our lives are in perpetual flow, and the fleetness with which they pass away is happily expressed in the sacred text, which says, that they "flee as a shadow, and as a post that hasteth by, and as a ship that passeth over the waves, which, when it is gone by, the trace thereof cannot be found, neither the pathway of the keel in the waves; or as when a bird has flown through the air, there is no token of her way to be found, even so we, in like manner, as soon as we were born, began to draw near to an end, and have no sign of virtue to shew."*

Since these and similar reflections are made by all, it might reasonably be expected that all

* These words do not occur in the canonical Scriptures. They are to be found in the Wisdom of Solomon, v. 9-13.—Ed.

should labour to improve the time granted to them, and make vigilance and industry compensate for its brief duration. Yet, how few seem to act from the conviction that life is but a span; or try to remedy the evil which they lament, by the cultivation of those talents and virtues which form their most important business. With what reason do those complain of their ephemeral existence who contrive that it shall have no vacuity from mischief, or who slumber away their days on the couch of sloth, without so much as dreaming of any plan that may prove beneficial to society or themselves? Has the labourer, who will not execute his task during the day, any just grounds to murmur that he is oppressed with too much work, when through his own want of exertion, at the approach of night, the duty of many hours has to be crowded into one? Wherefore should an elegy on the fleetness of time be heard from the traveller, who, instead of prosecuting his journey while the day shines, lies down to repose; and when he awakes, is astonished to catch only the last glimpse of the setting sun? Should the operations of nature, and the revolutions of worlds have been suspended, while he enjoyed his slumbers? Many seem to think it impossible to be spendthrifts of time, notwithstanding the eloquent declarations that may be heard on its loss. They

torture invention, and try all expedients to whip the lingering moments into speed. They put wheels of fire on the car of pleasure, and drive precipitately forward, wherever passion impels; and when at length they reach the bounds of their earthly career, they start, and wonder how they approached it so rapidly. But wherefore should they wonder at an effect so naturally following its cause? What have they in reason to blame but their own folly? They cannot, with any shadow of propriety, either hope or wish that they might measure back their past years, return to their former youth, and have it again in their power to abuse the mercy of heaven. Even those who have passed their days profitably and virtuously, dare hardly venture to harbour such a desire. God bestows his gifts to be used with discretion, not to be squandered away in useless, much less in vicious pursuits. Life is given to be employed in the cultivation of our moral and intellectual powers, and in preparation for immortality. When industriously employed, it is sufficiently large for every purpose for which it was granted. He who lives, as in all respects becomes a Christian, has no cause to lament the shortness of his existence however brief. Length of life is often erroneously estimated by number of years. Some who are comparatively infants in years, are sages in

wisdom, and in many an instance the proposition may be reversed. Some, instead of deploring the brevity of their existence, might, with more justice, lament that it had been protracted till they became vicious.

In order to make a profitable use of time, we should frequently reflect on the importance of its possession and the irretrievable nature of its loss. This is always a salutary subject of reflection, inasmuch as it leads to contemplate the end of all human affairs, and the commencement of a new scene that will have no termination. Some periods too are peculiarly favourable to such reflection, and seem to force it on the minds even of the thoughtless. Such a period is the commencement of a new year, when nature, in this climate is generally arrayed in her most gloomy attire, and the mind sympathising with her, takes pleasure in reviewing the past—a melancholy pleasure which she relieves by cheerful anticipations of the future.

Many and various are the reflections which crowd upon us when we turn our attention to the past, for many and various are the incidents by which it has been diversified both abroad and at home, among our neighbours and ourselves,—in

the political and commercial, the moral and religious worlds. Some have been advancing and others retreating in the grand pursuit of life,—old names have disappeared, and new ones been brought into notice,—some have covered themselves with honourable fame, and others been precipitated into infamy and ruin. They have been eating and drinking,—building and planting,—marrying, and giving in marriage. Many have closed their earthly career in youth, in manhood, or in age, and by their departure forced the reluctant conviction on their survivors that the time is approaching when they also must depart. Such is the history of every year of our lives. The shades of the picture may be of a deeper or a lighter hue,—but the grand outlines are ever the same.

What principally concerns ourselves, however, is not the vicissitude of things in general, the grand events in the history of man, though these are destitute neither of interest nor instruction,—but what changes we have ourselves undergone in our spiritual state, in our thoughts, opinions, principles, habits,—in a word, in all that concerns our immortal souls. Let us interrogate our own hearts, and examine what improvement we have made in our knowledge of things divine,—has religion

acquired a stronger ascendancy in our bosoms,—are our resolutions of obedience confirmed, and our preparations for a world to come more advanced? Have we to entertain the mortifying reflection that a whole year of our existence has been unprofitably spent, or to congratulate ourselves on our mental, moral, and religious improvement? Are there any dark passages in our history which we would wish to have effaced,—or is all so fair and luminous as to afford us only delight in the contemplation?

Happy is he who enjoys the pleasing retrospect even of a single year spent in the mode which his own conscience, as enlightened by the Word of God, most approves,—a year without shame, reproach, or ungodly sorrow,—spent in the exercise of his social and domestic duties,—in love to God and brotherly kindness to man. The consciousness of having so spent it is more gratifying to the heart than the most splendid worldly success,—the accession of honours,—or the augmentation of fortune. Such a consciousness is as a perpetual feast to the soul. It inspires hope and confidence in the Most High.

In reviewing the past there are few or none of us, I am persuaded, who may not discover much

to claim approbation, — the faithful records of whose hearts will not testify that their thoughts have not been evil continually, — whose conduct has not often been marked by a character of piety and philanthropy. You may indulge the approving testimony of conscience — for duties faithfully and affectionately performed — for a good example of attendance in the house of God — holy affections cherished — of temptations overcome — of resignation in affliction — of faith triumphant — of fortitude — temperance — and gratitude to the Bestower of all. These are most gratifying reflections, and the pleasure you have, secured from them, should encourage to perseverance in such a course as will ensure their repetition and continuance. The same duties will be accompanied by the same results, and the more faithful we are in their performance, the more will our felicity be enhanced. But if, on the one hand, we desire satisfaction from the consciousness of having done what it was our duty to do, there must be pain — and such a pain is most salutary in every ingenuous mind — springing from reflection on its defects and errors. The wisest and the best of men are still far from perfection, and when they come to examine themselves by the searching light of gospel truth they will find enough to correct or amend. Who can truly affirm that he has nothing

to regret in the past—no coldness of devotion—no breach in his obedience—no defect of temper—nor omission of kindness—nor lukewarmness—nor want of zeal in a cause that should call forth every energy—no countenance of error—nor indifference to the progress of truth—nor uncharitableness—nor vanity—nor ambition—nor selfishness—nor pride? Few, indeed, if any, can or dare make such an avowal—few whose life has flowed on, a pure unsullied stream, never breaking into forbidden ground, nor wandering from its onward course to the kingdom of God. He who says he has no sin is under a fatal delusion, and if he attempts to justify himself, his own mouth will condemn him, for nothing is more true than that all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. The man therefore who properly examines himself, instead of being wrapped up in the idea that he has done all that it was incumbent on him to do, and made the most judicious use of his talents and opportunities, will lament the imperfection even of his most eminent or conspicuous virtues, and consider how he may most effectually improve the time to come, and make farther progress in his spiritual journey. He will try more and more assiduously to assimilate himself to our great Example, assured that he must never relax his exertions if he would be his true disciple, but that he must follow his

injunction, to watch and pray lest he fall into temptation. He will frequently subject his heart to strict examination, daring to inspect its secret deformity, and resolved to purify it from all defilement. He will not be contented with having, or with seeming to have, one or two Christian virtues, but will endeavour to acquire them all, adding to his faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance—patience—godliness—brotherly kindness and charity. Neither will he fall into the common error of supposing that the excess of one virtue to which he may be constitutionally inclined, will compensate for the want of another of equal importance for which he has no inclination, that zeal will justify want of charity—or a love of justice atone for an unrelenting and unforgiving hardness of heart—or that the perspicacity with which he observes, or the rigour with which he blames, his neighbour's defect, will be a justification or apology for his own. He will feel the weight of the Apostle's declaration, that he who violates one of the commandments is guilty of disrespect to the whole, that whatever link he strikes from the chain of the Christian virtues, as from that of natural causes and effects, whether it be the tenth or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike. He will therefore aim to become perfect even as God is perfect, and having such an aim he can never

cease to feel the necessity of vigilance and active exertion in his Christian vocation.

Intimately connected with the examination of the past is that of the present. We should not only consider what we have done, but what we are actually doing. Are our former errors serving as beacons to guard against their repetition, or the painful feeling of our infirmities in days gone by preventing us from the commission of folly, or the indulgence of foolish imaginations? Are we still so much our own enemies as to follow those courses of whose danger and misery we had experience—or taught by the past have we learned to prize moral and religious integrity as the most estimable of all possessions? What, let us inquire, in our own breasts, are our present prospects, desires and intentions? Are we storing our minds with useful knowledge—searching for truth as for hidden treasures, and laying up a solid foundation of good works for the time to come? Or are we afraid lest the truth should be forced upon us, and turn away from its remonstrances, lest it should compel us from shame to renounce some darling prejudice, or error, or line of conduct, which our own awakened judgment would disapprove? Are we just to all, and kind and affectionate to those who have peculiar claims on our kindness

and affection? Does the spirit of Christian candour and charity pervade our thoughts and conversation, and are we as ready to extenuate or excuse a neighbour's faults and delinquencies as circumstances will allow? Have we marked out for ourselves, and are we determined to pursue such a path of life as, under the good providence of God, will terminate in everlasting peace—to "live soberly, righteously, and piously, looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."

These are useful and serious inquiries which should be frequently made, and at the same time accompanied with an earnest resolution to turn them to immediate advantage—to strengthen what is weak and to rectify what is wrong—to repent of the past, and leave no room for blame in the future. This is the good of self-examination. This is the end for which we are exhorted in holy writ to commune with our own hearts on our beds, and be still—to consider our ways, and to turn again to the Lord.

Few are so hardened in iniquity, and such de-

terminated enemies to their own good, as not to entertain an idea that they will one day repent and reform. Now, the only proof they can give that their intention is not altogether a fallacy, is to carry it into immediate effect, for there is no probability that they will have either the power or the inclination to commence a task to-morrow, which they cannot be persuaded to begin to-day. The time of their proposed reformation is generally placed at some remote and indefinite period—when they shall have disentangled themselves from the cares of business—when a sufficient provision is made for their families—when the infirmities of years requiring relaxation from toil will afford abundant time for attending to the concerns of futurity. In the meantime, years roll away—age steals upon them unawares—the season of their intended reformation still continues to flit before them, and ere they can overtake it, they sink into the grave, and their hopes are frustrated for ever.

Of this, however, the sinner is not easily persuaded. He still encourages a secret heart of unbelief with respect to the consequences of his evil doings and his own final conversion. He flatters himself that he may enjoy the pleasures of sin and escape with impunity, and that the sentence denounced against it is neither so certain

nor so severe as preachers represent. This is a fallacy which every day's experience might remove, and which his own conscience, when he allows it to be heard, will effectually expose. Sin is no sooner committed than followed by punishment—by the stings of remorse and the alienation of the heart from God. It is no more possible to separate the judgment of heaven from guilt, than the shadow from the substance. Sooner or later the offender must pay the penalty of his offence. The word of God spoken against it goeth not forth in vain, neither will it return empty. The bolt will not err from the mark at which it is hurled by the hand of the Omnipotent, nor the judgment denounced against sin from the beginning, fail to reach its object. But says the sinner, "I will avert it by repentance, I will fall before the face of my Heavenly Father, and smite on my breast, and say, Father I have sinned, and will meet a gracious pardon, and a joyful welcome into the household of faith—for it is written that there shall be more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance?"

This is well—the sinner may, no doubt, return, and the gospel holds out the greatest encouragement to induce him to embrace the offered terms

of pardon. But where is it promised to the presumptuous transgressor—to him who, knowing the threats so clearly denounced against all iniquity, and in defiance of exhortation and entreaty even from the Son of God himself, persists in his evil courses, and insults the mercy and forbearance of his Maker, by the very imagination that he will be overlooked or indulged till he is sick and weary of transgressing, and may find it pleasant or convenient to adopt some new path? If he would obtain pardon, let him seek it while it may be had, and not deceive his own heart, that it may be obtained whenever he shall chance to be in a humour to solicit it at any period hereafter. Let not wisdom utter her voice in vain, but turn at her reproof, lest she reject your petition with scorn when you implore her favour, and say, “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose

the fear of the Lord ; they would none of my counsel ; they despised all my reproof ; therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices.”

Most seriously do the Scriptures admonish us against the danger of procrastination from which nothing can ensue but disappointment, misery, and death. They warn us by the example of the Israelites, and desire us not to “harden our hearts, as in the provocation in the wilderness, when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart, and they have not known my ways. So, I swear in my wrath they shall not enter into my rest.” This sentence, the just consequence of their folly, ingratitude, and impenitence, was rigorously executed ; they were excluded for ever from the promised land, and their carcasses fell in the wilderness, the scene of their impiety and rebellion. We are, therefore, desired to exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, that we may avoid a similar, though more grievous calamity ; to make a profitable use of our yet remaining time ; apply seriously to the concerns of salvation, and beware lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

Supposing we had the times and seasons at our own disposal, and could protract them to any period we chose, still would this be no reason for deferring our virtuous purposes; for God demands the service of all our days. If now be not the most eligible of all seasons, it will never come; nor need we encourage any idea that the path of reformation will ever be more agreeable; or that it will be less irksome to commence it when our sins shall have acquired strength by nourishment and age, when habit has rendered them constitutional, and established their empire. It is easy to eradicate the tender plant, or bend it to our purpose. But when it has twined its roots round the rock, and spread its branches wide, in vain would you bend its stubborn strength; or should you try the experiment by the application of mechanical force, it will be broken in the conflict; or should you succeed for a little, nature at length will triumph, burst the restraint fixed upon her, and assume the position in which she originally stood. Can we hope then to bend the stubborn propensities of the soul when they have been nurtured and matured in vice? When the mind is hardened and distorted by iniquity, whence can we collect power to restore it to its pristine rectitude? "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his

spots? Then may ye do good who are accustomed to evil.”

Were we made certain by some superior being, whose authority we dared not question, that God had fixed the date of our continuance upon earth to one or two years, or even to a longer period, such assurance would probably produce a rapid change in the impenitent. They would feel the necessity of regeneration, and flee to religion as their only trust—to God as their everlasting friend. Now we have no certainty that we shall ever reach even the limited period supposed. It may be much shorter, and therefore it must be reckoned among our presumptuous transgressions to sin with a design to repent, and to rest our hopes of preparation for immortality on the possibilities and contingencies of the future. We know not in what day, nor in what hour, it may please God to demand our souls. While we are saying, Let us eat and drink and be merry, the irrevocable sentence may be passed; and of this we have ample experience, that neither youth, nor health, nor strength can give its possessor any certain pledge that he shall witness another revolution of the sun. Hence our Saviour so cogently insisted on the duty of constant preparation. Take heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time

is;—the Son of man will come in a day and in an hour when the improvident servant looketh not for him, and will cut him asunder, and appoint his portion among the unbelievers. Our Lord said of himself, that he must do the work of his Father while it was day, for the night was coming in which no man could work. Since much is to be done, and the time short, no moment should be suffered to escape unimproved. To defer is only to increase our labour—for he who leaves for to-morrow the business of to-day, will be oppressed by a double task, and the same causes of procrastination occur again and again. Resolution is enfeebled by delay—habit usurps the place of reason—the mental powers are relaxed by bodily infirmity—and that which was at first protracted for a time from choice, is at last protracted for ever from necessity.

Let us, then, my brethren, diligently employ what remains of our mortal lives, in the useful and necessary duties of our Christian vocation.

Let me exhort all of you to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Be diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord—owe no man anything, but to love one another. Whatsoever things are just—whatsoever

things are true, lovely, and of good report—if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think of these things. And God grant that our future days may bring to us all an increase of piety, of righteousness, and felicity—that, when our earthly course is finished, we may be received into the abodes of everlasting joy, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

XVI.

IMMORTALITY.

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

THAT the soul of man shall survive the dissolution of the earthly tabernacle in which it is imprisoned, is what no Christian can for a moment dispute. This is a doctrine inculcated by all religions, supported by the reasoning of the most acute philosophers, and made a prevailing motive to good conduct in the great body of mankind. Did the occasion require it, I might enter into a review of the arguments by which this doctrine is proved, and shew, from a comparison of the faculties of body and mind, and their total dissimilarity, that the grave of the one by no means becomes that of the other. From the excellence of the human mind itself, and its constant progress in virtue and knowledge, arises a presumptive evidence that

the tomb is not the limit of its improvement, much less the gulf in which all its attainments shall be absorbed and lost. Even granting that its existence depended on a combination of material principles, and was not, according to the prevailing opinion, something distinct from matter, it would not follow that it must be annihilated. Add to this that the justice of God is concerned in making a difference in the fate of oppressed virtue and successful guilt. Another state, therefore, is wanting, and that which reason declares to be necessary, revelation demonstrates to be true. But without entering into an elucidation of these topics at present, let us consider the advantages and improvements which our hearts and minds may derive from this sublime and consolatory doctrine.

Suppose the present were the only state of man, in what a labyrinth of errors would our opinions of God, providence, and human nature be involved! We might conclude that anarchy and chance, injustice, falsehood, and oppression, swayed the world promiscuously with justice, mercy, and truth, and that the Deity, like the gods of the Epicureans of old, dwelt far remote from the affairs of men, wrapt up in his own enjoyments, and equally regardless of their virtues and vices,

their happiness or their misery. But the doctrine of man's immortality, like light from heaven, penetrates the chaos, and dispels the gloom, reducing the jarring and discordant elements into harmony and beauty. It shews us that the moral, like the natural world, is under the direction of unerring wisdom and goodness, and that here we contemplate but a part of the ways of heaven, in which, though there may be many apparent irregularities, a more extensive view of the system would shew them to be both necessary and beneficial. It exhibits man as only in the first stage of existence—opens a boundless field for his virtuous ambition—and stimulates him to higher and higher degrees of virtue and knowledge. "Now," says the Apostle, "we see but in part, and know but in part; but then we shall know, even as we are known." How limited a portion of the ways of Providence are we at present enabled to comprehend! The instincts, passions, and affections, which properly belong to our animal nature, are continually impeding the operations of intellect. We mistake the aerial fabric of imagination for the structure of reason, and grasp at shadows for the solid realities of truth. But then, it is to be presumed that the vigour of the mind, being freed from those obstructions, will be greatly increased, and that those reasoning powers, which now con-

stitute the superiority of our nature, will receive such new influxes of light and truth as will raise us to an equality with celestial intelligences. The angel in *Paradise Lost*, is represented as purging the visual nerve of Adam with euphrasy and rue, to give him an insight into futurity. And thus, may we suppose, will the mental eye be purified, and when we are disrobed of this mortality, and clothed with immortality, will acquire a clearness and a quickness of perception which will discover wisdom, beauty, and beneficence, where now we can find only disorder and deformity. Many truths, and many of the secret things, which belong unto the Lord, and which we are now totally unable to comprehend, will then become perfectly clear. How many difficulties does the doctrine of man's immortality enable him already to explain! From how many embarrassments does it free him, and what energy and elevation does it communicate to his intellectual powers! No longer a dull inhabitant of earth, a dweller in clay, and a companion of the brute, he claims alliance with the invisible intellectual world. He feels himself united by the ethereal links of mind to superior natures—to angels, and to God. As he gives his soul up to the contemplation, he seems already to escape from his corporeal chains, and spring to the regions of celestial enjoyment.

As our mental, so also are our moral powers improved by this doctrine. The heart, like the mind, glories in the prospect of immortality, trembles at the thought of ceasing to exist, and ardently wishes that those benevolent feelings, which are the spring of its purest pleasures, may be prolonged for ever. How often are men heard wishing that they could practise their philanthropy on a more extensive scale, that they could burst asunder the chains of the captive—relieve the oppressed—give bread to the hungry, and make the widow's heart to sing for joy! How often do they pray that their friendship, cemented by mutual faith, may never be dissolved, that the pure fire of love may never suffer extinction, that the congratulations of self-approving consciences may never cease to be heard! These are the aspirations of the heart for an immortal being, and we need not fear that they shall be ungratified. The most exalted and refined pleasures which our nature is capable of enjoying, are those of benevolence and devotion. If our hearts have thrilled with rapture at the appearance of a friend, or expanded with ineffable delight when we communed with heaven, how will these sentiments and feelings be improved, when freed from those earthly affections by which they are so liable to be mingled and profaned! How are they sublined

even now, by the hope of immortality! In our present state, the exercise of many even of our virtues is liable, from our imperfection, to be accompanied with pain. While our sympathy is excited, our sensibility may be wounded, and our benevolent dispositions, because they cannot be indulged, may cause many a throb of vexation. But hereafter, all this alloy will be refined away, and the purified spirit shall rejoice in the exercise of an uncontaminated love. Then, to use the observation of a learned divine—"may the same virtue which in this life brings forth but one degree of joy or usefulness, bring forth a thousand degrees. For as a cubical foot of our grosser air might possibly expand, and fill a cubical furlong in the higher and thinner region of pure æther, so that virtue, which can subsist under the loads and clogs of our temptations and difficulties, though its present effects are but small, may dilate and blaze out into a glory, magnificence, and splendour equal to that of the holiest angels."

The heathen religions, and Mahometanism, promised their disciples in a future state only sensual enjoyments; and the stores of imagination were exhausted in depicting the pleasures of their fabled elysium. But Christianity, with a dignity worthy of its divine origin, promises man only

such enjoyments as are suited to a moral and intellectual being—no couches strewed with flowers—no tables groaning under a load of luxury—no goblets sparkling with nectars, but peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. How unworthy of God and our spiritual immortal nature were those gross and grovelling imaginations—how perishable are all such joys, and how incapable of filling the immense desires of an eternal existence! Luxuries pall on the taste—the splendour of gold is tarnished by the breath of time—the echoes of renown cease to reverberate with delight on the ear—the roses of pleasure wither while we inhale their fragrance, and leave us only the thorns. But the joys which God has in store for those who love him are imperishable. They are exempt from all corruption and decay. They pall not by repetition, but are ever fresh and fragrant. As our sun shall be without clouds, so shall our pleasures be without satiety.

Farther, the doctrine of man's immortality proclaims at once the defeat of vice and the triumph of virtue. Did we consider ourselves as perishable—organized dust—whence would the moral faculty derive either its terrors or consolations? The distracting thoughts of the sinner—the terrific imaginations of guilt—its palpitations—its alarms—

the spectres it summons from the grave have their origin here. Here, too, originate all those delightful hopes which occupy the bosom of virtue—which support her in the day of adversity—give energy to her exertions, and inspire her with confidence and resolution in the most perilous and afflicting trials. How might the wicked triumph, could they divest themselves of the dread of coming retribution, and efface those impressions of futurity which are stamped upon the heart! But now we know that their triumphing can be but short, and that the longest duration of worldly prosperity can never be commensurate to the day of woe. What are all the enjoyments the earth has to lend,—its pomp, its luxuries, its plaudits—to the man who has to die, and enter on a new stage whose only enjoyments are spiritual? What, asked our Lord, is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul—or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? He who gives a valuable estate for a bauble, is not so egregious a fool as he who barter his integrity for a pleasure which must be resigned in a few years—perchance in the twinkling of an eye. How long can the most permanent of worldly joys endure? How many of them do we not outlive, even in our present short and fragile existence? The pleasures of sin are found only in anticipation. Taste them,

and they die. But grant them what duration you please, must they not at length have their period; and what is the longest life compared to eternity? A drop in the ocean—a point on the surface of interminable space. The day of reckoning will surely arrive for the impenitent. When the fever of life is past, they will awaken to wrath and judgment, and find at length that unerring justice does preside over the destinies of man. This is the fear which palsies the arm of guilt, and shoots despair through the heart of the wicked. This is the hope which animates the bosom of virtue—the rock on which she stands secure amidst all the revolutions of fortune—and from which she can look down with unruffled composure on the short-lived conquests of death and the grave.

Another important advantage which we derive from the consideration of the immortality of man, is the lenitive it affords for every deprivation and affliction. As we are to pass into another country, it teaches us to consider all the blessings we at present enjoy only as short favours lent by the Almighty, for the accommodation of our journey, and which he may resume whenever he deems it expedient either for our chastisement or edification. To cure us of an inordinate attachment to them, and to rouse us from the lethargy in which the

kingdom of heaven is forgotten, he removes them from our view—bursts the ties which attach us to the world too closely—and thus do our deprivations become the secondary cause of our salvation. Well may the hope of future bliss enable us to bear those trials which God has rendered necessary to its attainment. How many mortifications do we endure—to how many deprivations do we submit for some low, temporal, perhaps vicious gratification! How much more should we cheerfully bear the afflictions sent by the Almighty, for the hope of future bliss! “I reckon,” says the Apostle, “that the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” “If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” “If we are sons, then we are also heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”

Among the various afflictions which this doctrine is peculiarly calculated to instruct us to bear with resignation, is the death of those endeared to us by esteem and affection. There is no grief that makes so deep an impression, or that is lamented with more unfeigned sorrow. I would not, therefore, forbid those who feel it to give

utterance to their sighs, or to open the fountain of their tears. Human nature must be indulged in one of its most amiable feelings. If the Son of God wept at the tomb of Lazarus, we may well be permitted to shed a tear of regret for our departed friends. But those who feel this grief are exhorted not to sorrow as those who have no hope; nor to abandon themselves to despair, as if they were deprived of all comfort, and reduced to a state of utter desolation. We have still a merciful heavenly Father in whose goodness we may confidently trust. We have all the promises of the blessed gospel, the cheering example of a persecuted and crucified Redeemer, the triumph of his cross and the power of his resurrection. If we are tried, we should meet our trials with the spirit, the fortitude, and the resignation of Christians, remembering that our light afflictions of the present moment will work out for us an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory.

Though nature must have her tribute of our tears, if we possessed a true spirit of Christian faith and benevolence, we should rather rejoice than mourn at the happiness of those who have got the start of us in the career of immortality, and have sooner obtained the prize for which all of us are contending. Can we be so selfish as to mourn

more for our own deprivation than rejoice in their felicity? "If ye loved me," said Christ to his disciples, when they were sorrowing for his departure, "ye would rejoice because I go to the Father: for my Father is greater than I." If we sincerely love those who are called away before us, is it not gratifying to reflect that they are gone to receive their reward, that they have passed in triumph through the stormy ocean of life, and entered into the haven of everlasting peace, accompanied by the love and esteem of mankind? But it may seem hard to be deprived of a friend in the height of his usefulness, when his virtues are most flourishing, when his talents could be most successfully employed, and when his prospects of worldly honour and prosperity shone most brilliant. Would we then have the bitterness of our regret diminished by the want of merit in the friend whom we deplore? Would it be a consolation to reflect that his life was useless—his virtues unknown—his prospects a blank? In order to save us a tear or a sigh, should we wish it possible that he might be reduced to a level with the worthless, who, depart when they may, cause no loss, and excite no regret in society? No, my brethren, such a consideration would only add poignancy to grief. The tear which is shed on the tomb of vice, is a

drop of wormwood and gall, the groan uttered there is that of profound and hopeless misery. But precious is the tear that falls on the grave of departed worth. It is a drop of hallowed dew, and incense of sweet savour, which, while it embalms the memory of the dead, exhales consolation to the living. Grief is sanctified by the virtues which it laments. There is joy mingled with the pain of every painful and virtuous emotion. The conviction that the righteous have their names registered in the book of life, can mitigate the sadness of every Christian for the loss of a departed friend. When a young person dies in the blossom of his virtues, he is a flower transplanted to the garden of Eden. He that is cut down in maturity, is as a shock of corn that is gathered in its season, and laid up in the garner of the Lord. To these considerations, let me add that we have a positive assurance in the gospel that we shall one day be united in heaven to those whom we loved upon earth, provided we follow their righteous example, and tread in those paths which have led them to the kingdom of God. This, my friends, is one of the strongest motives to constancy in virtue, and the sincerest proof of our love for the memory of departed worth. We shall undergo the same change which they have undergone, and, divested of our material chains,

arise light and vigorous to the enjoyment of everlasting being, endowed with renovated powers, and stripped of every imperfection.

Such, my brethren, are the delightful prospects and divine consolations of religion, and particularly of its doctrine of the soul's immortality. It reveals to us a new heaven and a new earth. It restores us to the enjoyments of which we have been deprived. It unites us to the blessed society of the wise and good. Thus does the tomb which the unbeliever contemplates as the den of annihilation—the devouring vortex which swallows up the generations of men never to be restored—appear to the eye of faith as the portals of immortality, through which thousands of disembodied spirits are continually crowding.

Let these reflections strengthen our faith and animate our virtue—that we may be “stedfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour in the Lord shall not be in vain.” The time is approaching when we shall have full demonstration of these sublime truths of religion. Here we have no continuing city, and the place which beholds us shall soon behold us no more. The habitations of men, like their tenants, have their period. The

most durable edifices moulder into dust, and the very place where they stood, is, in the lapse of ages, covered with the pall of oblivion. What becomes of the children of men? They are passing away in rapid and uninterrupted succession—their memorial perishes from the face of the earth—their honours are extinguished—the grave closes its inexorable jaws over them all—and the monuments erected to perpetuate their names sink down, and only increase the heap of rubbish under which their ashes repose. But though we have no continuing city here, we have another, says the word of holy writ, that is permanent, “whose builder and maker is God.” This lifts our thoughts from the perishable fabrics of human contrivance to those mansions which are placed on everlasting foundations—a city, which the page of inspiration describes in the figurative language of earth—for the language of heaven we cannot understand—yet calculated to excite the most lively conceptions of its permanence, splendour, and felicity—as having foundations of emerald and jasper—fountains of living water—the tree with immortal fruit, and light from the immediate presence of God and the Lamb. There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor pain, but God will wipe the tears from every eye, and to those whose names are written in the book

of life, he will grant the fulness of joy for evermore.

Since, then, we look for a new heaven and a new earth, what manner of persons may we, with the Apostle, ask, should we be in all holy conversation and godliness, in faith, in charity, in love to God, in love to man, in conformity to the precepts, and to the example of Christ;—how desirous to invest ourselves with all those virtues and affections, which even on earth give a foretaste of the joys of heaven, and which can best qualify us for admission into those mansions of bliss, to which Christ has been the precursor and guide, and into which we are assured that nothing impure, unjust, iniquitous can find admission. God grant that all of us may make it our constant endeavour to be diligent and persevering in the work of the Lord, and that in the great and final day we may be found worthy of an inheritance with the saints of light. Amen.

THE
PREACHER.



THE PREACHER.



BOOK FIRST.

Shepherds of Israel, what a task is yours !
How arduous, how delightful ! Yours to lead
Messiah's flock to pastures ever green,
To Hermon's dews, and Zion's holy hill.
As stewards, yours to share the bread of life ;
As kind physicians heal the broken heart,
And mitigate its pangs with anodynes
Prepared in Paradise. The heralds ye
Of God's high mandates, to interpret true
The oracles divine, with suasive voice,
Bland as the zephyr, to allure the soul
And win to heaven ; or raised with trumpet clang,
As Sinai's thunders pealing loud and long,
To rouse and guard the sinner from the gulf
That yawns before him. Yours across the waste
And howling wilderness, to guide the steps
Of weary pilgrim to the land of peace.

Yours to array the soldier of the cross
 In arms heaven-tempered, meet to brave the force
 Of Satan's rebel host, and send him forth
 To conquer and to win the immortal crown.

Who for such task is meet? So asked of old
 The inspired Apostle, and the bright response
 Recorded stands on Inspiration's page.
 Who made the mouth of man, the hearing ear,
 The seeing and the blind? Who gives the tongue
 It's vocal powers, or to the slow of speech
 An eloquence redundant? God most high
 From weakness perfects strength—from God alone
 Is man's sufficiency. Commence with Heaven,
 And great and sacred deem the power of prayer.
 Swift as the speed of seraph lightning-winged,
 It mounts the starry sphere, and suppliant thence
 Elicits blessings down. But think not Heaven
 Is won by words. In vain with folded arms
 Sloth yawns for bread, and pines with ragged want,
 While all the fruits of mellow Autumn crowd
 The hoards of industry. Lo! culture robes
 The iron rock with vegetable gold.
 Thus study clothes the mind. 'Tis her's the seeds
 Of knowledge to collect and fructify,
 And store with truth the treasuries of thought.

For mental riches only pour not thou
 Thy supplication—by the midnight oil;
 But for more precious treasures of the heart,
 For virtue, candour, charity divine.
 Let love to God and love to human kind

Blend in thy bosom, and thy thoughts pervade
 E'en as a vital flame. Creation first
 Sprang from eternal love—the glorious plan
 Of man's redemption sprang. Who feels no spark
 Of love divine warm-glowing in his breast,
 Ne'er let him hope, as God's ambassador,
 To profit man, or serve the cause of heaven.

Would'st thou around thee as a brilliant star,
 Pour light incessant? On thy own clear mind
 Must light incessant flow. The wasting lamp
 Asks new recruits of oil, or soon it burns
 Faint and more faint—at last exhausted dies.
 Thus feeble grows the mind, its strength collapsed,
 Shrivelled and dry, unless still new supplies
 Of knowledge feed it. Knowledge to the mind
 Gives its due nutriment. Where'er she dwells,
 In hermit grot or stately college hall,
 Woo her to smile upon thee. With her sons
 Court that expanded commerce of the soul,
 Which makes none poorer, but enriches all.

To teaching, doctrine, exhortation give
 Both thy diurnal and nocturnal hours.
 E'en as the industrious bee from flower to flower
 Excursive roves collecting all their sweets,
 So thou imbibe the honey dews of truth
 Wherein they glisten—midst Hymettian thyme
 Or Carmel's roses—for wherever found,
 Truth is from heaven; and in thy own pure mind
 Concoct the treasured sweets. In Nature's page
 Read God's high attributes—nor light esteem

That elder Scripture which thro' boundless worlds
Proclaims Jehovah's glory. When the morn,
In blushing radiance from the eastern clime,
Springs up rejoicing, by some hill's green side
Or lapse of wood-girt streams, or ocean's shores,
Join the full chorus that from earth and sea,
And all things animate, exultant swells
To hymn the Eternal. Or when night has climbed
Her ebon throne and called forth all her stars,
Let contemplation with her fiery steeds
Wheel thee among their ranks—adoring Him
Who names and numbers all their glittering host.
Invoke the spirits of the mighty dead
Yet hov'ring o'er their page, and speaking still
Their native accent, such as once were heard
By yellow Tiber, or amid the groves
Of famed Parnassus—or in Eden's bowers,
When man first spoke the language of the skies.
With Amram's son learn all of Egypt's lore.
Far up the stream of time let history guide
Thy shallop sailing mid the wrecks of thrones,
Sceptres, and diadems, and royal dust ;
The graves of nations—some without a name,
And some with lordly monumental piles,
All charactered in blood and sculptured o'er
With battles, murders, and heroic deeds.
Learn how their glories with their virtues rose,
And sunk beneath their crimes. Woo every Muse
That strikes the lyric or the epic chord,
Didactic, pastoral, or that moves the springs
Of mirth or tragic woe ;—with thoughts sublime,
And diction's rich adornments, storing well

Thy memory's treasure house. Nor cease to court
 Divine philosophy, her hailed of old
 By Rome's great orator, the guide of life,
 The friend of virtue, and of vice the foe ;
 Her that the wandering tribes of savage men
 First bound by social ties,—first ruled by laws ;
 Of morals and the soul's true discipline,
 The imperial mistress. All the precious stores
 Of ancient wisdom treasure in thy soul ;
 Whate'er of good the portico contains,
 Or academic grove—Socratic house,
 Ionic school—Italic—or the walls
 Of famed Lyceum—an Eclectic thou,
 Slave to no sect, but friend to truth in all.
 With learned Quintilian, or Palmyra's sage,
 And thine, Stagyra, learn the Critic's lore,
 With fine perception every grace to spy
 Of thought or diction. Scan whate'er of old,
 Brahmin or Druid taught ; or Bard or Scald
 Heroic sung ;—whate'er of new the eye
 Of science finds, exploring Nature's steps
 Thro' all her windings to her last retreat.

Nor let the Fathers in oblivion sleep :
 For many a flow'ret to adorn thy brows,
 Or fruit thy mind to nourish, may'st thou find
 In their neglected paths. Revolve the page
 Of Nazianzen by Urania loved,
 And golden-mouthed Chrysostom, flowing deep,
 Redundant as the cataracts of Nile.
 Thro' mystic Origen, learned Isidore,
 Sententious Basil, or sage Austin famed

For eloquence divine, explore thy way.
Nor scorn to soil thy fingers in the dust
Of Scotist, Thomist, Ochamist, and all
The mystic, metaphysic, jangling tribe
Of school divinity—perchance some pearl
Amid the rubbish may thy pains reward.
E'en Latimer's rough ore tho' crusted deep
With moss and rust of years, again recast,
May issue from the mint of modern taste
In rich attractive beauty. Scan the page
Of those great masters of the Pulpit who
Touch all the springs of passion—melt the soul
To tender sympathy—with shafts of fire
Transpierce the sinner's heart, and wring with keen
And bitter agony ;—or who address,
In more didactic speech, the sober power
Of reason—and by weighty argument,
Convince and overcome, those scattering quick
Their arrowy shafts—keen biting where they aim,
And gaining many a transient victory ;—
These, moving on in solid close array
And panoply invincible, to sure
And everlasting triumph. From the fire
Of Clermont's Bishop catch a kindred glow,
Or roll the thunders deep of Bourdaloue ;
Or on the marble tomb, beside the dust
Of kings and nobles, weep with him who wept
Their loss in strains that bathed all France in tears.
Less warm, but not less potent, Britain pours
Her eloquence divine, by sober truth
Chastised, and seldom into airy flights
Raised by imagination. Mincs of thought

Lie piled in Barrow ; as a giant, South
Wields, rude and fierce, his strength. To intellect
Clarke speaks alone, and, as a lucid star,
Pours light on truths obscure. Precise and close
Sage Butler reasons, as if led by rule
Of mathematic lore. But would'st thou stray
Thro' flowery regions, in what fair demesne
So wild, so fragrant, beautiful and gay,
Can thy soul wander as where Taylor leads
Thro' the sweet Patmos of his tomes divine ?
O ! those were towering minds—they stately grew
As cedars o'er the weak and lowly shrub ;
Cedars of Lebanon sacred to the Lord,
That raised to heaven their green and flourishing heads
Rich with immortal verdure. Glorious throng !
Illustrious sages, hail ! ye great, ye good,
Ye learned, ye eloquent, oh ! may my soul
Still dwell with yours—with you pursue the path
Of heavenly wisdom, climbing still more near
The eternal source of light, and truth, and joy.

But let not veneration for the powers,
Tho' splendid, of the learned, the good, the wise,
Lead thee to place thy free-born soul in thrall
To their dominion. Ne'er for sordid mess
Of pottage sell thy birthright, free to search,
And fearless to pursue, the steps of Truth,
Where'er she leads, unshackled by a chain
Tho' silky-soft or rosy. In the fount
Of Inspiration, oft the golden urn
Of intellect replenish—deep the stream
Redundant flows with music in its lapse,

And healing in its waves. Here slake thy thirst,
Nor when invited to the living rock
Where saints and angels quaffed, be thou content
With tanks and puddles, or with cisterns hewn
From brittle clay. What creed of man's device
Does error tinge not? From its baneful dews
God's word alone is pure. Be this thy creed ;
And from its hallowed page, both morn and eve,
Extract its truths divine. Its precepts blest,
Its awful threats, its glorious promises
Store in thy mind ; and of the chosen seed,
The rise, the fall, the government and laws,
Times, places, persons, scan with critic lore.

Come, view from Nebo's top the promised land
From Dan to Beersheba—that beauteous land,
Garden of God, with corn, and oil, and wine,
And milk and honey blessed. With palm tree groves,
With terebinthine vales and grottoes cool,
And mountains clothed with Gilead's precious balm,
Enriched and beautified. The windings trace
Of every stream—great Jordan rolling down
With mighty inundation, from their lair
Driving the pard and lion ; but his waves,
Awed by Jehovah's ark, let Israel pass
O'er his dried channel. Rove by Arnon's stream,
Or Jabbok's torrent, through the fragrant shade
Of palm-tree, olive, and the almond wild,
Hastening to Jordan with his tribute tide ;
By reedy Kanah, or the hallowed brook
Of Kedron, watering Salem's royal towers ;
Or by the azure cool refreshing waves

Of Galilee ; or by the dismal sea,
 Well named the dead, whose bitter, acrid tide
 No fin divides, nor wing of passing bird
 E'er fans or ripples. Or if pine-crowned hill
 Delight thee, come and climb the odorous heights
 Of Lebanon, or Carmel's oak-clad brow,
 Or Gilboa's hill with royal blood distained ;
 Or snow-capped Hermon ; or that beauteous mount,
 Tabor, where Jesus, on the grassy turf,
 Beneath the clear blue sky, the people taught.

Of Israel's grand Theocracy explore
 The laws, the manners, polity and arts ;
 Her happy, pastoral, patriarchal age ;
 Her cruel bondage, till the potent rod
 Of Amram's son across the Red sea wave
 Cleft the bright path to freedom. Trace her way
 Across the waste and howling wilderness,
 The fiery serpent's ancient heritage,
 With thirst and famine, till from Horeb's rock
 Gushed the fresh stream, and manna rained from heaven.
 Yet soon forsaking great Jehovah's law,
 Senseless, they bowed before a golden calf,
 And Moloch's fire, and Remphan's star adored,
 Till vengeance smote them, and of all who 'scaped
 From Egypt, two alone trod Canaan's soil.
 Now Joshua leads them—Jordan's flood divides,
 As from its base reels headlong, by the sword
 The land is widowed, and the tribes possess
 Fair Palestina. Next the Judges ruled
 Warlike, and armed with Dictatorial power :—
 Jephthah, unhappy sire ; and Samson armed

With strength, by strength invincible, but weak
Before a woman's wiles. They asked for kings,
And kings in wrath were given. Yet, Israel grew
Great, and waxed glorious by the prudent sway
Of Solomon—named wisest of mankind,
Till reason left him, and by female craft
Subdued, in dotage, oh, inglorious fall !
To Ashtaroth, she-devil, low he knelt.
By royal tyranny the kingdom rent
Saw Israel's throne and Judah's as two stars
Malignant, blazing opposite, and forth
Shooting consuming fires. A foreign sword
Smote them, and in captivity they wept
Their dark transgressions. Spoke the seers in vain,
In vain the prophets threatened, prayed and wept.
They slew their seers—the Prince of Life they slew.
And now the measure of their crimes was full,
When forth commissioned as a pest from hell,
Hungry, and strong, and rabid with the thirst
Of blood, the dire abomination came.
E'en in the holy place, with ravenous beak,
And blood-dropt wing, the Roman Eagle cowered ;
And saw the temple, 'midst devouring flame
And heaps of carnage, sink to rise no more.
Who 'scaped the sword, a wretched remnant, pined
In sad captivity, or wandered far
Thro' the wide world, scorned, hated, and oppressed :
No king, no city, government or laws,
Thence, as their own, unhappy, could they boast.
Midst persecution's storms, they found too true
The dire predictions of their sage fulfilled.
At night they cried " Oh would to God 'twere morn ! "

At morn, "Would God 'twere night!" In tears they
closed

Their weary eyes, and woke with bitter sobs :
All sore of heart—ordained from age to age,
The living evidence of truth divine.

Next, from the sacred volume may'st thou glean
Knowledge sublime of nature and her laws.
And there the philosophic sage may find
High argument beyond whate'er was taught
By learned Cosmogonist, how heaven and earth
Rose from the abyss of nothing, at the word
Of one, the Omnific and Almighty power.
He said, "Let all things be," and all things were.
Light robed the heavens—the planets in their course
Ran on rejoicing—in their destined bounds
Rolled the blue waters—swelled each mountain ridge
High in clear æther—flower and tree upsprung—
And all the tribes of animated things
Joyed in their infant being. From his throne
Well pleased, Jehovah saw—his hallowed word
Pronounced all good—and loud the heaven and earth
With all the sons of God gave shouts of joy.
He that created rules o'er all supreme ;
His hand directs the complicated springs
Of nature ; keeps the elements in play ;
Arms with their rage, or smiles them into peace.
Fires, torrents, tempests at his bidding speed,
His mandates to fulfil. He speaks—'tis done.
He breathes—life blooms ; resumes his breath, and all
The tribes of being mourn. When sin called down
His righteous ire, how burst on Sodom's vales

The brimstone whirlwind, fiery sleet and hail !
Earth yawned—and down its dark tartareous gulf,
Turret and dome and long piazzaed street,
Temple and column reeled, midst shrieks and prayers
And horrid blasphemies. The Asphaltic lake
Rolls o'er the ruins vast, of God's just wrath
The monument eternal. Nor to him
More hard the task, e'en from their lowest depths,
To rive the earth's foundations. Yet is seen
Graved on her rocks, the record of the doom
That once o'erwhelmed her. Wrapt in sensual joys
The nations lay, when forth in terrors clad
Flew the destroying angel. From its place
He thrust the pole aside. The shock dislodged
And rent earth's strata. From their dark abyss
He heaved the floods, and from above sluiced down
The cataracts of heaven. Man flees in vain
To tower or steep—the swelling flood pursues
And gathers round him. O'er the loftiest peaks
Curl the white billows, and now ocean roars
Shoreless around the ball. Then all the spoils
Of earth and sea commingled, whence still lie,
Bedded in rock, strange relics of the deep.
The sentence executed, heaven renewed
Its wonted smile. Again the mountain tops
Peer o'er the waves. On Ararat the ark
Rests, and aloft the many-coloured bow,
Ensign of peace, hangs glorious ; sign that ne'er,
While earth remains, shall waters whelm her o'er,
Nor jocund seasons, in continuous round,
Forget to circle. But another doom
By fire awaits her, if the Prophet's word

Rightly we scan. From all its latent beds,
Lodged in the earth and skies, the igneous power
Evolving sensible, shall wrap the globe
In flame that both destroys and renovates.
The old shall perish ; but another world
More glorious shall arise, with brighter skies
Illumed, and for the spirits of the blest
Adorned and made a habitation meet.

Scan well the beauties of the Hebrew muse,
Divine Urania, her who deeply drank
True inspiration, not from earth-sprung stream
Of Helicon, or famed Castalian fount,
But of the living stream that ever flows
Fast by the throne of God. No mortal muse
E'er soared such heights, e'er passed such depths profound,
With daring wing untired. Her lofty theme
The eternal attributes ; earth, heaven, and hell,
Creation's birth, Messiah's glorious reign,
Judgment, salvation, immortality.
She, crowned and throned amidst the glorious throng
Of bards and prophets with their golden harps
Hymning Jehovah, frames and leads the song.
What ode of triumph ever equalled thine,
Thou son of Amran ? In thy nervous strain
We see the Red sea cleft—the flying host
Of Israel—Pharaoh thundering in the rear
With all his chivalry, and shouting loud—
Pursue ! o'ertake, divide the spoil ! And now
Between the o'er-hanging ocean's battlements
Furious he drives ; and now at once let loose
From all its chains, upon the shrinking ranks

Bursts the wild deluge. On the farther shore
Freed Israel sees their wrecks, and shouts for joy,
“The Lord hath triumphed gloriously, the horse
And rider hath he sunk in ocean deep.”

Who, with such matchless skill as Jesse's son,
E'er touched devotion's harp,—the chords of joy
Rung with such ecstasy, or poured so deep
Contrition's wail, or in such rapturous sounds,
Invoked sun, moon, and stars, all heaven's bright host,
Kings, princes, nobles, hoary sires, and youth,
To raise loud hallelujahs to the Lord?

What bard with thee, Isaiah, e'er beheld
In character so bright a future age,
The brightening glories of Messiah's reign;
When like the rose shall bloom the desert wild—
When pard and lion with the kid and lamb
Shall gambol harmless, and the earth behold,
In all its beauty, Paradise restored?

* * * * *

THE PREACHER.



BOOK SECOND.

The Preacher's THEMES, they next demand my song.
How various these ! The end of all to warm
With pure religion's hallowed flame the heart ;
With moral truth the mind to edify,
With love to God—with love to him who died
For man's salvation, and with love to all
Of human kind. His themes whate'er is good,
Or beautiful, or lovely, all that claims
The praise of man, or feels the hope of heaven,
Faith, hope, and charity ; such themes as shook
The haughty Roman when his prisoner stood
In chains before him, and, as heaven inspired,
Reasoned sublime of justice, temperance,
And judgment in a world beyond the grave.

Some would in texts excel, and build their fame
For lore recondite and creative skill,

In building systems of stupendous size,
 On some poor particle,—*But, If, or And,*
 In Greek or Hebrew. Some find much delight
 In cursing Meroz. And the sons thereof
 Right bitterly they curse, as if the Lord
 Had called them to his help—a hope forlorn
 Against the mighty! But oh! curse not ye.
 The minister of Christ must bless, not curse.
 Ask not who comes from Bozra with his robes
 Dabbled in blood, nor from the Song of Songs
 Draw warm descriptions that of human love,
 More than divine, exhale the amorous air.
 Shun the impure, the mystical, the dark;
 And choose such texts as in themselves contain
 The pith and marrow of a sound discourse,
 In sense complete, intelligible, clear,
 Both on the mind and heart impressing deep
 Some great religious principle of faith,
 Of hope, of trust in God's kind providence;
 Or moral virtue, justice, mercy, truth,
 And charity to all of human kind.

Teach what the Saviour taught—bless whom he blessed,
 The poor in spirit, with the pure in heart,
 The merciful, the meek, the sons of peace,
 The mourner, all who in a righteous cause
 Suffer or act. The great rewards declare
 That wait them in the many mansioned house
 Not built with hands, eternal in the heavens.
 Teach as he taught—how God supreme o'er all
 To all is bounteous—how on all he showers
 His tender mercies; to the evil sends,

As to the just, the light and rains of heaven.
 He feeds the fowls that neither reap nor sow,
 And clothes the lily in more gorgeous hues
 Than ever sparkled on the royal robes
 Of Israel's richest king in glory clad.
 Teach as he taught, compassion to the poor,
 Sweet consolation to the wounded heart,
 Repentance to the sinner.

* * * * *

Till sage experience has matured thy powers
 Attempt not themes too high. Weigh well thy strength,—
 “Man, know thy self, all wisdom centres there :”
 Nor hope on waxen pinions midst the blaze
 Of uncreated light to sport secure ;
 Scorched by a taper's ray the moth expires.
 From rock to neighbouring rock the eaglet tries
 Her yet unpractised pinion—but more wide
 Expands her circuit, till through heaven's wide vault
 She soars exultant—to the sun's bright orb
 Turns her undazzled eye, and grasps secure
 The red-winged thunder ; yet, perchance, e'en her
 Too proudly soaring, may some heaven-shot bolt
 Dash like some rebel angel down to earth.

* * * * *

THE PREACHER.



BOOK THIRD.

Various the Preacher's themes and manifold,
But, as in Epic and Dramatic song,
Deem UNITY a virtue. Ne'er be led,
By wrong ambition, to exhaust thy stores
In wild variety. Whate'er thy text
Be uniform. Let one pervading truth
Give colour, shape, and texture to thy theme.
Let every Sermon be a perfect whole ;
No monster of incongruous elements,
With head of gold and feet of brittle clay,
But plain and seamless as the robe of Christ.
The skilful marksman takes one certain aim—
To one fixed point the pilot guides his bark—
The artist that would prove the solar strength,
In one small spot collects Sol's scatter'd rays ;
So, thou, collect thy arguments, and throw
In one bright focus truth's converging beams ;

But if thy feeble light glance here and there,
 Like quick reflections from the restless wave,
 Or school-boy's mirror twirled in idle play,
 The mind sees nought distinct.

Now obsolete,
 By taste exploded, the scholastic trade
 Of splitting texts, and, by divisions quaint,
 To mark, as mile-stones on a weary way,
 The tedious progress of a dull discourse.
 Yet beautiful is order ; bright its charm
 In all the realms of nature and of art ;
 But what skilled chief would to the foe proclaim
 His plan of battle ? In thy own clear mind
 Depict the march that leads to victory.
 As Pylian Nestor ranked the sons of Greece,
 Rank thou thy arguments. The stronger fix
 Firm in the van—the weaker in the midst ;
 But in the rear the flower of thy array,
 To make the final and decisive charge :
 With art hide art—by grand effect alone
 Discovered and approved. The hand that guides
 The wheels of nature 'scapes all human ken ;
 But who, with holy admiration high,
 Its movements sees not ?

Some licentious rove,
 Strangers to order, where wild fancy leads,
 To no one truth, or doctrine, e'er confined :—
 Strange meteoric fires careering far
 In curves eccentric—playing, as they run,
 Their wondrous fire-works. Some, whate'er their text,
 Know but one only everlasting theme.

Tho' changed its chords the lyre of Teian bard
Chimed nought but love. While some, like Jehu, drive,
Or Phaeton maddening in the car of day—
These, like the mill-horse broken-winded, plod
Weary and blind in one eternal round.

To *STYLE*, the dress and ornament of thought,
Devote thy care with ne'er forgotten aim,
Right to be understood. In words that bear
No meaning dark or doubtful, let thy speech
Transparent flow, that thoughts which deepest lie
May through it shine, and on the mental eye
Form images distinct. In simple phrase
Accost the simple ; nor to rustic ears
Trumpet the high-toned language of the schools :
Simplicity charms all—with magic power
Steals on the heart—to tenderness subdues,
Or melts to pity—elegance and strength,
Sublimity and pathos with it blend,
What style so simple as the book of God ?
How beautifully clear—adorned with thoughts
Bright as the stars of heaven that speak to all
Jehovah's glory—babes can understand,
But should your theme or audience e'er demand
A loftier style—in diction's florid pomp,
With tone majestic, on fastidious ears
Let the round period chime. But oh ! beware
Loose declamation—'tis a frothy stream,
That, void of strength, of beauty, health and joy,
Still chafes and foams, and in its rage betrays
Its shallow weakness. Some, in vulgar phrase,
And images uncouth, wound ears refined.

Some, by excessive polish, file away
All strength and vigour. Few in the concise
Err; but full many in the weak diffuse.
Drawers of wire, or fine gold-beaters, these,
On pulpit-anvil, hammering out the text,
Till, all its beauty and consistence lost,
It seems transmuted to the vilest dross.
Shun repetition—nought, great Homer sings,
Is e'er so tedious as a twice-told tale.
Yet, when some great emphatic truth demands
Peculiar stress, reiterated blows
May stamp it on the heart. Some who aspire
With nobler daring, fearful to incur
The charge of triteness, at the novel reach,
And with strained thoughts bespangle all the theme,
With fearful tropes and sad similitudes
Now claim attention—then thro' sea and land,
And fire and air, and thro' profoundest hell,
Protect us heaven! with dashing speed pursue
The Rhetorician's game. And when at length
They start the unhappy trope, away they speed
Up hill, down dale, thro' forest, bog, and glen,
Swift as the huntsman on the flying deer;
With horn and hound, and panting racer, rolls
The thunder of the chace. Such freaks avoid,
In youth extreme scarce meriting excuse;
And if your genius spurn established rules,
Exhaust its wildness in some other sphere.
Lop all ambitious ornaments away,
Nor dread to blot, correct, and recompose.
Think how the mighty orators of old
Attained perfection. For your model choose

Some great illustrious classic—one whose name
Shines brightly blazoned on the page of time.
Yet not with servile imitation tread
Close in his steps ; but time and place consult,
Manners and tastes, and clothe the varying theme
In still appropriate costume. Deeply drink
The Ciceronian stream that ever flows
Exuberant, mellifluous, crystalline ;
Or from the pupil of Isæus learn
With strong resistless energy to roll
A torrent flood still deepening as it flows.

Well sung the bard of Rome—the genuine fount
Of writing well is Wisdom. Lore profound
In things divine must lead to excellence.
With wisdom's richest stores imbue thy mind,
And pour them forth as from a copious fount.
In every light, and shape, and attitude,
Oft scan thy theme, and with a master's skill
Grace and embellish. Banish far the dream
That words are eloquence, that sound is sense.
'Tis pitiful to see one wretched thought
Twisted and tortured in a thousand ways,
For lack of knowledge, and a plenteous shower
Of barren epithets, like autumn's leaves,
Rained down for fruit. Such rhetoric grieves the soul,
As execrable music wounds the ear.
From eloquence is wisdom ne'er disjoined.
Court solid sense and ne'er too fondly trust
Exuberance of diction. Yet have words
Some potent virtue, and selected well
Clothe in rich drapery the naked thought.

By some mysterious spell like rays of light,
 They bear with them the images of things,
 And paint them on the mind. But let them speak
 The dictates high of wisdom—virtue—truth ;—
 For sentiments, not words—thoughts barbed with light,
 Pregnant with fire, and issuing from the breast
 Of inspiration—with electric shocks
 Thrill thro' the soul, its various passions stir,
 Awake, alarm, damn, or imparadise.

Let ELOCUTION next her aid supply,
 And wing your words with music. Dulcet sounds
 Delight the ear, but from the hoarse dry scream
 It turns discordant. Some, with lengthened bray,
 Astound and horrify. Low simpering some,
 Most delicate, most prim, dare scarcely ope
 Their pretty mouths—while others cackle on,
 Rapid and indistinct, with treble squeak
 And nasal twang. Be this thy chiefest aim
 To be distinct, articulate, and clear,
 Well heard, well understood. As music ne'er
 Dwells on one key, avoid monotony,
 Sleep's soft ally—for soon his drowsy hum,
 Like nurse's lullaby, steals o'er each sense—
 Till all the flock in somnolescence sink,
 And here and there the nasal trump proclaims
 The reign of Morpheus—shame that idol god
 Should thus intrude—oh ! charm him far away,
 And with a shout Stentorian burst his spell.
 Attune thy voice, like well tuned instrument,
 That boasts each sweet variety of sound.
 How soft it murmurs, as if pity's sigh

Had breathed upon the chords ;—anon it swells,
 As if Bellona's coming storm had swept
 The sounding shell, and woke to liveliest din
 Music's charmed daughters. Hark ! what various tones
 Does Nature utter, teaching man her love,
 Now, in the whispers of the gentle breeze,
 Or murmuring fall of streams, or carol sweet
 Of birds, she hymns her God, now more sublime,
 In storms and whirlwinds, and the echoing dash
 Of mountain torrent—as from rock to rock
 It leaps in thunder—speaks his awful power.

Let graceful manner Elocution aid,
 But deem not action, with the sage of old,
 The soul of eloquence. Composed and grave
 In voice and attitude, Religion pours
 Her truths divine, till warmed by some high theme
 She grows impassioned, and, as Nature prompts,
 Speaks with the hand and eye. True feeling gives
 To every action grace ; but what so cold
 As thoughts unfelt, yet spoke with emphasis,
 And gest of mountebank, or pugilist,
 Or wooden hero of a rustic show ?
 Beware the trick and gesture of the stage,—
 The rant, the start, the scream, the kerchief tossed
 In many an airy round ; or golden fruit,
 The throat to lubricate, or phial filled
 With fragrant perfume, or the optic glass
 To spy the fair. Such foppery provokes
 Contempt and scorn. How have I grieved to see
 The pulpit thus, by affectation vile,
 Dishonoured and profaned—how grieved to hear

Swoll'n declamation fret, and rage, and foam
 O'er pompous nothings, and the weighty fist
 With pugilistic force come thundering down,
 With ruin to the rostrum ; and for what ?
 To clench no doubt some weighty argument—
 To clench a tack—to crush a feeble moth.
 Intruders hence ! for know the pulpit scorns
 Such things as you, and on the scenic boards
 Display your attitudes and lily hands,
 More conversant with cards than with the leaves
 Of Holy Writ. Away and doff your gowns,
 Meet priests of Jeroboam—nor here intrude
 Where e'en the wise and good approach with awe.

To prove that man is mortal, once a priest
 Brought from his gown a yellow, chapless skull.
 And one, to crush all infidels in one,
 Held up his cap to personate Voltaire,
 And thus addressed it—“ Answer if thou can'st,
 Arch-infidel ! the arguments I bring.
 What, no reply ! Then own thyself o'ercome,
 And take thy meed, this vengeance on thy pate ! ”
 Such scenic exhibition ill becomes
 The pulpit's gravity. One rants and roars
 Like wild hyæna rampant in his chains ;
 Another drones and whines with tone so sad,
 In such lugubrious and sepulchral strains,
 As if his dwelling were among the tombs,
 And ghosts his congregation.

What Boanerges mounts the pulpit now ?
 With no glad tidings does he come to hail

Man's erring race, but as a herald sent
 From realms of darkness, utters sounds of woe.
 "Believe with me," he trumpets long and loud,
 "Or no salvation, sinner! shall be yours;
 But downward, downward, by devouring flame,
 Pursued and smitten, shalt thou sink to hell,
 There doomed through endless ages to endure
 God's burning, fierce, immitigable ire;
 While ugly fiends to seven-fold fury blow
 The flames around thee, yelling in thine ear,
 Eternity! Eternity!" I own
 The theme is awful; but by feeble powers
 Sunk and dishonoured it provokes to scorn.
 Between the ludicrous and the sublime
 Thin the partition, which one luckless word
 May burst asunder, and dissolve the spell
 Of high wrought fancies.

Now see the Christian Preacher well array'd
 With learning, wisdom, eloquence sublime,
 Graceful in action, in delivery sweet;
 Persuasive, powerful. Lacks there nothing now
 His character to perfect? One thing yet,
 Than all the rest more precious, wants he still,
 Of which devoid, all other gifts are vain.
 Vain e'en a seraph's tongue, and martyr's zeal,
 If virtue dwell not in his secret heart,
 And fair example like a glory bright
 Shine not around him. What are words but air
 If deeds their truth attest not? Deeds speak clear
 An universal language, understood
 By Jew or heathen, and in every land

Most current, most approved, What rhetoric
E'er flows so sweet and powerful to the heart—
What mirror that so true reflects the forms
Of heavenly virtue ?
But shall the world's Idolater forbid
Man's worship of the world ? The sinner teach
To spurn sin's thralldom, or the voice of pride
Inspire humility ? What foe to truth
Wounds her so deeply as the friend whose life
Her name dishonours ? The fell Judas he,
Who with a kiss the Lord of life betrays—
Who crucifies afresh. Of all the flock
Be thou the guiding star. To merit well
Their soul's esteem and confidence thy pride.
Be thou their friend to counsel and advise,
As a beloved Physician, to assuage
The sufferings of the heart. With hope and joy
Rayed from thy looks, approach and dissipate
The gathering clouds of care. Thy Saviour see
Caressing babes, and, by his gracious ways,
Inviting and inspiring confidence.
Back to the fold the wanderer's steps he leads,
Heals with sweet anodynes the sufferer's wounds,
And makes the widow's heart to sing for joy.

Now clothed complete in Evangelic arms,
And ready for the conflict, at his post
Behold the man of God. With modest look,
Yet firm and self-possessed, he opes the page
Of Sacred Writ, and utters words sublime—
Theme of discourse. With solemn voice and clear,
The truth he amplifies—illumes the dark,

Makes plain the complex ; sedate and calm he claims
 Benevolent attention. Smooth he flows,
 And unimpassioned, till, by due degrees,
 Collecting vigour as he onward rolls,
 More deep, more strong, with unresisted might
 He rolls impetuous on.

He warms, he brightens, till he seems inspired,
 And, like some holy messenger of heaven,
 Speaking high mandates of the eternal King.
 Now all his soul seems gathered to the theme—
 And all the orator is up in arms,
 Prepared to storm with most resistless might
 The fortress of the heart, and thence dislodge
 The hydra sin, * * *

And to her native hell precipitate.
 Guilt ! whence thy terrors ? Whence that quivering lip—
 That horrent hair—the blanched and deadly hue
 Of cowardice upon thee ? Ha ! the light
 Of holy wisdom flashing on thy soul
 Reveals thee to thyself—outcast of heaven,
 All earth in arms against thee. Lo, the world
 Shrinks from thy tread, and hell beneath is moved
 To meet thee at thy coming. There in chains
 Midst flames and tortures spend thy powerless rage.
 But hark ! a milder and more pleasing theme :—
 How penitence can heal the contrite heart—
 Can wash and purify the purple tinge
 Of every crime, and souls to God restore,
 Pure as the snow-drift or untinged fleece.
 Lost sinner, turn—oh ! wherefore wilt thou die ?
 Oh ! turn and live ; yet heaven's bright portals stand
 Wide open to receive thee, if resolved

To burst thy fetters, yet thou dar'st be free.
 The hosts of heaven with glad acclaim will hail
 Thy flight from bondage. As the father joys
 His son to welcome, from the haunts of sin,
 Of misery and death returned to crave
 Forgiveness and a refuge from despair,
 So God most High will pardon and receive
 The humble penitent. But, oh ! with speed,
 Ere life's thread snaps, accept the offered grace ;
 For know repentance in the silent grave
 No dwelling holds. Then, oh ! in time be wise ;
 This hour, this moment stamp upon thy heart
 The solemn fixed irrevocable vow,
 That makes thee God's for ever.—To the soul,
 Soft as the evening dew, his words descend
 With melting influence. The starting tear
 Of sympathy—the sob—the panting breast,
 Thrilled with profound emotion, to his words
 Yield charmed assent, while, spell-bound and entranced,
 Assembled thousands on his accents hang,
 As on an angel's from the skies despatched,
 With messages of grace to guilty man.

* * * * *

Well taught thyself, well may'st thou others teach ;
 And from thy treasuries of hoarded thought,
 Both new and old, select high argument
 To vanquish, soften, or persuade the heart.
 Nor with loose declamation shame your cause,
 Nor hope with jejune thoughts or barren words,
 Though numerous as the sounding forest's leaves,
 To win the applause of taste. With wat'ry fruits
 Raised in the hot bed of a sterile brain,

Think not to sate the craving appetite
That faints and hungers for the bread of life.
Let solid sense and exhortation sage
Flow from thy lips—and language deem alone
The vehicle of thought. The task be yours
On the dark soul to pour celestial light ;
To rouse each dormant principle of good ;
The breast that's cold in virtue's cause to warm ;
Each low affection to exalt ; and raise
The gravitating soul, with words of flame
And heavenly aspirations, to the skies.
Shun vain opinions ; quaint opinions change
Their forms and colours like the fleeting clouds ;
To-morrow sees the fashion of to-day
Sunk in oblivion—and what now is deemed
Right orthodox in faith, anon becomes
The hierarchy's curse. But the great laws
Of love to God and man ne'er suffer change.
Mid all the revolutions of the soul,
And all the doctrines bigotry and pride,
The love of novelty, the thirst of fame,
The appetite of power, originate—
These stand immutable. And shall these laws,
By seers of old, by righteous prophets taught,
Ne'er fire thy soul with eloquence divine ?
But wilt thou ever, in mysterious points,
And in the fierce polemic's wars, perplex
Thyself and hearers, and inflame a zeal
That threatens ruin to the house of God ?
Some to a theatre of noisy strife,
Of local politics, pervert the fane
Where heavenly peace should dwell. The aim to sink

The soul to earth—not raise aloft to heaven ;
 With some low care to clog the mounting thought,
 Or earthly passions stir. Did he who spake
 As man ne'er spake, the dire example give
 Of interference in those worldly broils
 Which charity should heal ? Thou sacred mount
 Where once the Saviour taught—ye wilds which saw
 His wondrous deeds—ye waters from whose breast
 He taught assembled crowds—ye sacred streams
 Of Jordan, and ye waves of Galilee—
 Ye streets of Salem, witness if such themes
 E'er dwelt upon his tongue.

Some loud harangue

For man's applause ; and for preferment some
 Lured by the mitre's charms—that dazzling crown
 Of church ambition, and for Church and State
 Aloud rebellow, till the rocks and wilds
 The cry reverberate. Some, e'en for strife,
 The shrill-toned clarion of defiance sound,
 With arrogant pretension dooming all
 To hell who question their dogmatic creed,
 Of nought e'er liberal but fire and wrath ;—
 Hot brimstone Preachers !—who, with fiery breath,
 Thick steaming, and exhaling sulphurous stench,
 Seem just escaped from that infernal pit
 Where Satan erst while lay—so well they paint
 The horrors of that den—so well fulfil
 The ambassage of hell. The long-eared crowd
 Delighted hear, and bray their loud applause.

What thing is that which mounts the pulpit now ?

Its lily hand with sparkling gem adorned—
 Its perfumed locks ranged with such cunning art,
 That each particular hair its station knows—
 Its lace-fringed band so trim—its gown flung back
 With easy negligence—its kerchief tossed
 In airy rounds exhaling odours sweet !
 A votary of the graces, ladies, courts
 Your favouring smile—beware and guard your hearts—
 Or not alone o'er Satan and the world
 This day may boast its triumphs. Softly sweet
 The well-toned periods chime—words flow on words
 Mellifluous, in their smooth continuous lapse
 Ne'er interrupted by a rugged thought,
 Nor whirled precipitate by passion's rage.
 Ah me ! those tender tones ! that lisp divine !
 That sonnet of a sermon, short and sweet,
 Has touched and conquered Wilhelmina's heart.

But who is he that comes with fire and storm,
 Threat'ning by fierce assault to scale the towers,
 And burst the gates, of heaven ? His fiery looks,
 Red as the sun's, when through the city fog
 He glares portentous—fitter he I ween
 To hold a truncheon than the keys of heaven ;
 And better would the warrior's harness sit
 On that broad back, than sacerdotal state—
 The champion of church militant is he.
 Well roared Goliath ! if Stentorian lungs *
 Could scare the foe that wanders up and down
 Like roaring lion seeking to devour,

* Garganum mugisse putes nemus, aut mare Tuscum. Hor. Ep.
 Lib. II. 1. 202.

Hence would he flee. But sense, not sound must win
The triumph here, and far away expel
The soul destroyer. Soft as evening dew
On the green sward, falls heavenly wisdom's voice.
More potent than the loud and angry blast
Is zephyr's breath to wake the infant flowers.
Not in the tempest that asunder rent
The mountains, and in pieces broke the rocks,
Not in the earthquake, nor the hissing fire,
But in the still small voice Jehovah spake.

With sycophantic look and whining tone,
One now harangues in broad familiar phrase,
And fire-side quaint colloquial sounds disowned
By every muse. Yet, modest, he assumes
The title "Preacher of Christ crucified" !
And thinks he well that character sustains,
By repetition of the Saviour's name
Thus shamed and scandalized. A *Canter* he
Chiming and shouting, and delighting much
In mystic phrase and bloody imagery.
Poor human nature, by this dauber's hand
Bespattered, what a monster art thou grown !
Sprung from defilement, in defilement bred,
To the heart's core corrupt—to all of good
An utter reprobate—of one good thought
Incapable—to evil ever prone.
Though in himself the likeness true he finds,
Why should he libel human nature thus ?
But, hark, a comfortable Preacher now
Exalts his voice—"Ye chosen of the Lord,
To you the Almighty ne'er imputes a sin,

For One has borne the accumulated load
 Of Adam's guilt and his posterity,
 Through endless generations. Trust in him,
 Not in yourselves—good works are filthy rags,
 But faith in Christ a robe of righteousness.
 Come, wrap ye, wrap ye in the robe of Christ,
 And wash ye in his blood, then, though your sins
 Be scarlet red, they soon shall be like snow."

Thou bold declaimer, 'twas not thus of old
 The Prophet taught—he charged to cease from ill
 To turn to good—the widow to console—
 The orphan to relieve—the wronged redress.
 Now come and with me reason, saith the Lord,
 And though your sins be crimson, they shall grow
 White as the untinged fleece. The Saviour came
 Not to abolish but fulfil the word
 Which righteous Prophets spoke—to arm anon
 With his high sanctions and immortal hopes,
 And form a people filled with holy zeal
 In doing good. But thou his righteous law,
 By mystic unintelligible sounds,
 Would'st turn to nought, from every moral tie
 Unbind the soul, and shame the Saviour's cause.

No Preacher he of Christ, though loud his claim
 To that high title, who his sacred name
 By palling repetition prostitutes.
 He claims it best, who preaches best the truths
 By the blest Saviour taught—who God describes
 As our Almighty, Universal Sire,
 Just, wise, and most beneficent to all,

Pouring his blessings, as the sun his light,
 On good and evil, who exhorts to love
 Him first, him last, as the eternal source
 Of life, and light, and joy, and him obey
 In thought, and word, and deed. He preaches Christ
 Who preaches love to all the race of men,
 Whate'er their name, complexion, soil, or clime :
 Who teaches to be humble, just, and kind,
 To sympathize with sorrow-stricken hearts,
 To feed the hungry, and the naked clothe,
 The fallen raise, the penitent forgive,
 To wage with sin interminable war,
 To conquer in the heart each rebel thought
 And guilty passion ; who exalts the soul
 With faith and hope above this world of care ;
 Who paints the triumph of the Saviour's cross
 O'er death's dominion—shews his bright ascent
 To realms of bliss, and fires th' immortal soul
 To follow up the radiant path to heaven.

Give me the Preacher who can make me feel
 The power of virtue,—one whose heaven-taught words
 Thrill through the heart like arrowy shafts of flame,—
 One who obeys the Apostolic word
 In pointing where the angel Duty leads,
 And urging all, with resolution strong,
 To follow, maugre every human ill,
 In him confiding who the pilgrim guides
 E'en thro' the vale of death. Thou man of God,
 Speak touching truths, reprove, rebuke, exhort
 To bold exertion, stimulate the slow,
 The feeble strengthen, and the frigid warm.

But questions dark and intricate avoid,
As gend'ring strife. In natural light and shade
Men's characters depict—no dauber thou,
Flinging thy colours with unskilful hand,
And bodying forth a hideous caricature
Like nothing mortal. In no wild extreme
Of good and evil human kind depict ;
But as they are—in worst of whom some good
The curious eye, benevolent, may find ;
As in the best some trait of ill betrays
Man's imperfection. To the sinner hold
His ugly likeness, till he loath himself ;
And conscience, like the secret voice of God,
Re-echoes to his heart—"Thou art the man."
Urge him with speed to flee the tents of sin :
Up ! up !—begone—cast not a look behind—
'Tis death to linger ;—for thy life away !
Men call her pleasure—named more justly pain—
Her cup is poison, and foul serpents coil
Among her roses. Doff her fair disguise,
And see beneath a fiend of hideous form
That breathes destruction and conducts to hell.
But lo ! where Virtue comes with winning smile,
Blooming as Paradise, to charm thy soul,
And win thee back to God. O ! hear the voice
Of the blest charmer. She alone bestows
Joys permanent and pure—but all things else
Shall fade and perish. Grandeur's gorgeous throne—
The robe of state—the victor's gilded car—
Aye, e'en the homage paid at beauty's shrine,
And adulation's voice that sweeter flows
Than Hybla's honey—all shall cease to charm—

All like a pageant fade, and vacant leave
 The heart, or filled with sorrow, pain, disgust,
 And recollection's stings. But virtue sole
 Survives the wrecks of time. Beside the throne
 Of heaven's eternal Majesty she dwells ;
 And when the dread archangel's trump shall sound
 The knell of worlds, triumphant shall she reign
 With all her chosen throned in holy bliss.

The praise of a Polemic seek not thou :—
 Yet reason sound—and for the truth contend
 With force and skill—but let discretion guide ;
 Nor in the shock of warring arguments
 Forget the law of charity divine.
 But when Corruption boldly stalks abroad—
 When Infidelity pollutes the land—
 Or vile Hypocrisy comes sneaking forth
 Chanting her solemn sycophantic slang ;
 Or Fashion, clothed in many-coloured robes,
 Gay minister of Satan, leads the dance
 Around some golden calf, then rise in might,
 And gird thee in thy Evangelic arms.
 Sharp well thy arrows—store thy quiver well—
 Well bend thy bow, and on the impious throng
 Loose thy keen shafts, till to their dens and caves
 They flee discomfited. With vigour wield
 The Spirit's sword—the word of God Most High—
 Trenchant and keen and potent to divide
 The mind from matter. Ye beneath the wing
 Of heaven's dread Ruler, wage no dubious war.
 Great, good, and glorious is the cause of God
 And his Messiah. Gird ye for the task,

As men who combat for a nobler prize
Than diadems and thrones. A cause so grand
Ne'er warmed the sage whose ready counsels saved
The imperial city from the burning brand
Of ruthless Catiline, nor him whose voice
Turned the fierce spear of Macedon, nor touched
Olympian Pericles, when to increase
The glory of his Athens, mid'st her sons,
Like thunder-grasping Jove, he rose to sway
Their wild democracy. And oh! will ye
Be cold and feeble when the cause of heaven
With more than mortal energy should fill
The torpid heart, and fire the frozen blood!
What! was it thus the Apostolic sons
Of thunder felt, and fought, and overcame?
Thus in the face of danger, toil, and death,
O'er realms of frost, o'er burning sands and seas,
Among the heathen to the tyrant's throne,
The sophist's rostrum, to the idol's fane,
E'en to the citadel, where firm intrenched
Sat Superstition, girt with all the might
Of earth and hell, undaunted, did they bear
The banner of the Cross? Before them fell
Dagon and Rimmon—from their blasted shrines
The mute-struck fiends oracular dispersed.
Down from her starry heights fell Ashtaroth
Precipitate, and hell's dark confines shook.

Watchmen of Israel! what a task is yours!
How arduous! how delightful! to diffuse
The light of heaven upon the darkened soul,
And in the wounded bosom of despair

Infuse the balsam of celestial hope ;
To cure the burning anguish of remorse,
To carry consolation to the couch
Of sore disease, to dry the mourner's tears,
And change the orphan's plaints to strains of joy ;
Each kind affection, every fair desire,
And every tender charity, in youth,
In age, and manhood to implant, and rouse
To life and action ; every ill reduce ;
To smooth each sad asperity of life,
And up the holy hill of Zion lead
The patient pilgrim to the realms of day.

THE END.







Relig
Faeol

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Summond, W.

Sermons

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