



LIBRARY
OF THE
Theological Seminary,

PRINCETON, N. J.

Case, *SCC* *Division*,
Shelf, *2827* *Section*,
Book, *v. 1* *No.*

407

S E R M O N S

O N *Robert Finley*

DIFFERENT SUBJECTS,

BY THE LATE REVEREND

J O H N J O R T I N, D. D.

Archdeacon of LONDON, Rector of St. DUNSTAN in



THE THIRD EDITION.

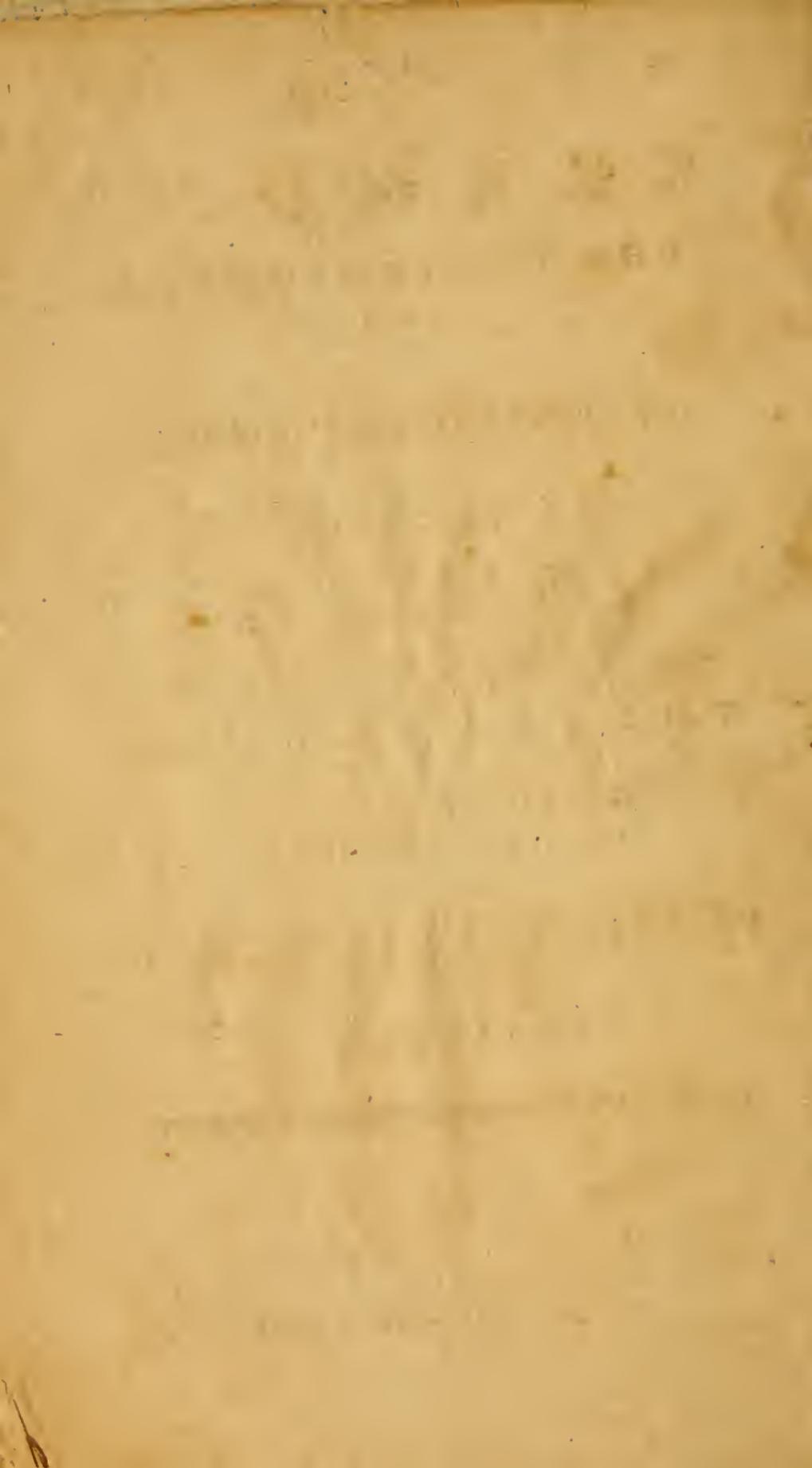
VOLUME I.

DUBLIN:

Printed for Messrs. WHITESTONE, SLEATER, WILLIAMS,
WILSON, HALLHEAD, FLIN, JENKIN, BEATTY,
WHITE, BURTON, and PARKER.

9-5
29

M DCC LXXXVIII.



TO
THE PARISHIONERS
OF
ST. DUNSTAN IN THE EAST,
AND OF
KENSINGTON,
THESE SERMONS
OF HIS FATHER,
PRINTED AT THEIR REQUEST,
ARE INSCRIBED,

AS A TESTIMONY OF RESPECT,

BY

ROGERS JORTIN.

Lincoln's-Inn,
January 1. 1771.

ARTICLES FAMOIS

CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

The Sin of misleading the Blind.

DEUTER. xxvii. 18.

*Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of his way.
And all the people shall say, Amen.* p. 1

SERMON II.

Abraham's offering up his Son.

GENES. xxii. 1, 2.

It came to pass that God did tempt Abraham, and said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering. p. 15

SERMON III.

The Mixture of good and bad Men.

MATT. xiii. 30.

Let both grow together until the harvest.

p. 27

S E R-

S E R M O N IV.

Industry.

2 THESS. iii. 8, 9.

Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought ; but wrought with labour and trouble night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you : not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow. p. 41

S E R M O N V.

Over-righteousness.

ECCLES. vii. 16.

Be not righteous overmuch.

p. 54

S E R M O N VI.

The Love of our Country.

NEHEMIAH v. 19.

Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people. p. 67

S E R M O N VII.

The Mixture of Rich and Poor.

PROV. xxii. 2.

The rich and poor meet together : the Lord is the maker of them all. p. 79

S E R-

S E R M O N S VIII. IX.

Goodness of God.

PSALM cxlv. 9.

The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.

p. 93, 106.

S E R M O N X.

Omnipresence of God.

JEREMIAH xxiii. 23, 24.

Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.

p. 120

S E R M O N XI.

Immutability of God.

JAMES i. 17.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

p. 134

S E R-

S E R M O N XII.

Spirituality of God.

JOHN iv. 24.

God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

p. 147

S E R M O N XIII.

Impartiality of God.

ROM. ii. 11.

There is no respect of persons with God.

p. 160

S E R M O N XIV.

The Love of God.

MARK xii. 30.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.

p. 172

S E R-

S E R M O N XV.

The Fear of God.

LUKE xiii. 5.

I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear : Fear him who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell ; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.

p. 184

S E R M O N XVI.

PROPERTY OF

PRINCETON

Reliance.

THEOLOGICAL

PROV. iii. 5, 6.

Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not unto thy own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

p. 196

S E R M O N XVII.

Hope.

ROM. xii. 12.

Rejoicing in hope.

p. 208

S E R-

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N X V I I I .

Thanksgiving.

E P H E S . v . 20.

*Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father,
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.* p. 221

S E R M O N X I X .

J O H N xxi. 21, 22.

*Peter saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?
Jesus said unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come,
what is that to thee? Follow thou me.* p. 234

S E R M O N X X .

Lord's Prayer.

L U K E x i . 1 .

*And it came to pass that as he was praying in a certain place,
when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord,
teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.
And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Fa-
ther, &c.* p. 247

S E R -

S E R M O N XXI.

Contentment.

P H I L I P P. iv. 11.

I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. p. 260

S E R M O N S XXII, XXIII.

The Love of Enemies.

M A T T H. v. 44.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies. p. 274

R o m. xii. 20.

If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. p. 287

S E R M O N S XXIV, XXV.

Religious Wisdom.

R o m. xvi. 19.

I would have you wise to that which is good. p. 300

J A M E S

J A M E S i. 5, 6.

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him: but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. p. 313

S E R M O N . XXVI.

Pleasantness of Religion.

P R O V E R B S iii. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness. p. 325

S E R M O N XXVII.

Young Children to be imitated.

M A R K x. 14.

Suffer the little children to come to me; and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily, I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. p. 338

S E R M O N XXVIII.

The Beatitudes.

M A T T H. v. 3, 4.

Blessed are the poor in spirit ; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn ; for they shall be comforted, &c.

p. 351

S E R M O N XXIX.

Profit of Godliness.

I T I M. iv. 8.

Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

p. 363

S E R M O N XXX.

Conversation.

E P H E S. iv. 29.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.

p. 376

S E R M O N XXXI.

Parables.

M A T T H. xiii. 13.

Therefore speak I to them in parables, because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

P. 399

S E R M O N XXXII.

Unjust Steward.

L U K E xvi. 8.

And the Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely.

p. 403

S E R M O N XXXIII.

The good Samaritan.

L U K E x. 30.

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

S E R-

S E R M O N XXXIV.

The barren Fig-tree:

M A R K xi. 21, 22.

And Peter calling to remembrance, saith to him; Master, behold the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith to them, Have faith in God.

p. 429

S E R M O N XXXV.

The Pharisee and the Publican.

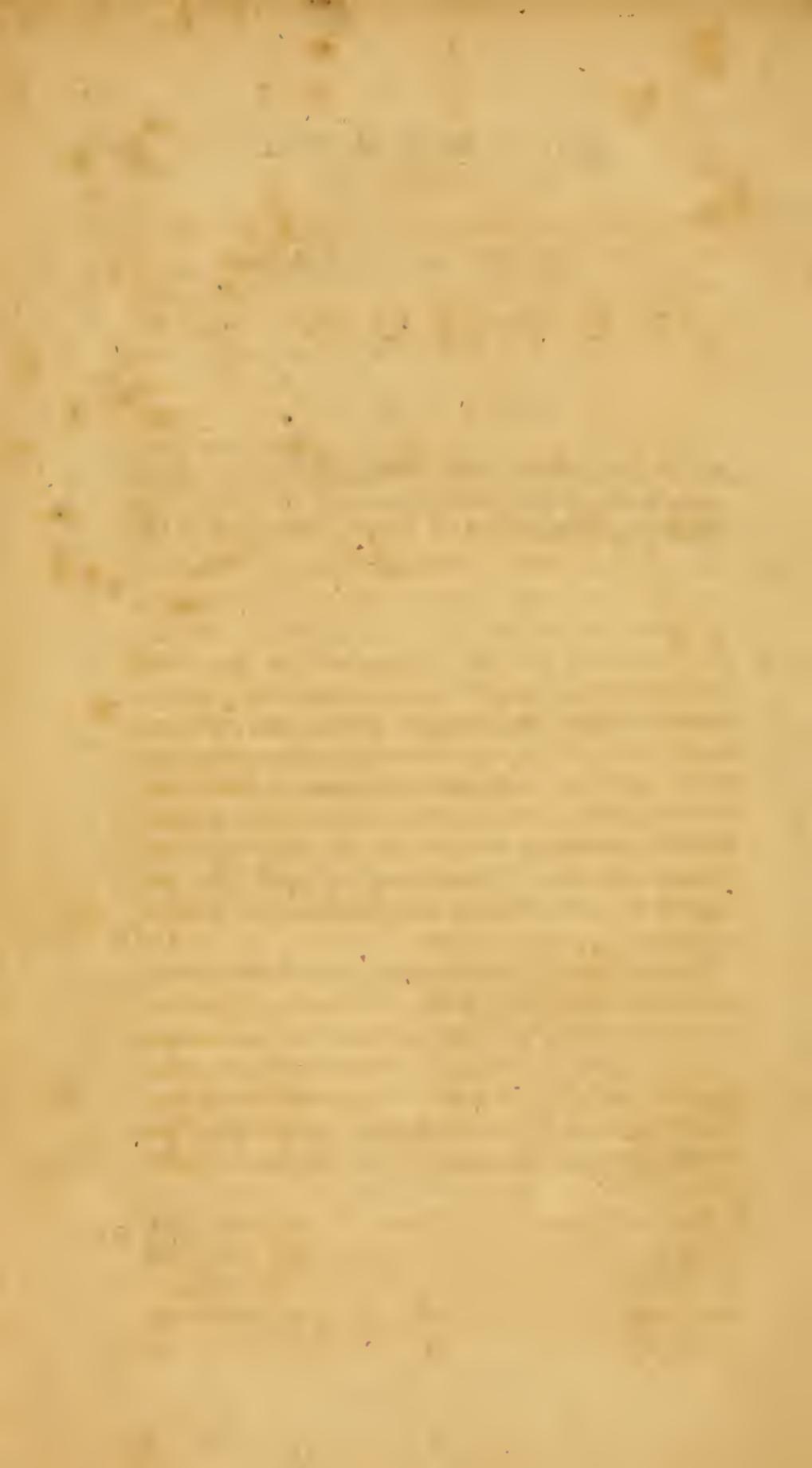
L U K E xviii. 14.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

p. 442



S E R.



S E R M O N I.

DEUTER. xxvii. 18.

Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen.

MANY of the expounders of the holy Scriptures, both ancient and modern, have industriously sought after hidden senses, and sublimer meanings than the words obviously and naturally offered: and this method of interpretation hath been carried by some of them to the utmost excess, because of such expositions there is no end, when the sober rules of grammar, of reason, and of good sense are neglected, and the heated Imagination is let loose to pursue her own wild conceits.

The ceremonial Law of Moses, in particular, seems to have distressed both Jewish and Christian Doctors, because some of its precepts were in appearance strange, arbitrary, frivolous, and tending to no useful purpose; and therefore studious and contemplative persons sought out mystical doctrines, which they supposed to lie concealed under the covering of the literal sense.

For these attempts to illustrate and justify the word of God, they are not to be blamed, they rather deserve praise than censure; but their attempts were seldom successful, and their example, upon the whole,

is discouraging. As for the Jewish interpreters, their expositions were often contemptible, and such as might be expected from men misled by prejudices, and deprived of several helps which Christians enjoy; and to them one might say, 'The well is deep, and thou hast nothing to draw with: whence then shouldest thou have that living water?' The ancient Christians too often imitated the Jews in finding out senses in the Scriptures which were never intended (*a*). But this seems to have been the fault of the times rather than of the men. In these later ages, better methods of interpretation have been successfully pursued, though injudicious persons will always be found, who are incapable of receiving instruction upon this head.

It may be thought that of all writings whatsoever, Laws and Statutes will not bear ambiguities and double senses, and cannot admit such refinements. Laws have something in their own nature repugnant to mystery. They are, or they should be, designed for general use, and be as plain as is possible, that he who runs may read them, that even the dull and the ignorant may be in no danger of misapprehending them.

But there is something very particular in the Mosaic Law, which both distinguisheth it from other laws, and carries with it an excuse and a plea for double senses which they have not.

The Law of Moses, as it contained a shadow of good things to come, as it had a reference to the Messiah, and exhibited bodily and sensible representations of spiritual benefits and blessings to be conferred by him,

(*a*) The Pagan Philosophers also fell into the Allegorizing way.

Vult (Chryippus) *Orphei, Musæi, Hesiodi, Homerique fabellas accommodare ad ea, quæ ipse primo libro de Diis immortalibus dixerit: ut etiam veterissimi Peeter, qui hæc ne suspicati quidem sint, Stoici suis se videantur.* *Cicero De Nat. Deor.* i.

him, so far it was unavoidably of an allegorical and symbolical nature. Yet it wanted not that simplicity and perspicuity which are requisite in laws: Moses gave the people the two great commandments, to love God, and to love their neighbour, and many rules of life and precepts of morality with sufficient plainness. But the various ritual ordinances, the washings, the purifications, the atonements, the ceremonies, the sacrifices, the bodily pollutions to be avoided, and the bodily purity to be observed, these often were either figurative representations of holiness of life and purity of heart, or had a view to the future dispensation and to the Gospel of Christ, which in the fulness of time should be made manifest.

It will be said, perhaps, that the Israelites, who came rough and unpolished out of the land of Ægypt, where they had been occupied in mean and slavish employments, were not acute enough to discover and understand these hidden senses. It may be so; and if they could not discern them, it mattered not: There was enough for them in the Law, which was of the plain kind, and suited to their capacities. But why should we suppose them so very unfit for this sort of instruction? The Ægyptians, with whom they had long dwelt, had many (*b*) mystical precepts, and their religion was full of symbols and enigmatical representations. The Israelites might therefore expect something of the mysterious kind in their sacred Books, and it was a proper occupation for the learned to meditate upon the sublimer parts of religion, and to unfold them to the people.

Besides; the Law was not designed for one generation of men, and for one age, but for many. It is to be supposed that the people of Israel being once

(*b*) Thence Pythagoras learned to veil his precepts under expressions which are mere riddles, and so dark that it is impossible to explain them with any certainty.

settled in the peaceable possession of the land of Canaan, and obliged to be well acquainted with their sacred Books which contained their national laws, would improve themselves daily in wisdom and knowledge ; and if they did not, it must have been altogether their own fault.

We must not think that double senses can never be admitted and allowed in moral precepts, and in rules of life and behaviour ; for there are some such precepts in the Old Testament. But then the second sense, or the sublimer design should usually be obvious, or at least, discoverable by those who apply the proper methods to discover them. I will mention a few instances of such passages in the Books of Moses, and then proceed to consider the text, which also is a precept of a double sense.

In (c) Leviticus it is said, Thou shall not curse the deaf.

This base action of reviling or cursing a deaf person is here condemned. But that is not all ; there is something more forbidden by this Law ; for it seems to be of a proverbial nature, and the general meaning is, Thou shalt not take the sordid advantage of a man's incapacity to defend himself, and hurt him either in his body, his fortunes, or his reputation. To abuse an absent person, to calumniate people in secret, to attack another's reputation in the dark and in disguise, to defame those who are dead, to hurt in any manner those who are unable to help and redress themselves, all this may be called, To curse the deaf.

Again : Amongst the Mosaic Laws are these (d) ; Thou shalt not kill a cow and her young both in one day. If thou findest a bird with her eggs or young ones, thou shalt not take both the dam and the young.

Besides

(e) Chap. xix, 14.

(d) Levit, xxii, 21. Deut, xxii, 6.

Besides the actions which are here prohibited, every behaviour which shews inhumanity and barbarity seems to be forbidden. The things here mentioned, slight as they may appear, are perhaps condemned, because they carry an air of cruelty; and if cruelty, and the appearance of it, or a tendency to it, was to be avoided even towards brutes, much more was compassion and pity due to men. A Jewish Commentator hath supposed this to be the spirit and import of these laws, and thus interprets them; As your Father in heaven is merciful, so be ye merciful upon earth, and destroy not on the same day a beast and its young one.

Again, we read in the Law, (*e*) Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind. Thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed: neither shall a garment of linen and woollen come upon thee. Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together.

Since the things which are here prohibited are not morally evil, there might be a further meaning in these laws, namely, that the Jews should abstain from all impurities, and that they should have no intercourse, and contract no marriages with idolatrous neighbours.

I will not deny that these and other such singular laws might also possibly be enjoined in (*f*) opposition to certain rites and ceremonies used by superstitious and idolatrous Pagans. Nothing hinders but that a law may serve to more purposes, and have more views than one or two.

(*e*) Levit. xix. 19. Deut. xxii. 10.

(*f*) This is the notion of Spencer. But this learned and useful writer, having projected a general, and in the main a rational method of interpretation, seems sometimes to carry his hypothesis too far, supposes Gentile superstitions of which no traces can be found, introduceth the devil too often into his system, and lays some things to his charge which perhaps he never did,

The precept, Not to eat blood, is often repeated in the Old Testament; but where it is first mentioned in the book of (g) Genesis, it is joined to the prohibition of murder. One reason therefore for which feeding upon blood is prohibited was because it had a savage and brutish appearance, more of a wild beast than of a man; and by this abstinence from blood, men were taught to shun cruelty and inhumanity towards their fellow-creatures, and bloodshed, and murder.

In Deuteronomy (b) it is said; Thou shalt not muzzle the ox, when he treadeth out the corn.

We have here a symbolical law; and the meaning of it is, that whosoever is employed in labours beneficial to others, ought himself to partake of the profit. This law therefore recommends humanity to slaves and to hired servants, encouragement to the industrious, liberality to the deserving, and public rewards to those who are useful to the public. For this interpretation we have the warrant and authority of St. Paul. It is written, says he, in the law, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes no doubt this is written; that he who ploweth should plow in hope; and that he who thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. And so forth.

I now proceed to the text; Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way.

In this chapter, curses are pronounced against several heinous crimes, such as idolatry, contempt of parents, murder, rapine, and the like; and amongst these crimes is mentioned this, of causing the blind to go out of their way; a wickedness of a singular nature,

(g) Chap. ix. 4.

(b) Chap. xxv. 4.

ture, and which one would not expect to find in this list of vicious actions. It is a crime which is seldom committed ; there are few opportunities for it ; there is little temptation to it ; it is doing mischief for mischief's sake, an enormity to which few can easily bring themselves. Add to this that in Leviticus this base action is mentioned along with that of cursing the deaf, which, as we observed before, is a kind of proverb, and bears a figurative sense : Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind. We may therefore reasonably suppose that in the words of the text, Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way, more is intended than barely to condemn those who should lead a blind man out of his way. And what that may be, it is not difficult to discover. Blindness in all languages is put for error and ignorance ; and, in the style of the Scriptures ways and paths, and walking, running, going, wandering astray, stumbling, falling, mean the actions and the behaviour of men. These obvious observations will lead us to the moral, mystical, spiritual, and enlarged sense of the Law, or Commination ; and it is this ; Cursed is he who imposeth upon the simple, the credulous, the unwary, the ignorant, and the helpless ; and either hurts, or defrauds, or deceives, or seduces, or misinforms, or misleads, or perverts, or corrupts and spoils them. This, I say, is the sense which may be fairly put upon these words, besides their literal sense. It remains to shew by what actions we may be supposed to be guilty, more or less, of this fault.

1. As to the Ministers of the Gospel, they may be said to mislead the blind, when instead of endeavouring to instruct and amend their hearers, they deal in false opinions, or unintelligible doctrines, or unprofitable disputes, or uncharitable and unmannerly reproofs, or personal reflections, or flattery, or in any subjects

subjects foreign from religion, and void of edification; much more when they teach things of an evil tendency, and which may have a bad influence on the minds and manners of the people.

To err in some things, and to be ignorant of many things, this is man's portion and lot, and infallibility belongs to none of us. Therefore in expounding texts, and in drawing inferences, and in explaining doctrines, in reasoning and in proving, we may make some mistakes; but though a Preacher cannot answer for his abilities, and his critical judgment, he may answer for his heart; and whosoever useth his best endeavours to qualify himself for the office of expounding religious truths, and is clear from all designs of deceiving, from all dishonest and self-interested views, takes the surest method not to be one of those who send the blind out of their way; he will in all probability, by his own caution, and by the blessing of God, be secure from gross and dangerous errors. Christian morality shines clearly in the Gospel, and the great duties of life are written with a sun-beam; and as to points which are of the learned, or refined and speculative kind, and which yet are sometimes and in some audiences proper to be discussed, the more difficulty there is in them, the less proportionably is their importance, and the less hurtful are the mistakes about them, if we should happen to fall into any.

Many and severe are the denunciations in Scripture against false prophets and false teachers, who delude the people with lies, and say, The Lord faith; and the Lord hath not sent them. For faults of this kind our Saviour reproves the Scribes and Pharisees, and cautions their hearers not to be misled by them, but to use, with due modesty and caution, the inherent power which every one hath and must have, of judging for himself where his duty and his soul are concerned.

cerned. As a man cannot see with the eyes of another, so neither can he believe with another man's faith, nor comprehend with another man's understanding. — It is a lazy modesty and a false humility to resign that reason which God hath conferred upon us, and to submit implicitly to the dictates of men, who are often positive and over-bearing in proportion to their power and to their ignorance, and sometimes so disingenuous as to teach and maintain what they themselves do not believe.

Without any censoriousness or uncharitableness, we can complain that the Church of Rome hath been very guilty in this respect. No personal invectives are here intended; for in that communion, as in other Christian societies, there are many well-meaning, honest, virtuous, worthy persons. But if you consider their Ecclesiastical State and System in general, as a Body politic, and as a Spiritual Power, it is certainly calculated to keep the commonalty in ignorance, and in an implicit faith and a blind submission to human authority; and under the plausible pretence of unity and external peace, to discourage liberty of conscience, and free and rational examination. But to say the truth, there hath been too much of the determining and domineering spirit in (i) most christian societies of every denomination.

2. In all our worldly affairs and intercourse with others, as we ought to act fairly, justly, and honestly towards every person, so more especially ought we to behave towards those whom we might injure with impunity, that is, without danger of being called to account for it in this life. To wrong the weak, the ignorant, the friendless, the poor, the orphan, the widow, the stranger, this is represented in Scripture as the height of villainy. This is cursing the deaf, and laying stumbling-blocks before the blind, and adding baseness to wickedness.

(i) I wish I could except our own.

wickedness. This is practical atheism ; it is acting as if we had nothing to fear, except the power of men, as if there were either no God, or which is the same thing, as if there were neither knowledge, nor goodness, nor justice in the most High.

Some of this practical atheism is as common as speculative atheism is uncommon, and there are many persons guilty of these faults, more or less, who yet call themselves Christians, and fancy themselves Christians, and hope to escape the wrath to come by performing some of the externals of religion. And for this reason the sacred Writers are so very careful in so many places to lay the main stress upon moral actions, upon charity, justice, honesty, integrity, and real piety, and to declare that nothing can compensate the want of virtue.

3. As nations subsist by trade, so trade subsists by integrity. In traffic and commerce, upright dealing is an indispensable duty ; and over-reaching and defrauding is a vice, as the Pagan Moralists will inform us, some of whom have laid down excellent rules upon this subject. So that, to apply our Saviour's words ; If our righteousness equals not the righteousness of the Greeks and Romans, in vain do we pretend to call ourselves Christians.

But if it be a fault to make unreasonable advantages in our dealings even with those who are upon their guard, and are supposed to be as skilful as ourselves, and who trust in their own judgment and abilities, it is far worse to impose upon the ignorant and the necessitous, and to wrong those who have a good opinion of us, and place an entire confidence in us. This ungenerous and ungrateful behaviour is what the text calls, Misleading the blind.

- 4. Of the same bad nature is giving wrong counsel and hurtful advice, knowingly and wilfully, to those who have an opinion of our superior skill, and apply to us for direction.

direction. As likewise all dishonesty in offices of trust and confidence. He who hath the education, the instruction, the disposal, the fortunes, and the affairs of others committed to him, hath a double bond, and a double obligation upon him to an upright behaviour. The one is an obligation of natural and revealed Religion: the other may be called an obligation of Honour, of honour abstracted from all religious considerations. There should be no occasion for any religious motives to persuade a man that he should not injure his benefactor, ruin his bosom friend, and his friend's children, and starve those innocents to whom he is a kind of Deity, and whose eyes wait upon him, that he may give them their food in due season. He was accounted honest, faithful, friendly, and diligent by those who entrusted him; they loved, honoured, and respected him. To use them basely is a double fault, and a fault which several persons would abhor, even from a mere principle of honour, who yet are little influenced by religion. As in our dealings with men, to return good for evil is the sublimest degree of virtue to which human nature can ascend; so to return evil for good is the vilest depravity into which it can sink.

5. To take bad courses, to keep bad company, to be vicious amongst the vicious, dissolute amongst the dissolute, this is confessedly a great fault. But yet there is a greater; which is, to seek out the weak, the young, the ignorant, the unwary, the unstedfast; to instil bad principles into them, to intice them to sin, to draw them into temptation, to spoil an honest disposition, to seduce an innocent mind, to rob an unspotted person of virtue, of honour, and reputation, of peace of mind, of a quiet conscience, and, perhaps, of all happiness present and future. This is not an ordinary offence; it is to be agents and assisters to the Devil, and to do his work, and imitate his example. It is a crime attended with this terrible

rible circumstance, that even repentance itself can be attended with no suitable reparation to the injured person. He who robs another of his money may repay it; and he who flanders and falsely accuses another, may do him public justice by owning the offence: but he who corrupts the mind and the manners of another, can make him no compensation.

Of the same sort of crime they are guilty, who employ their time and their abilities, given them for far other ends, in writing loose and prophane books, in contriving and studying to do all the mischief that they can, in all times and in all places, to poison present and future generations, and to work iniquity even when they are in the grave.

We have seen what is the moral, spiritual, and enlarged sense of making the blind to wander out of the way, and by what behaviour we may be guilty of this iniquity. The faults which we have pointed out, like other vices, have their opposite virtues, which we ought to practise and cultivate.

If cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way, then, by the rule of contraries, blessed is he who can say with Job, I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame.

In general, we are obliged, as men, as members of society, as Christians, to brotherly affection, and charity; in particular, we are obliged to give good advice to those who want it and are willing to receive it; to use those well who confide in us; to assist those who are distressed and helpless; to abstain from all appearance of evil; to give no offence; to set a good example to our domestics, to the young and the ignorant: for as an ingenious Pagan writer observes, the greatest reverence is due to children, and nothing indecent should be said or done before them; and when opportunities present themselves, we should be kind to those from whom we have

S E R M O N I.

13

have the least to expect by way of return, and who have nothing to give us, but their prayers and their love; and yet these are no mean and contemptible recompenses. Affection and gratitude is all that we can give to God, and it is always favourably accepted by him. We should imitate him in this, and account a thankful heart to be a sufficient payment for the small good offices and courtesies, which we can bestow upon our inferiors. Suppose even this recompense should fail, yet, as our Lord assures us, Bleſſed is he who doeth these things; for he shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the Just.

SERMON

S E R M O N : II.

G E N E S . xxi i . 1 , 2 .

It came to pass that God did tempt Abraham, and said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering.

BY comparing the Old and the New Testament together, it appears very plainly that the former is accomplished in the latter, that it centers in Christ, as in the Messias, that he was foretold from the beginning, as the person who should cure the evils which sin had introduced, and restore fallen man to a state of happiness and immortality.

He was to be the seed of the woman, the son of Eve, of the family of Seth, of Noah, of Shem, and of Abraham; of Abraham the father of the faithful, and one of the greatest persons, and the most favoured of God, of any of the Worthies recorded in the Old Testament.

The first revelation made to Abraham, of which we are informed, was when he was seventy-five years old, after he had been long married, and had no children, his wife Sarah being barren. He was ordered to leave his home and to go to another country. The Lord said to Abraham, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee. And I will make

make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. With this divine order Abraham instantly complied.

When he was in the land of Canaan, God appeared to him again, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land. This is the second conversation which he had with the Lord.

Afterwards he went into Ægypt, where his wife was taken from him: but God interposed miraculously in his favour, and she was restored to him. This was a third particular providence, or divine manifestation.

Again; a fourth time God appeared to him, and said, All the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

After this, Lot who was his nephew, and had been his companion in his travels, was taken prisoner by four kings: but Abraham, with his own domestics, and a few friends, fought with the victorious army, and overthrew it, and rescued the prisoners; and this signal victory he had all imaginable reason to ascribe to a particular providence.

Then God appeared to him again, and promised him a son, whose offspring should be as numerous as the stars of heaven. At the same time God made a covenant with him, and confirmed it by signs and visions, and revealed to him some things which should befall his posterity.

After this, when his son Ishmael was born, and he was ninety-nine years old, and Sarah ninety, God revealed himself to him, and promised him a son by

Sarah,

Sarah, even Isaac, who was to be the heir of Abraham and of all God's promises. At the same time the ceremony of circumcision was instituted.

Afterwards, the inhabitants of Sodom were miraculously destroyed, and Lot was miraculously saved, partly for the sake of Abraham, to whom Lot had the happiness of being nearly related. God would not punish those wicked cities before he had acquainted Abraham with his design. Abraham made supplication to God in their behalf, with a view to the family of Lot; and God granted him more than he promised, and protected his friends and relations from the general ruin.

Abraham once again had his wife taken from him, and restored to him by a miraculous interposition.

Then Isaac was born to Abraham, according to the promise of God, and Ishmael and his mother Hagar were sent away.

After all these favours and these divine revelations, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his only and his beloved son Isaac. Abraham obeyed, and would have put the command in execution, if God had not interposed. On this account his faith is highly extolled in Scripture; and justly, if we consider, first, how hard the trial was; and, secondly, how reasonable the obedience was.

As to the first; Isaac was his only child, his only son by his wife; for his son Ishmael was in a manner lost to him, and sent by divine appointment to dwell in another land. Isaac was given to him by a miracle in his old age, which must have greatly increased his affection to him. He had probably never done any thing to disoblige his father, but on the contrary had been good and dutiful. This son was to be suddenly taken from him by death, and by a violent death; and what was harder, he was to be present at it; and

what was still harder, he was to be the executioner. How difficult it must be for a parent to perform an act of this kind, is what every one may easily feel and imagine, and it wants no words to set it forth.

Abraham took his son, and departed with a full resolution to do as he was ordered ; and for three days together he underwent all the anxiety and distraction which must be supposed to have filled his heart upon this severe trial and cruel occasion.

We read in History of parents, who, being Generals or Magistrates, put their own sons to death for transgressing military laws, or for rebellion ; and preferred the love of their country, of impartiality, of justice, and of discipline, to natural affection. But in this hard conflict they had popularity, reputation, fame, glory, and perhaps, pride and a rigid severity of temper to support them, and to subdue the tender passions. Abraham had the highest degree of natural affection to overcome.

Lastly, his only son was also the very person to whom God had solemnly promised signal blessings and a numerous posterity ; so that the former promises, and the last command, seemed directly to contradict each other, and consequently might have staggered a less confirmed piety than that of Abraham, and have made another parent, if he had been so tried, unwilling to obey, and inclined to suppose either that there was some delusion in the revelation, or that he did not rightly understand it. He would have chosen to save his son, and to sacrifice his faith. Yet Abraham's faith was as reasonable as it was eminent.

For, first, he had, as we observed before, a long and familiar intercourse with God, and frequent experience of the nature of revelations, and so knew beyond

beyond a possibility of doubting, that the command came from God.

He was ordered to go with his son to the land of Moriah, a land where there were many mountains, and to offer up his son upon one particular mountain which God would shew him. On the third day he came within sight of it, and distinguished it from the rest; which must have been by some divine indication, perhaps by a cloud or a fire appearing upon it. So this was a new revelation to him that God required of him this act of obedience.

He therefore concluded that God would provide some method to reconcile this cruel command with his goodness and with his promises. And this method could be no other than to raise up Isaac, and to restore him to a second life. Upon this supposition the immorality and the cruelty of killing a son would be removed, and the death of Isaac would be only a short sleep followed by a resurrection. Abraham, says the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, offered up his son, accounting, or reasoning with himself, that God was able to raise him from the dead. He considered that God had given him this son by a miracle, and thence he justly concluded that God could restore him again to life by a miracle. This was an eminent degree of faith and reliance, and the more so because there had been no example of a resurrection from the beginning of the world; and also because Isaac was to be a sacrifice, and his dead body was to be consumed in the fire, and reduced to ashes; so that a restoration of his son, after such a total change and dissipation, was as great a miracle as could be conceived.

By faith, says the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, by faith Abraham offered up Isaac, accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead;

(a) from whence he also received him in a figure: That is; Abraham was persuaded that God could raise his son from the dead; and according to his faith it was done unto him; (b) he did receive him raised up from the dead, raised in a figurative sense, when the sentence of his death was recalled, and when he brought him away from the altar. This was a plain and striking image and representation of a real death, and of a real resurrection.

Thus we have gone through and considered this remarkable history; and the following important uses may be made of it.

First, we learn from it the true nature of faith, of that practical and active faith which recommends us to the favour of God.

Secondly, If we inquire what was the design of God in this transaction, we may plainly discern that it was not only to make Abraham an illustrious example of faith and obedience, but to foretel the death and resurrection of our Lord, and to make Isaac a lively type and representation of Jesus Christ.

As to the first, there is not perhaps any point of divinity which hath been, and which is more mistaken and misrepresented, than the doctrine and the nature of Christian faith: and this will appear by comparing these false and weak and fanatical notions of faith with the faith of Abraham.

One

(a) ὅτε αὐτὸν ἤλιψε παραβοῆσαι εἰσεπέμπει.

(b) This I take, with Grotius and some other Interpreters, to be the true sense of the place; though Tillotson, Clarke, Whitby, and many more refer it to Isaac's conception and birth. The verb *εἰσεπέμπει* far more naturally implies Abraham's *bringing away* his son safe and sound, than *receiving* him when he was born. And besides, the birth of Isaac is not so proper a type of a resurrection, as his deliverance was. His birth from parents who were superannuated, and as it were dead, was rather an image of a *creation* than of a *resurrection*. Add to this, that the *Aorist* *εἰσεπέμπει*, put for the *Plusquam perfectum*, is somewhat harsh; and that the tense, *he received* is preferable to *he had received*, if the context and the reasoning will bear it, as most certainly they will.

One error is to consider faith as a mere assurance and firm persuasion arising from no suitable evidence and no sufficient reason, but from feelings, from an inward illumination and an irresistible impulse and operation of the Spirit.

This is a faith which must be useless to all, except the possessor, since he can neither prove the reasonable-ness of his own belief to others, nor bring them over to his sentiments by any proper motives. And as this faith depends only upon imagination, so when the imaginati-on flags, or takes a new turn, or the inward light waxes dim, the faith is gone, having no solid support. And in fact it appears from their own confessions, that such Enthusiasts pass alternately from one extreme to another, sometimes fully assured, sometimes doubting or disbe-lieving, now carried up to heaven, and then sinking down into the deep, and reeling to and fro like drunkards.

The faith of Abraham, as we have seen, was not of this kind. It was grounded upon long, and repeated, and miraculous experience, upon the testimony of his own sen-ses, upon numerous revelations made to him, and upon the veracity, the omnipotence, and the good-ness of God.

Another error concerning faith is to lay more stress upon believing than upon good works, to exalt faith and to depress morality. The faith of these persons is a bold and a confident persuasion that they are favourites of God and of Christ, and certain of salvation ; and this, according to them, is the principal part of religion, though the Scriptures plainly assure us that this is a most incomplete and erroneous notion of true faith, that faith without works is a mere nothing, that Abraham was justified by works ; not indeed by legal works, or external rites and ceremonies, yet by works of righteousness, by an unshaken reliance on divine promises of blessings not to be expected in the common course of things, and by

by readily complying with a divine command of a singular kind, altogether opposite to the innocent passions, and to the imperious force of natural affection.

Another false notion of faith is, that faith is a blind submission of the understanding and of the senses to the haughty decisions of a Church, which absurdly calls herself the Roman Catholic Church, which scorns to prove her doctrines, except first by affirmations, and then by blows. She requires of her children that they should sacrifice Reason to Faith, and humbly believe whatsoever she proposes; and this is the unavoidable consequence of her claim to infallibility, and of those impossible or unintelligible doctrines which in dark, ignorant, and corrupted ages were adopted by her, and sanctified with the venerable name of Mysteries. These, as they are directly contrary to common sense, can never be received, unless common sense be first treated as a proud rebellious subject, and a dangerous foe to religion. The faith of Abraham was not of this absurd kind. He readily submitted to the will and to the orders of God, because he was satisfied and convinced that God was able to reconcile his present command with his former promises, and to make an ample recompence both to him and to his son.

Hence we may form to ourselves a right notion of true, active, practical Christian faith. It is a belief of the revelation which God hath made to us by his Son; it is a belief entertained upon just grounds; it is a belief of a future state of retribution, and more particularly of the rewards promised to the obedient; and it is a belief shewing itself by doing that which is good, and by abstaining from that which is evil. When the present temptations to sin are strong and urgent, and yet are overcome by faith, then it is that faith appears to the most advantage, and shines in its brightest splendor; then he who performs an act of duty which is difficult and irksome, is a true child of Abraham, and a disciple

of Christ, and he who sacrificeth a favourite vice is as if he sacrificed a favourite son. Thus faith is a victory, not over our senses and our reason, but over our irregular affections and turbulent passions. This is faith, the faith which the Scriptures recommend : other faith besides this they know not, but reject with disdain, as hypocritical, unprofitable, false and dead.

The misfortune is, that they who entertain enthusiastical notions of faith, in opposition to human reason, are not to be reasoned with to any purpose. No impression can be made upon the mind ; no light can dispel such darkness.

Secondly ; If we enquire what was the design of God in thus tempting or trying Abraham, we may plainly discern that it was not only to make this Patriarch an illustrious and a lasting example of faith and obedience, but to foretel the death and resurrection of our Saviour, and in Isaac to exhibit a lively type and representation of Christ.

The resemblance between Isaac and Christ, continued through a great variety of circumstances, is extremely singular and striking, and not to be accounted for, except by a divine design and foreappointment, as will manifestly appear by taking a distinct view of it.

The birth of Isaac was miraculous, and contrary to the common course of nature : so was the birth of Christ ; and in this the resemblance was singular.

The birth of Isaac was foretold and promised by God himself ; so was the birth of Christ declared before by the Angel.

Isaac had his name given to him before he was born ; God said to Abraham, Sarah shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name Isaac. In like manner the Angel said to Mary, Thou shalt bring forth a son, and call his name Jesus.

The word *Isaac* signifies *laughter* or *joy*, which name was given him, not only because Abraham and Sarah had

had laughed when the promise was made to them, but also on account of the joy which he caused to them at his birth, and as he was to be a public blessing to all nations, and in him the great promises of God were to be fulfilled. So the word *Jesus* signifies *Saviour*, and the tidings of his birth were tidings of great joy which was to be to all people.

Isaac is called the only son, and the beloved of his father; a title afterwards most peculiarly appropriated to Christ, the only-begotten and the beloved son of God.

Abraham offered up his only son, as God afterwards gave up his only son, to die for mankind.

Isaac was an emblem of Christ in his death and resurrection; and in this there is that difference which ought to be between the type and the person represented, between the shadow and the substance; for Isaac died figuratively and typically, but Christ died truly and really.

Isaac for the space of three days, that is, from the time that the command of God was pronounced, to the time when he was laid upon the altar, may be considered as dead, dead by law, and by the sentence passed upon him; and when he was released by a second command, he arose figuratively, and was restored to life again. So Christ was for three days in the state of the dead, and on the third day arose to life.

Abraham took the wood for the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac, who carried it to the place where he was to be sacrificed, and then he was bound and lifted up, and laid upon it. The like circumstances are observable in Christ bearing his cross.

As the most clear and express promise of the Messiah was made to Abraham; so the most express and lively type of the Messiah that we meet with in all the Old Testament, was Abraham's offering up his son: and as St. Jerom tells us from an ancient and constant tradition of the Jews, the mountain in Moriah where Abraham

was

was commanded to sacrifice Isaac, was Mount Calvary, the very spot where our Lord also was sacrificed and offered up for us (*b*).

Our Saviour is represented constantly in the New Testament as offering up himself not only a sacrifice, but a willing sacrifice, and laying down his life not by constraint, but of his own accord. We may conjecture that Isaac also was in this respect a type of Christ, and that he willingly submitted to the command of God, though not without those fears and that dejection which are incident to human nature. The account which we have of this transaction is very concise; but as Isaac was old enough and strong enough to carry the wood for the burnt-offering, and as it appears not that he endeavoured to save himself by resistance or by flight, and as it can hardly be supposed that Abraham would kill him without first informing him of God's command, and reminding him of the folly of attempting to disobey it, and giving him hopes of being restored again to life and to his father, we may suppose that Abraham made use of all proper motives to induce him to resignation and submission, and that Isaac behaved himself dutifully and piously on this severe occasion.

(c) Josephus, who had no notion that Isaac was a type of the Messias, yet led by the circumstances and by the probability of the thing, introduces Abraham exhorting his son to resign himself to the will of God, and Isaac complying with great sedateness and generosity of mind, and makes the heroic virtue of the son equal to that of the father. And an ancient (*d*) Christian Writer, who was contemporary with the Apostles, hath made the same remark.

When Abraham was upon the point of sacrificing his son, the Angel of the Lord came and prevented him: when

(*c*) Tillotson.

(*c*) Antiq. i. 13.

(*d*) Ἰσαὰκ μετὰ πεποίθεσσας γινώσκων τὸ μέλλον, ἡδίως ἐγένετο Ζεύς. Clemens Epis. i. § 31.

when Christ had been the appointed time in the grave, the Angel of the Lord came and attended upon his resurrection.

Thus have we shewed the resemblance between Isaac and Christ to be so strong and singular, as to justify the supposition that the first was a type of the second.

That Abraham had a foresight of the Messias, who was to spring from him, and in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed, is affirmed by our Saviour, when he says to the Jews; Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad. And it is probable that when the great transaction of offering up his son Isaac was happily concluded, it was also revealed to him that this was a typical and figurative representation of the death and resurrection of the only beloved Son of God.

S E R M O N III.

M A T T. xiii. 30.

Let both grow together until the harvest.

OUR Lord designing to inform his disciples that there should always be a mixture of good and bad men here, and that God would commonly suffer this without exerting his power in immediately punishing the disobedient, made use of a parable out of which my text is taken, in which he shews that he would not have the tares, that is, wicked persons, rooted up and separated from the good seed, from his own servants, but that he designed to suffer both to grow together till the harvest, till the consummation of all things, and that then the separation should be made.

In this parable, by the tares mixed with the good seed, we are to understand a mixture of good and bad men, not only in the world, but also in the Christian world. By the kingdom of heaven is here meant the state of the Gospel, and the Church of Christ. The man who sows good seed in his field is Christ who preaches the Gospel to the world. The good seed are they who embrace his doctrine, and conform their lives to it. Amongst the good seed spring up tares, that is, wicked persons join themselves to his servants, and both thus united, constitute, or seem to constitute, one and the same society.

For

For these wicked persons may be said in one sense not to be members, and in another sense to be members of the Church of Christ. A Christian who deliberately refuseth to perform the conditions which Christ requires of his followers, and who is usually self-condemned, is not a true disciple of Christ, and will not be acknowledged by him for such at the last day. Christ is the vine, of which he is a branch, an unfruitful branch, whose end will be to be cut off and cast away.

But still there is a difference, as to the present state, between one who is a bad Christian, and one who is no Christian. Whosoever believes in Christ and in his Gospel is a Christian, though he may be a wicked one; nor doth he absolutely cease to be a Christian, unless he apostatizes from the faith, and renounces the baptismal vow, openly or secretly. And the same holds true of religious societies, or particular Churches, grossly deficient it may be in faith and practice, but professing Christianity, and as such, Christian Churches.

We say of sick people, Whilst there is life there is hope. The same may be said of wicked Christians; for though without repentance and reformation their future portion will be worse than that of wicked Pagans, yet whilst any seed, whilst any spark of the spiritual life remains, whilst they believe in Christ, there is some hope, and there are some means of amendment. The sin unto death, mentioned in the Scriptures, seems to be the sin of apostacy, of renouncing Jesus Christ, and that after having received miraculous proofs of the truth of Christianity.

Again: This parable is also a prophecy of the future state of the Church, which hath been too exactly verified in all ages. Our Lord declares that many should call themselves Christians, and hardly deserve that name, that their lives or their doctrines should not be consistent with the Gospel. This soon came to pass, even in the days of the Apostles: there were then persons who taught

taught false and wicked opinions, and whose manners were as bad as their notions; and there were others whose actions did not agree with the precepts of the Gospel, which yet they acknowledged themselves obliged to observe.

Thus were Christian societies soon infected with persons, whose principles or practices, or both, were faulty; and this is an evil from which they have never been free. That this might not be matter of offence to the good, and that they might not be tempted to suspect that Christ had cast off all care of his Church, he thought proper to declare that it should be so, and that God for sufficient causes would suffer it, without separating the bad from the good.

And possibly for this, amongst other reasons, our Saviour might permit Judas to continue with his Apostles, to teach us that if of the Twelve whom he had chosen, one was a Devil, much more was it to be expected that the Church in future ages should have pastors and teachers not better than their predecessor Judas.

Again: This parable intimates that in the Church persons should arise, whose furious and blind zeal would be hurtful to the common cause. No sooner do the tares appear, than the officious servants of the Householder desire to go and root them up. Whilst Christianity was persecuted, the Christians underwent ill usage with constancy, patience and resolution: yet they complained of it as of a scandalous abuse of power, and endeavoured to convince their cruel adversaries how unjust it was to destroy innocent people, industrious and peaceable subjects, for a mere difference in religious sentiments. But as soon as the state of affairs was altered, and the Pagans could no longer oppress them, they began to take up other notions concerning compulsion, and to consider it as a thing that might be good, when it was in good hands. Then the spirit of persecution exerted itself in

the

the Church, and hath ever since continued in various parts of the Christian world.

This spirit and temper is discouraged in the Parable, and we are there told that grievous inconveniences would follow such rigorous methods.

It cannot be supposed that God hath empowered his servants to destroy all those who should teach false doctrines or lead irreligious lives, because the most virtuous would often be the greatest sufferers. For Christians being unhappily divided into many sects, and warm men of every sect thinking themselves the only orthodox believers, and sometimes the only good men, if they should all imagine that they had a call and a commission to harass or to cut off the bad, destruction and persecution would never cease, and the best persons would fall a sacrifice to ignorant and outrageous zeal.

It hath been a favourite doctrine with various Enthusiasts, that the Saints ought to inherit not only heaven, but the earth also; that the true Israelites have a right to plunder the wicked *Ægyptians*; that the ungodly have no property here below, no true title to their goods and chattels; and that dominion is founded in grace.

Those persecutors who were not meer atheistical hypocrites and politicians, have usually been fanatical bigots, much inclined to this system, and ready to put it in execution, if the Civil Magistrate did not tie up their hands.

Our Lord then reserves, for the most part, the judgment of wicked Christians to a future time, in which he will try and condemn them himself. His servants are introduced in the parable, as desirous of being employed in gathering up the tares; but he commands them to desist, lest, says he, ye root up the wheat with them; lest, whilst ye are indiscreetly busy in destroying bad men, ye unawares destroy the righteous.

No one indeed can be qualified for such an office, unless God should give him a power of knowing the hearts of men. Hypocrisy can conceal itself sometimes from every

every eye, except that from which nothing is concealed. Judas in all probability was like most other sinners in this, that he became not very wicked on a sudden; yet he seems to have escaped suspicion, so that when Christ declared to his disciples that one of them should betray him, they were surprised, and could not tell of whom he spake.

And besides; If God by his own immediate act, or by putting the sword into the hands of his servants, should take sudden vengeance of all bad men, this world would not be a state of trial, and we should be deprived of that freedom from compulsion which attends a reasonable service. The motives to obedience are now more suited to our nature. A great and a distant reward is set before us; great, to excite our desires; distant and unseen, to exercise our faith. A punishment is threatened, sufficient to alarm our fears, because it is dreadful, and because we know not how soon it may overtake the offender: but it is not immediately inflicted, and therefore it forceth not, it only dissuades.

Add to this that the good and the bad are so intermixed, so closely united by worldly dependencies, that they cannot be separated here, and the ruin of the one would be the ruin of both. There are, and there always have been, many persons in Christian countries, who if their opinions and actions were tried by the rules of the Gospel, must of necessity be deemed very bad Christians, and yet on other accounts are useful in their several stations; who have abilities, industry, learning, knowledge and experience; who have skill in arts and sciences, in commerce, in war, in politics; who have various qualities, which make them profitable, not only to their friends and families, but to the public. Such persons may so far conduce to the temporal prosperity of the nation to which they belong, that without a miracle it could not subsist, if they were all cut off. For the sake

sake (*a*) of the righteous therefore God may permit such persons to pass their days with them, and with them to enjoy the common blessings of providence.

Our Saviour then hath given his servants no power to destroy others, or to oppress them, under pretence that they corrupt the doctrines of the Gospel, or live not suitably to all its precepts. But we must not hence suppose that neither the Church nor the State ought to have jurisdiction over Christians.

Civil Magistrates have the sword committed to them, to execute wrath upon evil-doers, to punish the transgressors of the just laws of society. These powers they possessed before the Gospel was preached, and these powers are neither diminished nor increased by the Christian religion.

As to a national Church, it is a religious society of persons professing themselves the servants of Christ, and promising to believe his doctrines, to obey his precepts, and to live according to the directions contained in the Gospel.

No person ought to be compelled by violence to enter into this society, or to continue in it. If any one likes it not, let him keep out, if he be weary of it, let him depart. Jesus Christ wants no unwilling subjects.

Christian Societies have no right to require other terms of communion, in points of faith and practice, than those which are contained in the Gospel: but those they ought to require, and with those they cannot dispense.

Christian societies, like all other lawful societies, seem to have in themselves an inherent (*b*) right of Discipline, a right of admonishing, censuring, and expelling scandalous and disobedient members. How far it may be expedient or practicable to exert this authority, seems to be

(*a*) *Dii quoque, inquiunt, multa ingratiss tribuunt; sed illa bonis paraverant: contingunt autem etiam malis, quia separari non possunt. Sanctius est autem prodefe malis propter bones, quam bone propter malos.* *Seneca, De Benef. iv. 28.*

(*b*) *Grotius ad Luc. vi. 22.*

be a thing of a variable nature, and depending upon circumstances.

In the first ages of the Church, when Christians were few in number, compared with their adversaries the Jews and the Pagans with whom they dwelt, they exercised this jurisdiction amongst themselves upon openly wicked and impenitent brethren. It behoved them so to do, on prudential accounts, to keep up their character in the world, and not to suffer their societies to be a rendezvous and a refuge for profligate people, who would come in as spies to calumniate them, or as cheats to eat them up, and to live upon their charitable contributions, or as deceivers to teach them false doctrines, and to sow dissension amongst them.

But now that Christianity is the national religion, numberless impediments arise, which will not permit us to call openly to account all openly wicked Christians, to rebuke them and to cast them out.

As we cannot for many reasons execute this judgment universally and impartially, so there are considerations which may make us contented to be as we are.

For first, in Christian countries where the Church and the State are connected together, the laws of the land have taken a tincture from the laws of the Gospel, and most of the notorious crimes, condemned by the Christian religion, are also condemned, and should be punished, by the Civil Government, as injurious to society.

Secondly, very wicked and scandalous Christians lose their Christian rights and privileges, till they recover them by amendment; and in all our public acts of devotion, we do in effect declare impenitent offenders to have no share in the promises of the Gospel.

Thirdly, such persons usually withdraw and cut themselves off from Christian society and public worship, and seldom appear in religious assemblies, unless perhaps to qualify themselves for a place.

Many persons have thought that it would be an excellent scheme to make all people conform to one and the same religious system ; and then, said they, there would be no need for a toleration, which only serves to keep up faction and schism. But the thing is as impracticable as it is wicked. They who would compel men to this uniformity by burning Infidels and Heretics, have as little skill in making of Christians, as those cheats who undertake to make gold, by mixing base metals with a miraculous powder, and melting them down in a furnace.

Consider those parts of the Christian world where there hath been only one Religion, called absurdly enough the Roman Catholic Church, supported by a false Moses and a false Aaron, that is, by the Prince and by the Inquisition. In such places every inhabitant hath usually called himself a good Catholic ; and woe to him if he did not. But this Catholic hath often been an Atheist, a Deist, a Jew, a Mahometan, a Pagan, who hath passed his days in dissimulation. And if, as some ingenious men have said, the worst heresy is a wicked life, there hath been no small number of such heretics in such countries, where ignorance and superstition are often accompanied with a most horrible profligacy of manners.

We may observe farther, that from the mixture of good and bad men, there are several considerable advantages arising to both.

Why do the wicked escape with impunity ? why do they flourish ? why are they so fortunate ? why is piety ridiculed and scorned, oppressed and persecuted ? These complaints are as old as mankind, and they have been renewed from age to age ; and yet, so far as they suppose that the wicked generally enjoy more happiness than the righteous, they are not just and well grounded, but the peevish expostulations of good men at unguarded hours, and when their minds were ruffled and oppressed with grief. For the truth is this ; sometimes vice, and sometimes

times virtue prevails; sometimes the best men are delivered into the hands of the ungodly, and sometimes these receive their due punishment. But in general the righteous and the wicked are equally exposed to the calamities and afflictions to which man is born; with this difference however, that although power and wealth may seem to fall most to those who deserve them least, yet goodness is more frequently accompanied with peace of mind, health, reputation, and the necessaries of life than vice, and therefore hath the advantage over it even in this world. True it is that wickedness is not at present attended with all the inconveniences which it ought to suffer, if there were no state besides this; but we have already mentioned several reasons for which God doth not immediately visit the disobedient, and some conveniences which the good experience by dwelling with them; and we will proceed to shew that from this mixture of both, many advantages arise to both.

The oppressions and persecutions which the righteous sometimes endure, and the ill usage, more or less, which they frequently receive from the wicked, cannot be denied to be in some respects no small inconveniences; and yet these very inconveniences must be acknowledged (*c*) proper trials of virtue, which appears to the best advantage, when it struggles with difficulties; and a good man thus proved, and overcoming all opposition, is often of singular service to mankind; his reputation and its influence continue through following ages, and allure many to imitate those excellent qualities which they must admire.

Upon the supposition that this were our only state, the low and afflicted condition of righteous persons would be a formidable objection to a wise and gracious Providence; and he who should distinguish himself by an adherence to virtue, might then justly expect to be so far distin-

(c) — — — — Gaudet patientia duris;
Latius est, quoties magno sibi constat, honestum.

Lucan.

guished by his Maker from the vicious crowd, as to be permitted, without much pain and sorrow, to pass his few days, till he returned to that everlasting silence and insensibility whence he was called.

But if there be a life after this, and various degrees of happiness for those who do well, and greater favours for suffering virtue than for virtue which hath not been so tried, such temporal evils are without question, though irksome for the present, yet, upon the whole, expedient and profitable. Upon this supposition, a wise man, weighing the loss and the gain, would be willing to obtain the highest places in the kingdom of heaven, and in order to obtain them would not refuse to be both almost and altogether such an one as St. Paul was, not excepting his bonds.

Much prosperity is so often observed to produce in the human mind a carelessness about the future state, and an immoderate love of the present, that perhaps the greatest calamity which can befall a man, is never to have had a calamity. But hardships and troubles often awake men out of this stupid and dangerous security, and the unkindness of the world will teach them to set their affections upon better objects. The same is true of Christian societies (*d*): A decay of faith, and a corruption of manners, have been the unhappy fruits of the peace and plenty which they have enjoyed; and they have seldom been more religious than when in a low and oppressed condition.

Besides these trials, there are other temptations, less violent indeed, but perhaps not less dangerous, to which the good are exposed by dwelling amongst the bad in Christian countries, and in peaceable times. Irreligious persons will endeavour to corrupt the minds of those with whom they converse, and over whom they have any authority; they will upon all occasions discourage and ridicule

(d) Eusebius, H. E. viii. 1.

dicule piety and probity : for if the good delight in serving their father who is above, the wicked are not less diligent and less pleased in doing the work of their father who is below. These trials and inconveniences have also their use ; they give good men an opportunity of testifying their sincerity and their constancy, which could not shew themselves to the same advantage, if impiety and immorality were accounted infamous and detestable, and obliged to conceal themselves from public view.

Again ; The good, by their unavoidable intercourse with the bad, may often be the occasion of reclaiming them, those at least in whom shame, and self-reproach and reason are not quite extinguished. Good example allureth to imitation, and virtue is catching as well as vice. There is in goodness an inseparable dignity and decency : there are also many blessings, which by the ordinary course of events, and by the divine providence, attend an inoffensive and upright behaviour. They who have departed from righteousness, but not so far as to fall into the extremes of vice, have frequent opportunities of seeing this ; and by seeing it, they sometimes become sensible of their error and loss, and seriously wish that they were also in the favour of God. These honest desires may be to them the beginning of wisdom, and the for-runners of amendment.

What an unspeakable advantage is this, both to those who are rescued from eternal destruction, and to those who are the blessed instruments of saving their souls, and of turning them from sin to righteousness ! What an honour is it to be an useful servant, and a good steward in God's family, and even a fellow-labourer with Jesus Christ !

Lastly, The good, by dwelling amongst the wicked, have an opportunity of observing the pernicious nature, and the sad consequences of vice. This will appear to be no inconsiderable advantage, if we take notice that

even they who have long continued in well doing, much more young persons who have contracted no habits of obedience, may stand in need of various motives to constancy and perseverance in time of temptation. Of these motives few seem to be more forcible than the unhappy situation and circumstances of those profligate and notorious sinners, who have a body enfeebled and worn out with intemperance; an understanding sunk beneath the capacity of a brute; a taste altogether depraved and vitiated; a mind tormented with furious passions, the seat of hopes which are disappointed, of desires which cannot be satisfied, and of fears which are just and well-grounded. The person who carries about with him this wretched mixture of sin and misery, is a dreadful and detestable example of folly, a living argument against iniquity, and an unwilling preacher of righteousness.

The advantages which the bad may find from passing their days with the good are manifest. The patience and the loving-kindness of God affords them all imaginable motives to amendment. God invites them to return to him by their own consciences, by the voice of reason, by the revealed will, by the behaviour and by the admonition of his servants. They may see that piety is not impracticable nor uncomfortable; they may see persons of the same rank with themselves, of the same occupation, of the same age, exposed to the same temptations, preferring virtue to vice, and happy in their choice. These are favours which God daily extends to the most unworthy and unthankful, with no other design than to save them from perdition. But these favours, if rejected by them and insolently abused, will add to their guilt and increase their punishment, and the remembrance of them will be a cause of continual grief and remorse at their departure hence, and in their future state.

Thus it appears that God mercifully and wisely permits this mixture of the good and the bad, for the trial of both, for the improvement of the one, and for the amend-

amendment of the other. Both pass their days together, both grow together till the harvest, and God makes his sun to shine and his rain to descend upon both, and allows both to partake in common of the common blessings of his providence. Thus shall it be till the end of the world. Then the state of probation ceases, and the state of retribution begins ; and there is no longer any reason that persons of such different tempers, views, and behaviour should inhabit the same place. The wicked will then be separated from the righteous, banished from the presence of God, and sent to dwell with creatures of the same perverse dispositions ; which alone would be a terrible punishment. The fear even of this should be sufficient to warn us so to behave ourselves here, that hereafter we be not doomed to such cursed society, but may live with God, and with beings who love and imitate him.

S E R M O N IV.

2 THESS. iii. 8, 9.

Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought ; but wrought with labour and trouble night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you : not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow.

ST. Paul found it expedient on many accounts to recommend industry in their worldly callings to the first Christians: They who in those times received the Gospel by their own free and deliberate choice, upon serious examination, having arrived first to years of discretion; who were convinced of its truth by the signs and wonders wrought to confirm it; who had been bred in Jewish superstition, or in Pagan ignorance; and who were thus suddenly removed from darkness into light, and from doubt and diffidence into full assurance; they, I say, had these considerable advantages over us, that they usually felt a more lively sense of the evidence and the importance of Christianity, had brighter examples of goodness amongst them for their imitation, were more affected by the glorious promises of eternal happiness which were set before them, and looked with more indifference upon a world from which they had little to expect, besides scorn and reproach and malice and persecution.

But if their faith was accompanied with greater degrees of fervour than are commonly found amongst us,
yet

yet some inconveniences might arise even from that zeal. Piety, when it is not guided and governed by prudence, may degenerate till at last it becomes wild extravagance. A contempt for this world, and for all its concerns, may be carried too far; and St. Paul seems to have feared lest some should run into this extreme, and neglect to provide for themselves and their families, through a fanatical notion that a Christian could have no leisure for such low occupations, and lest others, influenced by laziness, or by worse motives, should imitate them in this supine negligence.

For the Apostles, and they who like them were then appointed to preach the Gospel, had seldom leisure to labour in their worldly callings, and had a particular assurance from Christ that he would provide for them. This might mislead other Christians to rely indiscreetly on the divine Providence, and to think that these promises were equally extended to them.

There seems besides to have been at that time a current opinion that the second (*a*) coming of Christ, and the end of all earthly things, was at hand, which might have a bad effect upon some injudicious persons, and produce too much indolence and carelessness in worldly affairs.

The (*b*) eminent liberality also of the first believers might prove a temptation to dishonest, sluggish, and insincere men (for such there have been in the Church at all times) to indulge a lazy temper, and to live at the expence of those Christian societies into which they had entered themselves.

Some of those Heretics of the most ancient times, who are recorded in Ecclesiastical History, were in all probability

(*a*) This notion revived towards the end of the tenth century, and produced much mischief in the Christian world. See Mosheim, p. 372. & Bibl. Univ. ix. 12.

(*b*) Bonorum communio apud primos Christianos fuit liberalis potius rerum necessiarum communicatio, quam quod nemo quicquam proprii habuerit. *Salmasius de Usura*, p. 655, &c.

probability induced by no other motive outwardly to profess Christianity, than by hopes of a share in the public collections; and accordingly, whensoever distress and persecution arose, and they had a near prospect of more danger than profit, they could easily secure themselves by deserting the Church, and renouncing the Faith.

Thus, unless proper care were taken to prevent this evil, the Church, instead of being a society of honest, frugal, and diligent persons, able to maintain themselves and those who were proper objects of their charity, would have become a mere nest of drones.

St. Paul, therefore, as a pious and a prudent teacher, recommended industry to the Christian world, not only by precept, but by example.

He himself on more than one account had a claim to a maintenance from the public.

As a preacher of the Gospel and an Apostle of Christ, he had a right, by custom, by equity, and by the laws of God, to receive a subsistence from those whom he instructed, as he proves in his first Epistle to the Corinthians.

As he was the Apostle of the Gentiles, the care of many Churches lay upon him, he had a much larger province than any of the Apostles, he was obliged to labour more abundantly in the Gospel than they, and therefore less able to spare time in labouring for a maintenance.

Add to this that a small sum was sufficient for one man, and for a man who desired nothing besides food and raiment.

Yet he sometimes chose to waive even this privilege. I have used, says he, none of these things, neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me; for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. He chose rather to feed himself by his own toil and industry, by labouring night and day, because he would not eat any man's bread for nought.

nought. I have coveted, says he, no man's silver or gold, or apparel. Yea, you yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak.

Such a person might boldly and earnestly press the observance of a duty which himself had so remarkably fulfilled ; and indeed he lays a great stress upon it, and represents it as more important than some usually imagine it to be. If any one should neglect to provide for his own family, we should perhaps call him a careless, an indolent, an imprudent man : but St. Paul says, If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

Study, says he, to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.

And again; When we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

Again; Let him that stole steal no more ; but rather let him labour, working with his hands, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

And in the text ; Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought ; but wrought with labour and travel night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you : not because we have not the power, but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow us.

We may consider this example of St. Paul as a precept, first of industry in our worldly callings, secondly of industry in our religious concerns. Each of these duties I shall now endeavour to recommend, beginning with industry in our worldly callings.

I. If we hope to acquire what is necessary for our subsistence, to (c) preserve it when we possess it, to provide for

(c) *Dormientibus iura non subveniunt*, says the Civil Law.

for those who depend upon us, and to avoid gross and scandalous ignorance, labour of the body, or of the mind, or of both, must be undergone. I shall not endeavour to prove the truth of this assertion: it is generally known and acknowledged; and few have denied it. We (*d*) read in ancient history of a sect of Christians, who from those words of our Lord, *Labour not for the meat that perisheth*, concluded that they ought not to do any work to get their bread. We may suppose that this sect did not last long; that these sluggards were soon starved out of the world, or rather that (*e*) cold and hunger sharpened their wits, and taught them to be better interpreters of scripture. It may seem strange, and hardly credible to some persons, that there should have arisen such a sect as this: but daily and woeful experience shews us that there is nothing so strange, nothing so senseless, which some men will not throw out, and which others will not swallow.

Industry in our worldly callings is necessary, because it is impossible to neglect it and to be obedient servants of God, as it may appear several ways.

Naked came we into this world, and destitute of all things which support and preserve life; naked also as to our minds, which at first are a mere blank, and have no knowledge. But the soul and the body are made and designed by their Creator, the one to improve in understanding, the other to increase in strength, and to be employed by the soul in a manner which may conduce to the welfare of both. Thus God by the voice of nature teacheth us that he designed us to be improveable and industrious beings.

To these deductions of reason the Scriptures agree in many places. They tell us that God put the first man into

(*d*) See Whitby on John vi. 27. Tillemont, Hist. Eccl. t. viii. 531.
Meffaliens.

(*e*) Magister artis, ingenique largitor
Venter.

into the garden of Eden, to cultivate and embellish it. Afterwards, upon his transgression, it was told him that his work should be increased, and that in the sweat of his face he should eat his bread. Great travel is created for every man, says the Author of Ecclesiasticus, and a heavy yoke is upon the sons of Adam, from the day that they go out of their mother's womb till the day that they return to the mother of all things. This is very true; and yet so many advantages both to body and mind arise from labour, that it may be made a question whether the toil which God enjoined to Adam after his fall, and to his posterity, was a punishment or a favour. Certain it is that labour, if it was brought into the world by transgression, is one of the best preservatives against it; if it was the child of Sin, it is the parent of Virtue.

Again; God, who hath made us incapable of subsisting by ourselves, and obliged to our fellow-creatures in part, for the things which we possess, teaches us by the voice of reason that we also in return ought to promote the welfare of others. Before we come to years of discretion, we have contracted a debt of gratitude to those who have educated us, and to the nation to which we belong. We cannot refuse to discharge it without great injustice, nor can we discharge it without industry in our callings.

The Gospel strictly commands us to do good, to assist, to instruct, to direct, and to relieve. It commands us therefore what the idle person hath neither power nor inclination to perform. Laziness is always attended with ignorance, and usually produces poverty; and it is not to be expected that he who is so negligent of his own body and mind, should be serviceable to others, and should love his neighbour more than himself.

Add to this, that in general whosoever is slothful in business, in his worldly concerns, will probably be a slothful Christian too; for the same temper which disposes to the one, disposes to the other, and the same difficulties

difficulties which deter a man from labouring to live creditably, will discourage him from striving to live religiously. It is the nature of idleness to hate to take pains, and of goodness to be active: and therefore there is little reason to hope that they should meet and dwell together.

Idleness is the parent of vice. He who hath some end, some innocent and honest end to pursue, and is constantly busy in contriving and executing what tends to it, and hath accustomed himself not only to labour but to delight in his calling, keeps beyond the reach of many temptations, or if they find him out, will often send them away, because he is not at leisure; but numberless are the temptations to which the sluggard is exposed, and by which he is continually assaulted.

His understanding is furnished with nothing good and useful, it pursues nothing steadily, it hath contracted an aversion from serious study and meditation: his imagination will therefore be restless, and rove in quest of one folly or other for entertainment; for the soul is busy whether we will or no, it cannot cease from thought, design, and action of one sort or other, either useful or frivolous, either good or bad; and, when it is not directed to that which is profitable, and tied down to some particular work, will grow wicked for want of employment. A vacant mind is a proper habitation for a Devil: it is the house, which he cometh to and findeth empty; then goeth he and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there.

An idle person usually (*f*) loathes his own company, for which indeed he is not much to be blamed. He cannot endure to converse with himself, or with his betters. This drives him to contract unprofitable friendships, or rather acquaintances, for seldom is there friendship

(f) *Omnis stultitia laborat fastidio sui.* Seneca, Ep. ix.

friendship where there is no virtue. He seeks out those who are like himself, and whose time is a burden to them: he becomes a companion of mean and debauched persons; their bad qualities he soon imitates, and makes no small progress in vice, which is the only thing that he is disposed to learn.

An idle person, unless favoured by an extraordinary concurrence of circumstances, falls into want, and thence into wickedness; for he who through laziness becomes poor, is usually prepared for any mischief. When he is reduced to straits, then follows, What shall I do? I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. But nature craves, and his wants are importunate: something he must do, and it must be something which is not laborious, and only requires lying, or forswearing, or cheating, or robbing, or some other vice.

Thus it appears that industry in our worldly affairs is a duty which God requires from us; that there is a closer connection between it and religion than we usually imagine; that it is impossible to live an idle life and a good life; and that he is really serving God who is busy in his calling.

Another motive to diligence and industry is, that of all bad dispositions laziness is perhaps the most deceitful and the most vexatious, and that in all honest labour there is much satisfaction. The love of ease and pleasure produces idleness; yet such is the nature of things, that idleness produceth neither ease nor pleasure, but the reverse. All men value the conveniences of life: the idle person takes the surest way to penury. All men love respect and reputation: the idle person is ever contemptible, because he is ever unserviceable and ignorant, an (g) useless burden of the earth, salt that hath lost its favour, fit for nothing else than to be cast out and trodden under foot. All wish to have faithful friends upon whose good offices they may depend: the idle person

very

(a) —— ἐτῶσιν αὐχοῦ ἀρεῖπος.

very seldom finds such; and if he has them, he often loses them, because he hath no amiable qualities which may recommend him to them, and secure their esteem. All desire peace at home, and the love of those to whom they are nearly related: the idle person takes no care of his family, and can expect no affection there. All would (*b*) unbend their minds sometimes, and rest a little from their labours: but the lazy person, who would perpetually amuse himself, is disappointed in that also, and tired and cloyed even with his diversions; for pleasure is no pleasure when it becomes the sole employment, and must be interrupted often and long by serious affairs, to become acceptable and entertaining.

The desire of the sluggard killeth him. He hath desires as strong as the most active and industrious ever feel, and indeed stronger, because he follows no business, an attention to which would drive out of his mind vain and foolish wishes. He desires wealth and pleasure and honour and power, and the favour and esteem of the world. He desires that these things would come and seek him out, and offer themselves to him, without any endeavour exerted on his part to obtain them; and these desires are usually disappointed, and leave him to the vexation which arises from inconsistent affections. Then (*i*) follows dissatisfaction, dislike of his condition, envy and hatred of those who surpass him in good qua-

V O L. I.

E

lities,

(*b*) — lusus animo debent aliquando dari,
Ad cogitandum melior ut redeat sibi.

Pbædrus.

(*i*) Inde mœror marcorque, et mille fluctus mentis incertæ, quam inchoata habent suspensam, deplorata tristem: inde ille affectus otium suum detestantium, querentiumque nihil ipsos habere quod agant, et alienis incrementis inimicissima invidia. Alit enim livorem infelix inertia; et omnes destrui cupiunt quia se non potuerunt provehere: et ex hac deinde aversatione alienorum processuum et suorum desperatione, obirascens fortunæ animus, et de secuio querens, et in angulos se retrahens, et pœnæ incubans suæ, dum tædet sui pigetque. *Seneca de Tranquill. ii.*

Otiosum hominem, seductum existimat vulgus, et securum, et se contentum, sibique viventem: quemque nihil ulli contingere, nisi sapienti, potest. *Idem, Ep. iv.*

lities, and are in high esteem, of those whose labours are recompensed with success, and of those who, deservedly or undeservedly, possess the things which he covets.

These are vexations from which industry in our callings will secure us. It hath a tendency to preserve health of body and serenity of mind: it repays us with something that is grateful and useful. In all prudent labour of the hands or the head some acquisition is made; we maintain ourselves, and are not burdensome to others; we get skill, dexterity, and experience, and so learn to do our work with less toil and trouble; we improve our understanding, and find out truths which more than reward the pains of seeking them.

By industry we obtain credit and reputation. Every one is willing to employ a diligent person; and whatsoever his condition be, he cannot be contemptible.

By industry we shut out many implacable enemies to our repose, many fretting desires, and sorrowful reflections, and turbulent passions, and violent temptations.

By industry we become beneficial to others, able to assist our friends, to relieve the poor, to instruct the ignorant, and to provide more especially for those whom God hath committed to our care.

Thus much concerning industry in our worldly callings.

II. Let us now pass on to diligence in religious affairs, in working out our salvation, to which we have the most pressing motives.

The shortness and uncertainty of life warns us not to neglect it; for since upon our present behaviour depends our future state; since the days of man are few, few according to the course of nature, and often made fewer by a thousand unforeseen accidents, it behoves us to lose no time, but to set about our duty instantly, to-day whilst it is called to-day.

The

The reward set before us excites us to it. We think it reasonable to labour for conveniences which are temporal, that is, uncertain and transitory; and this industry is commendable. Much more should we exert our utmost care and diligence in securing to ourselves the unchangeable favour of God, the society of Saints and Angels, and an endless happiness which shall be mixed with no sorrows and disappointments.

Gratitude moves us to it; to serve him with all our power who hath done so much for us, with whose benefits we are enclosed and surrounded, which way ever we cast our eyes and our thoughts.

The punishment allotted to the idle and wicked servant calls us to it, to think no labour too great by which we may avoid the wrath to come. Infamy, and Reproach, and (*k*) Want and Dependence appear in terrible forms to us, and to escape them we are willing, if we have any spirit, to labour incessantly, and to submit to the hardest toil. Fools and blind, if we perceive not that these are nothing, compared to the woe, which must be the future portion of those who will not serve God here in this state of probation.

Our present interest invites us to it, to be most industrious in pursuing the welfare of our soul, which will procure us peace of mind, and the blessing of God even upon our worldly undertakings; whilst a neglect of our duty to him will be attended with fear and remorse, and give us an uneasiness which outward circumstances, however flourishing, will not be able to compose.

Such motives we have to religious industry. Every Christian will certainly allow them to have sufficient weight and force, and acknowledge that eternal life is desirable, and that it is an indispensable duty to serve God. But the illusion is this: We are inclined to think

(*k*) —— malefici Fames, et turpis Egestas,
Terribiles visu formæ.

this duty so easy to be performed, that a very little diligence and caution will be sufficient.

Let us then consider what kind of expressions the sacred Writers use, when they speak of our Christian duty. They exhort us to be rich and fruitful in every good work, to be ready to every good work, to be zealous of good works, to abound always in the work of the Lord, to pursue and work good towards all men, to exercise ourselves in godliness, and in the labour of charity, to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, to give diligence to make our calling, and election sure, to continue patiently in well-doing, to run that we may obtain a prize, and to press towards the mark, to watch continually and be upon our guard, to give all diligence to add one virtue to another, to walk circumspectly, to watch incessantly to prayer, to gird up the loins of our mind, to strive that we may enter in at the strait gate, to wrestle against principalities and powers, to take the kingdom of heaven by violence, to fight that we may receive a crown, and to war a good warfare, and to endure hardship as faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Thus the Scriptures tell us plainly, that without some labour we cannot be good. The difficulties with which the first Christians struggled were many and great; and difficulties of one kind or other will ever be arising. We are assaulted by importunate temptations; we often feel a propensity to go aside from our duty, and we are surrounded with bad examples, with multitudes who pursue their own destruction. When we reflect upon these things, we may perhaps be led into the other extreme, and suspect that the ways of righteousness must needs be disagreeable, and that the passage through them is tedious and painful.

But the Scriptures say that the ways of religion are ways of pleasantness; and the word of God is true, and consistent with itself. That obedience is a labour, and that it is a pleasure, are equally certain. That these things

things are reconcileable will appear, if we consider that in all honourable and profitable employments, in all arts, in all studies, the beginnings are difficult, and the difficulties must be mastered by obstinate application. But many things contribute to lessen those difficulties daily, or to make men less sensible of them, as a sprightly resolution, present profit, the hope of still greater advantages, experience and practice, and long custom which is a second nature. Thus some, whom idle by-standers judge to lead a wretched and laborious life, are really most contented and pleased with their condition; for a man is just as (*l*) miserable as he thinks himself, and if he delights in industry, industry to him is a diversion, and idleness is a toil.

So also is it in our religious concerns. The duty of a Christian is a laborious thing, especially to those who have bad dispositions to conquer, or particular difficulties to encounter; but, (*m*) when we do any thing good with labour, the labour passeth away, and the good remains: when we do any thing evil with pleasure, the pleasure passeth away, and the evil remains; and then custom making our obedience habitual, an even temper, peace of mind, and many other present advantages springing from it, the hope not only of escaping future evil, but of obtaining everlasting life, and the divine assistance vouchsafed to us as far as it is needful, will by degrees make our inclinations join with our reason, and our duty become our delight.

(*l*) *Tam miser est quisquam, quam credit,* Seneca.

(*m*) "Ἄττις πρᾶξης καλὸν μετὰ πόνου, ὃ μὲν πόνος οἴχεται, τὸ δὲ καλὸν μένει· ἀντὶ τοιόντος αἰχρὸν μεθ' ἴδοις, τὸ μὲν ἄδυτον οἴχεται, τὸ δὲ αἰσχρὸν μένει. *Musonius apud Gellium.*

S E R M O N V.

ECCLES. vii. 16.

Be not righteous overmuch.

A WISE writer requires a wise reader; and therefore Solomon, in his introduction to his book of Proverbs, represents that person as a considerable proficient in knowledge, who is able to understand a proverb and the interpretation of it, the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.

The sentences of Solomon are sometimes a sort of riddles, put forth to try the capacity, and to exercise the wit of the student, and to show the folly of hasty and censorious people who condemn what they do not comprehend.

In this method of instruction, Solomon, and other wise men in those days, and in Eastern nations, affected to be extremely concise, and to convey a great deal in few words. But conciseness is attended with obscurity, and will produce a variety of interpretations.

Obscurity they thought to be rather a beauty than a blemish in compositions of this sort; as clear waters are shallow, and deep waters are of a dark complexion (*a*).

Theſe

(*a*) Pindar says of his compositions;

Πολλὰ μοι ὑπ' αγκά-
νος ὄχεα βέλη
ἔνδον ἐνὶ φαρέτρας
φωιᾶνθα συνεῖσιν. ἐς
δὲ τὸ πᾶν, ἔρμηνεων
χαῖτζει.

Ολυμπ. B. 149.

These obscure sentences usually relate not to the elements and rudiments of religion, which ought to be perspicuous and plain, and adapted even to the lowest apprehensions ; but they are precepts of prudence and wisdom, intended for proficients in moral political and religious knowledge. The Ten Commandments therefore are clear, though all the sayings of the Sacred Writers are not so ; and Moses reminds the people, that they had no pretence to complain that any necessary part of religious instruction was concealed from them. This commandment, says he, which I command thee this day, is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off.—But the word is very nigh unto thee in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayst do it.

The religion of the *Ægyptians*, amongst whom the Israelites had so long dwelt, was all mystery, wrapt in obscurity, and delivered only to a few under the seal of secrecy ; and this, doubtless, was a convenient cover for falsehood and nonsense. But in the holy Scriptures, every thing necessary for general practice is open to all ; and the abstruser parts are calculated for those who have the capacity and the inclination to study them. And as in the Law, so in the Gospel, there is milk, and there is strong meat, there are practical precepts for the young and the simple, and there are sublimer parts to exercise the inquisitive and the studious : and both under the Law and under the Gospel, it was the will of God that there should always be a succession of teachers to instruct the ignorant in all things necessary for them to believe and practise ; and to explain to the more knowing the sublimer truths, which are perhaps sometimes rather the ornamental than the fundamental and essential parts of religion.

In the obscurer passages, which occur in the sacred books, an expounder of the Scriptures is obliged to have recourse to conjecture, and can seldom go beyond probability. He must offer such interpretations as he judges to

to agree with the intention of the writer ; and if in his comment upon such a text, he keeps close to sound doctrine, and to the great principles of morality and of revealed religion, though he should happen to be mistaken in some of his conjectures, it will be an error of no dangerous consequence, since what he deduces will contain religious truths, though it may not be exactly what the sacred author meant ; especially if he delivers it with that diffidence and caution, which every wise man will use, where he is not absolutely certain.

Amongst these dark, concise, sententious and singular sayings, we may reckon the words of the text : Be not righteous overmuch. Here is a caution, as it should seem at first sight, given to men, to take special care not to be too good and too religious ; a caution which their usual behaviour shews to be extremely unnecessary, which Solomon in his days had little occasion to inculcate, and which we in our days have as little occasion to recommend.

And yet as indiscreet as Solomon's advice may appear, discretion is the very thing which in all probability he is recommending ; as I shall endeavour to shew in the following discourse.

It hath been said by some ancient Moralists, that virtue is the medium between opposite vices. This is true of virtue or religion considered in general ; and it is true of some particular virtues, though it seems not to be applicable to them all.—Religion is equally remote from lukewarmness or indifference, and from bigotry or superstition ; and as to particular virtues, liberality, for example, is equally remote from covetousness on the one hand, and from prodigality on the other ; and sobriety as to food is also equally remote from unwholesome abstinence, and from surfeiting and gluttony.

Solomon seems to have taken religion in this point of view ; he seems to have considered righteousness as a disposition and behaviour, which may be overdone as well as

as underdone ; and if we take his direction in this sense, it will not be difficult to apply it to various cases.

The overrighteous man, in Solomon, is not a knave and an hypocrite, for such an one is not righteous at all, and hath nothing to do with the caution ; but he is one, who having a good intention and upright views, at least, no dishonest ones, yet wanting judgment and discretion, being weak and well-meaning, runs into extremes, and gets beyond his rule. Of this imprudent behaviour we are unhappily furnished with various instances, which we will briefly examine, by and by, one after another ; for they are so numerous, that we shall not have time to expatiate upon any of them.

At present we may observe two things ; first we may learn to think respectfully of the wisdom of Solomon, whose advice, odd as it may appear, is the result of great prudence and long experience ; and secondly we may learn to be the more careful, since there are so many ways of being overrighteous, not to be ensnared by any of them, but to arm ourselves beforehand against these various temptations which lie in our way to mislead and deceive us, and which are the more dangerous to honest men, because they transform themselves into Angels of light, and wear the amiable face and the modest garb of piety and devotion.

Be not righteous overmuch,

I may observe to you, by the way, that as Solomon gives this surprising kind of advice to pious men, he also at the same time gives an advice to wicked men, an advice which seems at first sight no less singular than the former : Be not overmuch wicked. This looks as if he allowed frail men to be wicked in a certain degree. But it is no such thing : this would contradict the close of his book, and the result of his inquiries, which is summed up in these excellent words ; Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter ; Fear God, and keep his commandments : for this is the whole of man ; that is, this is his true end, and his great concern. But as a

skilful

skillful physician, when he cannot cure a disease, applies himself to lessen its pain, and to mitigate its malignity, Solomon seems to treat his wicked patient in the same way. If thou wilt needs be wicked, says he, be so with some kind of discretion: for there is a wickedness which clothes a man with rags, fills him with diseases, covers him with infamy, drives him into banishment, or brings him to a jail and to the gallows. Avoid at least all crimes of this sort; so shalt thou do less harm to thyself, and to civil society; and by abstaining from grosser iniquities, thou mayst perchance get a sense of duty and a taste for virtue.

Be not righteous overmuch.

It is a melancholy consideration how nice and hard a point it seems to be for particular persons, or for societies, to keep the golden mean between infidelity and superstition, between irreligion and enthusiasm, and how apt many are to run into the one or the other, and to draw others after them into the same extreme. What our Saviour says of the path of religion, holds true of the path of discretion or prudence; Strait is the way, and few there be that find it; few indeed, comparatively speaking.

People of fashion and gaiety, who think of nothing are besides this world, and the unrighteousness thereof, who either professed unbelievers, or who never concern themselves about religion, these are a numerous tribe, even in Christian countries. The Gospel shines in vain to them: They chuse to sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death. They are often much addicted to scoffing and sneering at every thing that hath the appearance of sanctity, and endeavour to make piety contemptible, and to laugh it out of countenance.

Now a fanatical devotion, or piety without discretion, affords various objects of ridicule, which they know how to seize upon and to set off. The follies and impertinences of such people, and sometimes the hypocrisy and knavery

knavery that shines through shallow pretensions to godliness, all these furnish a fund of taillery for the profane. Sober virtue; unaffected goodness; a zeal accompanied with knowledge and conducted with prudence, these are majestic and venerable; and it is easier for wicked men even to hate them than to scorn them. Such examples will not serve the purpose of the profane; therefore they level their attacks against bigotry and superstition; insinuating at the same time that all religion is superstition.

On the other hand there are persons of a devout disposition, but of a gloomy pensive temper, and of a heated imagination, who abhor the profaneness and the carelessness which is so conspicuous in the gay and polite world. And thus far all is well, and they deserve commendation. But they stop not here; their piety is of that sort which sours the temper, and makes them intolerably arrogant and censorious. They think and speak uncharitably of those, whose devotion is less noisy, and whose religion is more rational. Reason is a thing which they suspect and undervalue, and they look upon the defenders of it, as upon men infected with luke-warmness and indifference for the cause of Christ.

What now can be done for these two sorts of persons? Alas, very little; since the Libertine will not think, and the Enthusiast cannot think to any good purpose. Unless they will listen to Reason, to that Reason which the one misemploys, and the other abhors; unless they will lend a hand, and do something towards mending themselves, little can be done for them by others.

The Libertine is by far the worse man of the two. If he hath abilities, he turns them against the Giver, and is not ashamed to have God for his benefactor, and the Devil for his instructor. The Fanatic, it may be, hath parts also; but his imagination hath preyed upon his reasoning faculties; and so far as this is constitutional, and a disease of the mind and body, it is more a misfortune than a fault.

But

But we may learn from the one and the other to take care of ourselves, lest a hatred for profaneness and dissipation draw us into a sour, mystical, unmeaning, exstatic kind of devotion ; and lest an aversion from this injudicious fervour betray us into a cold disregard for religion, and a levity of behaviour which doth not even save appearances, which makes men talk and act as if they were ashamed of being thought Christians, which gives just offence to serious persons, sets a bad example, and hath a pernicious influence on the young and unwary. Let our piety be sincere and active, but let it be sober and sedate ; and let us be more sedulous to lay a foundation of religious knowledge, and to act upon good principles, than to wind up our affections to spiritual raptures. Reason is stable, and her effects are permanent. The passions are fickle ; they depend much upon the state of the body, and the ebbing and flowing of the spirits. Sometimes the brisk ones prevail, and sometimes the desponding ones. Sometimes the man says, with St. Peter ; Lord, why cannot I follow thee now ? I will lay down my life for thy sake ; at another time he yields to a far less temptation than that which overthrew the Apostle.

Be not righteous overmuch.

1. In general, they are righteous overmuch, who run into any excess in the practice of those acts, which are of a religious nature, which are good, and absolutely necessary in a certain degree ; such, for example, as prayer, contemplation, retirement, reading the Scriptures and other good books, frequenting the public worship of God, instructing others, abstinence, mortification, alms-giving, and religious conversation. These things are overdone, when the practice of any of them interferes with other necessary duties, so as to cause them to be omitted ; or when they are carried farther than the health of the body or the attention of the mind can accompany them, or the situation and circumstances of life can admit.

2. Over-

2. Overrighteousness consists also in every thing that is properly called Will-worship. Will-worship is in general the invention and the practice of such expedients of appeasing or of pleasing God, as neither reason nor revelation suggest; and which, since they are not contained in the law of nature, or in the law of God, must either be wicked, or at least frivolous and foolish. This Will-worship hath been in all times and places the constant concomitant and the sure badge of superstition. To enumerate all the modes of superstition, and all the shapes in which it hath shewed itself in the Jewish Church, in the Pagan and in the Christian world, would be an endless as well as a needless task. It sufficeth to have mentioned in general the nature of Will-worship.

To us Christians, the Gospel is our sufficient and complete rule of behaviour; and if any Christian understands it tolerably, he will soon find his rule to be so strict and so excellent, that he will have no occasion to seek out and aim at sublimer accomplishments. Let him well consider his duty, as it is there laid down, and let him seriously ask himself the question, Have I complied with all these precepts? His conscience, I suppose, will reply to him; No, thou hast not: thou hast failed in this, and in that. Let him first live up to the Gospel, and when that time is come, we will give him full and free leave to apply himself to Will-worship, and to works of Supererogation. But that time assuredly never will come. His sun will be set before his task is thus accomplished; and if God receives him to favour, it must be, not by an act of justice, but by an act of mercy, accepting his endeavours, and pardoning his offences for the sake of Jesus Christ.

3. Religious zeal, being naturally brisk and resolute, is a warmth of temper, which may easily run into excesses, and which breaks in upon the great law of charity, when it produces oppression and persecution. The zealot pleads conscience for his own behaviour, but ne-

ver will allow that plea in those who dissent from him : and what a perverse and saucy absurdity is this !

In countries where there hath been an Ecclesiastical establishment, and a national form of religion, persecutions have usually been carried on by men, who in reality and at the bottom had no religion at all, but were influenced by political, or by self-interested views, joined to a proud and a cruel temper. Yet it is not to be denied that amongst persecutors there have been people really devout and religious, in their way, and acting according to conscience. We know for a certainty of one person upon record, who was such, namely St. Paul, before he was converted. Our Saviour says to his disciples ; The time cometh when whosoever killeth you will think that he doth God service. That time came soon, and St. Paul was one of those furious bigots. His example stands for an admonition to all men, especially to all who are in authority, to restrain their zeal from flaming out in unwarrantable vehemence in support of what they account to be true religion. For the same cause is the rash zeal of St. James and St. John recorded, who wanted Christ to let them call down fire from heaven, to consume those Samaritans who would not receive him with hospitality. Ye know not, said our Saviour to these impetuous disciples, ye know not what spirit ye are of ; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them.

4. Overrighteousness hath conspicuously appeared in indiscreet austerities, a solitary life, a voluntary poverty, and vows of celibacy. I join all these together, because they have very often gone together.

There seem to be diseases of the mind, as well as of the body, which burst out at certain seasons, and are contagious and epidemical. This sort of fanaticism, of which we are now speaking, had its rise in ancient times, and prevailed all over the Christian world. Christians then began to be distinguished into two sorts, the secular, and the spiritual.

A good

A good secular Christian in those days, was a man, for example, who was perhaps a married man, who was occupied in some honest and reputable calling, who was a good husband, a good father, a good master of a family, a good neighbour, a good subject, a good magistrate if he was in authority, a man courteous to all, kind to his relations and friends, charitable to the poor, frequenting the public worship of God, respecting the ministers of the Gospel, a man who made it his endeavour to live soberly, righteously, and godlily. We should be apt in these days to call such an one a good man, and to wish that we were plentifully furnished with persons of this character. But all this was accounted a low, imperfect, and vulgar sort of Christianity. The sublimer religion, which was then called Christian philosophy, was practised by pious persons, who bound themselves to a single life, departed from their houses and friends, gave up their possessions, retired to solitary places, and there spent their days in working with their own hands for a poor subsistence, but principally in praying, watching, fasting, contemplation, and silence; lived upon spare, coarse, and unwholesome food, and treated their bodies with so much severity, that if their Pagan enemies had used them so, they might have justly called it an inhuman persecution. This introduced the prohibition of marriage, extended to Monks, to Nuns, and to the Clergy. Now a small degree of sober reflection might have convinced Christians, that all this was overrighteousness, and the religion of good men who had zeal without knowledge, and devotion without judgment. Yet this is what the church of Rome extols, recommends, and requires.

5. This leads us to another instance of overrighteousness, which was common amongst the ancient Jews or Hebrews; namely, making solemn vows to God, without duly considering the inconveniences which might attend them. Such vows either ended in neglecting to perform them, which was perjury; or in performing them with a slovenly sorrow and reluctance, and in offending God, who loveth a cheerful giver. Solomon

Iomon therefore speaks of this practice in a manner rather dissuading than recommending it. Better is it, says he, that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. If that be the case, then it is best of all to keep out of the reach of such temptations, by making no such vows.

6. Zeal or righteousness is carried beyond its bounds when men run into unnecessary danger even for a good cause. A man hath a natural right to profess openly that religion which his conscience tells him is true, if he maintains no opinions plainly destructive to civil society. He hath also a right to disapprove and reject errors. But this may be done out of season and indiscreetly. The ancient Christians had a laudable zeal for the Gospel; but it carried some of them into excessive imprudence in provoking, insulting, and defying their Pagan enemies, and seeking out martyrdom when they were not called to it. But it was observable that several of these rash Zealots, when it came to the trial, fell off shamefully, and renounced their religion; whilst other Christians, who were timorous and dissident, who fled and hid themselves, and used every lawful method to shun persecution, being seized upon and brought forth to suffer, behaved by the gracious assistance of God with exemplary courage and constancy.

The example of St. Paul, after his conversion, is an example of pious discretion; and no Christian ever joined more happily the prudence of the serpent with the innocence of the dove. We find him escaping by flight from his enemies, pleading his privilege of a Roman citizen, taking advantage of the dissention between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, appealing from the Jewish Council to Cæsar's tribunal, and behaving himself respectfully and even politely to the Roman magistrates.

7. Another instance of overrighteousness appears in a busy, meddling, intriguing forwardness to reform defects, real or supposed, in the doctrines, discipline, or manners

manners of the Christian community. Every one is not qualified for the office of a Reformer. He hath a call, he will say: but a call to be turbulent and troublesome, is not a call from God. The Apostles, he will say, acted as Reformers, without asking leave of the Public. It is true; but they had good proofs to give of their call and of their authority. Since the Apostolical days, hardly any reformation ever prospered, unless the civil Magistrate had the conducting of it. The Rabble is a bad guide and counsellor in such attempts, and so are the leaders of the Rabble. The beginning of strife, says the Wise Man, is as when one letteth out water: and when the waters of popular strife are thus let out, the dirty torrent sweeps down every thing before it, good and bad, and throws all into confusion.

8. Lastly; a modest and a prudent man will not be overrighteous in the following instances:

He will not be forward to rebuke all evil-doers at all times, and on all occasions, when the bad temper, or the high station of the offenders may make them impatient of censure, and draw upon him for an answer, Who made thee a judge and a ruler over us? Mind thy own concerns, and mend thy own manners.

He will not be fond of disputing with every one who is in an error. Perhaps there is not a more disgusting quality, next to vice, than a spirit of contradiction and litigation, even although it be exerted in defence of truth. Such persons seem to have it more in view to assert the superiority of their own penetration and judgment, than to inform others, or to defend a good cause. They are most disagreeable companions, and most useless wranglers. It may be observed, that in almost all debates, even between civil and polite contenders, the issue is, that each departs with the same sentiments which he brought along with him, and after much hath been said, nothing is done on either side, by way of conviction.— This will make a wise man not overfond of the task of mending wrong heads.

Mention hath been made, I think, of most of the instances, wherein men may be overrighteous ; and it seems very expedient to warn all sober and well-meaning persons to avoid these extremes. As to the wicked, they want no caution upon this head : but a religious man often stands more in need of being guarded against overrighteousness than against profaneness, for this plain reason, that when he is tempted to sin against a known duty, he hath a monitor within, and is rebuked by his conscience ; but when he runs into the devout extremes, he unhappily approves his own conduct, and his mistaken conscience encourages him to go on. And yet after all, it is true, that as to a man's future state, it will be much better for him to have been over-religious than to have been profane. The former is an error : the latter is a crime. The former is usually a fault of the head : the latter is a fault of the heart.

S E R M O N VI.

NEHEMIAH V. 19.

Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

TH E R E is a disposition of mind called public Spirit, or the love of our country, which good men in all ages have exerted, which prudent men have encouraged by endeavouring to make it fashionable and honourable, which ingenious men have consecrated to immortality by their praises of it, which few men, how profligate soever, have had the impudence to censure openly, which Ridicule, that spares nothing, hath been almost afraid to attack, and which in our country hath been much talked of, and seldom found.

It hath been commonly said that virtues are better taught and better enforced by example than by precept. If so, we have in the person of Nehemiah an instance of public spirit, which may be set against any thing that History can produce, and will not suffer by the comparison; nor can (*a*) Greece or Rome boast of an Heroe superior to him in this great and good quality.

(*b*) Nehemiah was a Jew, who had never seen Jerusalem, which was not the place of his birth; but his ancestors had dwelt there, and were buried there. His

(*a*) Grotius compares him to Camillus, and to the elder Cato.

(*b*) See Prideaux's *Connect*.

father seems to have been one of those Jews who were carried to Shushan, where was the court of the Persian king, and who, getting a good settlement there, would not embrace the opportunity of going to Judæa, when the Jews had obtained leave to return from the captivity; which doubtless must have been the case of many besides himself, who, either on account of age and infirmity, or of their possessions and occupations, or of their neighbours, friends, relations, and old acquaintances, chose to remain where they had so long dwelt, and where they were, in a manner, naturalized.

Nehemiah was cup-bearer to the Persian king, which was a place of great honour, and of no less profit. He was highly in the favour of that prince, and very rich, and as to this world, had all that he could hope and wish. It was scarcely to be expected that one in his situation would have bestowed a thought upon his remote and poor and desolate country; and not one of ten thousand in his circumstances would have concerned himself about it. If at that distance he had sent a generous relief to his brethren in Judæa, and performed such kind offices towards them as he conveniently could, even this would have been a friendly and liberal behaviour; but he proposed to himself to do much more than this.

For some who came from Jerusalem told him of the bad state of that city, how it lay in ruins, and how the inhabitants were exposed to the insults of their enemies, and to the scorn of their neighbours, and were very weak and very miserable. Upon hearing this, he was greatly afflicted, and applied himself to fasting and earnest supplications to God, that he would look favourably upon his people and then he resolved to take the first opportunity of addressing himself to the king.

One day, the king observed that he appeared to be melancholy, which had not been usual with him, and asked him the cause. He replied, Why should not my countenance

countenance be sad when the city, the place of my fathers sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?

The king granted him his request, and sent him to Judæa, as Governor, with powers to rebuild the walls and gates, which he executed boldly, speedily, and effectually. The neighbouring nations did all that they could to oppose it, and conspired together, and resolved to attack the Jews, and to destroy them if they attempted to repair their ruined city. Upon this, Nehemiah did not order the people to go to prayers only, and to confess their sins, and to commit their cause to heaven; but, like a pious and a brave man, he exhorted them to join with him in supplications to God, and at the same time to put themselves in a posture of defence. But his own words will express it best: We made our prayer to God, and I set the people with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I said unto them, Be not afraid of them: Remember the Lord who is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives and your houses.

Nehemiah found the people in a deplorable condition, overwhelmed with poverty, and eaten up with debts, and labouring under the tyranny of usurers and extortioners, who though they were of their own nation, yet took a base advantage of their distress, and lent them money upon excessive interest, so that they were forced to sell their lands, and then their children, to buy bread. This oppression and iniquity he entirely removed, partly by persuasion, and partly by authority, and obliged all persons to make restitution of this illegal gain, and to swear that they would do so no more.

Amongst the Jews there were false and treacherous brethren, men who were in a foreign interest, and received bribes from their idolatrous neighbours, and who sought to bring an invasion upon their own country, and to distress the people and the Governor; and amongst these

these apostates there were priests, and prophets, false prophets, who gave out predictions to frighten the Jews ; and one of whom told Nehemiah that there was a conspiracy formed against him, and assassins determined to kill him ; and advised him to go and shut himself up in the temple, and offered him his assistance and his company. And I answered, says Nehemiah, Should such a man as I flee ? Who is there that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life ? I will not go in.

Nehemiah then returned to the Persian court, and obtained leave to come again as Governor, and proceeded to reform both the Church and State of the Jews. The Emperor Augustus boasted that he had found Rome built with bricks, and left it built with marble. Nehemiah found Jerusalem an heap of rubbish ; and left it so well inhabited, adorned, and fortified, that it soon became a city of note, and recovered in a great measure its former lustre.

He and Ezra caused the law of God to be read and explained to the people, and all its rites and precepts to be religiously observed ; and then began Synagogues to be erected in many places, and the people to meet there regularly every sabbath day, which kept up the face at least of religion amongst them, and also preserved them from idolatry ever after, though God soon ceased to raise them up any more prophets.

Nehemiah continued Governor for twelve years, and supported his dignity with great magnificence and liberality ; and this vast expence he bore from his own private fortunes, without taking any thing from the nation, or accepting the allowance which the other Governors before him had received ; and, which is no less (*c*) commendable, difficult, and uncommon, he also governed his

(c) — cauſas bellorum (Agricola) statuit exſcindere. A fe ſuisque orſus, prium domum ſuam coērcuit, quod plerisque haud minus arduum erat, quam provinciam regere. Tacitus, Vit. Agric. 19.

his own family, and kept his domestics in good order, and suffered them not to pillage or to insult the people.

Nehemiah went again to Persia, and returning to Jerusalem found many corruptions crept in during his absence, which he instantly reformed with zeal and resolution. He probably continued in his government to the time of his death, which seems to have been in a very old age, when he was full of years and honour.

If he had lived in some polite age and country, he would have had statues erected in the public places, and all the regard paid to him which a generous and ingenuous people can bestow upon true merit. But as he did what he did principally for the service of God, and of religion, he desired to have his reward rather from God than from men ; and therefore he breaks out once and again in these words ; Think upon me, my God, for good, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy. He prays that God would accept his good intentions, and forgive his imperfections.

He had his recompence in both worlds ; happy in the love of his people, happy in seeing his honest labours blessed with great success ; and his own history, written by himself, and being part of the holy Scriptures transmits his name and his reputation to all generations, when statues and pillars, and other frail monuments of human gratitude, moulder away and fall into oblivion.

And now, to make a proper use of this bright example, I shall offer some observations concerning the love of our country, and the behaviour by which it is evidenced.

It may be justly affirmed, that there is no one good and commendable quality, of which there is not some precept, or some example, in the holy Scriptures. A conceited, fantastical, and half-learned Writer of this nation hath said of the Gospel, that it neither recommends private friendship, nor the love of our country. The answer is obvious :

First,

First, there are many examples of these dispositions recorded both in the Old and in the New Testament. Our Lord himself had his particular friends; himself burst into tears at the foresight of the calamities, which were to overwhelm his unhappy country, though he was not to partake of them.

Secondly, the Scriptures of the Old Testament, if rightly understood, have fairly intimated, and the Gospel hath expressly taught, that we ought to love all mankind. Now by this precept, Religion sufficiently enforceth both private friendship and public spirit, and at the same time corrects a vicious excess to which each of those affections are very prone, namely, a regard shewed to one person, or to one nation, at the expence of the duty to mankind. This was evidently the case amongst the Greeks and the Romans, many of whose eminent Leaders, to advance the wealth and grandeur of their own people, scrupled not to oppress and pillage other nations. Their courage and conduct are set in the most favourable light by their own ingenious and partial Historians; but, if examined by the rules of reason, must usually stand condemned as mere outrages and robberies.

Sacred History informs us that God created only two persons, from whom all of us descended. It was so ordered perhaps, with this intention, that in the infant world the first race might grow up in peace and love in one family, and under one father and mother; and that when they were dispersed, they might still remember that they were all of one original, the children of one human father, and of one heavenly Father, and so might retain a brotherly love and regard to each other, howsoever separated in different places.

Reason and the light of nature shew us that men are all partakers of one common nature, all are born and live and die, all have a body and a soul, and the same affections, inclinations and wants, all have the same natural

natural and moral law to observe, and nothing can be more like one man than another is. There is therefore a relation between man and man much closer than between man and angel, or man and brute. This also should create mutual benevolence ; and he who loves himself shouold love another, who is his other self and his own image.

Our Saviour hath enforced and inculcated this duty so particularly and frequently, that it is altogether needless to produce proofs of it.

Under this general duty of love to our fellow-creatures is comprised the love of particulars, of those especially to whom we are most obliged and nearest related, and of those with whom we are united in civil society. But this particular duty to parents, children, kings, governors, teachers, brethren, friends, benefactors, countrymen, is to be regulated by the general duty. We must so love these, as not to cast off regard to others, much less to injure them.

The love of our friends is in some sense natural, it often grows up with us, it prevents reason and reflexion : it is therefore a duty which may in a great measure be trusted to us, and which wants rather to be explained than enforced. But the love of mankind is a manly thing, a sublimer affection, and wants to be well recommended, and strictly required ; for, as our Saviour observes, If ye love those who love you, it is no great virtue ; even children do it : and if ye love your own country better than another nation, do not the Pagans the same ?

The love of our country is then commendable when it is reasonable ; for there may certainly be cases and circumstances when it ceaseth to be a particular duty, and when we may and should love and serve another country preferably to our own native land. Such, for instance, is the case of those who flying from tyranny and persecution have been courteously received in other nations,

tions, and have obtained there the rights and privileges of citizens, of which they had been unjustly deprived at home. But it is beside my present purpose to discuss this point. I am now to shew what duty we owe to our country, and to recommend the behaviour of Nehemiah to our imitation, as far as our condition and abilities will permit. The character of Nehemiah is uncommon. Such Princes and such Governors as he do not often make their appearance, and it is very well if a few are to be found in the world who have the honour in some degree to resemble him.

Nehemiah was ruler of a nation, and, as such, can be no example to private persons, though he be an excellent one to princes and governors, who, if they would be esteemed as he was, must act as he did. For though wealth and power may be obtained by many ways, yet respect and reputation can only be acquired by deserving them. But the submission which the sober and religious part of the Jews paid to Nehemiah is an example to us how we should behave ourselves to good kings and rulers, and even to tolerable rulers. We should willingly obey and assist them, shew them the respect due to their station, neither say nor do any thing that may lessen their character, and weaken their authority, and pray for their peace and prosperity, upon which indeed our own depends, and with which it is connected.

Nehemiah was a zealous supporter of the Law of God ; and in this he is an example to persons in authority ; with such limitations however as the difference between the Jewish oeconomy and the Christian dispensation suggests. For the political laws of the Jews are no laws to us, any farther than they are confirmed by Reason, or by the Gospel.

The enforcing of Religion is perhaps one of the most nice and difficult duties of a Christian magistrate. It requires caution, good temper, prudence, dexterity, and

and probity, to give no encouragement to licentiousness, and yet to avoid all such compulsion as may injure civil liberty or invade the rights of conscience; for as vice is the reproach and the ruin of any people, so is persecution. Therefore Christian governments are necessitated to overlook and connive at some immoralities, at some irreligious and profane talkers and writers; not because such offenders deserve any favour or toleration, or any thing better than a jail, but because it is so very hard to find out and apply a general remedy which is not in one respect or other as bad as the disease. What is speculatively right, and what is practicable, are two things.

Nehemiah loved his country, principally because it was the seat of true religion, the place where God had chosen to put his name, and to fix his worship. The same reason have we to love our country, where the Protestant religion is established; a religion purged from many gross errors which ignorance, superstition, and arbitrary power had introduced into the Church; where the Scriptures are put into the hands of the people, and divine service performed in the vulgar tongue; where men are at liberty to follow the dictates of their own conscience, and to serve God in their own way, a favour extended even to those who would not shew us the same indulgence, and who never yet failed to persecute heretics and schismatics, when they had it in their power; where we have a religious system and constitution, which, though to call it perfect would be to pay it a compliment at the expence of truth, yet comparatively speaking, must be allowed far preferable to the principles and the notions which prevail in many parts of the Christian world.

Nehemiah loved his country, probably for the sake of its civil government, which was not tyrannical and arbitrary, but in many respects somewhat like ours. If we love not our country for the same reason, we are not worthy of those laws and privileges which advantageously

ly distinguish us from many other kingdoms, and which we ought to preserve as a sacred deposit, and transmit to our posterity, and rather part with our lives than with our liberties.

Nehemiah set the people an example of piety, and endeavoured above all things to make them religious, and thereby to secure to them the favour and protection of God. In this we should imitate him, and without this in vain do we pretend to love our country. It was judiciously said that an (*d*) orator is a good man skilled in speaking. For if he be not good, he cannot be an Orator; he is only a Prater; and all his eloquence, though he possess it in a considerable degree, signifies little, and hath small influence. In like manner a Patriot is a religious man, who employs himself in serving the public; and a good citizen is one who loves God and his neighbour. Whosoever neglects his duty to God, cannot perform his duty to the public in a complete and effectual manner. There are, as there ever have been, men who have little religion, and yet some share of what we commonly call honour and public spirit, who would not injure their nation for private advantage, and would risk their fortunes or their lives for their country. Yet these persons often do more harm another way, by their immoralities, by setting a bad example, and corrupting the minds, of men, than they can compensate by intrepidity, generosity, and honour.

But in reality, a patriot without religion, and an honest man without the fear of God, is one of the most uncommon creatures upon earth; and unhappy are the people who have nothing better to trust to than to the honour of such Counsellors and Magistrates. Let revenge, or ambition, or pride, or lust, or profit tempt the man to a base and vile action, and you may as well

hope

(*d*) Vir bonus, dicendi peritus.

hope to bind up an hungry tiger with a cobweb, as to hold this debauched patriot in the visionary chains of Decency, or to charm him with the intellectual beauty of Truth and Reason.

There never was perhaps a wiser and a greater Ruler than Moses, or one who had a sincerer affection for the people committed to his care. His piety enabled him many times to save his nation, when his courage and his conduct would have stood him in no stead. Often had God threatened to destroy the whole congregation, and to make him the father and founder of a new people; but by his earnest entreaties he averted the divine wrath, and obtained pardon for them. In all this there was something extraordinary: but from the whole tenor of the Scriptures it appears that the prayers of the righteous are prevalent with God, and may bring down blessings upon themselves, and their families, and their country. If so, a poor man, who is covered with obscurity, and is scarcely known to his next neighbour, may by his intercession with his heavenly Father do his country more service than the wisest statesman, or the ablest general.

Of all the titles that were ever given to a man, the most glorious and the most desirable is to be called, Father of his country; and there have been Princes who have received it with tears of joy, as the greatest of all honours. But there is a title greater than this, which God gave to Abraham, when he called him, Abraham my friend. To be styled, the friend of God, by the Almighty himself, is something far above all the appellations which human custom, and human gratitude, and human flattery can bestow. Such a person must needs be the best and the most useful friend to mankind, and to his own country.

In the character of Nchemiah we see liberality, disinterestedness, courage, industry, uniformity of conduct, and every social accomplishment. Though our situation
and

and circumstances permit us not to do what he did, yet we may shew the same temper, by acting boldly and honourably in our station, by discountenancing profaneness and immorality, by encouraging virtue and knowledge, and learning, and useful arts and sciences, by rejecting all unlawful gain, all private profit which is detrimental to society, by relieving the wants of our brethren, by submitting to the inconveniences and hardships which the public good may at any time require, by loving our religion and liberties better than the wages of slavery and iniquity, and by acting thus constantly and steadily, whether it be fashionable or unfashionable, whether it be safe or dangerous. This is the general duty of subjects: and as to the Ministers of the Gospel, they are more particularly obliged both to teach and to practise obedience to the Government in all things lawful; not for fear of punishment, which is servile; nor for lucre, which is sordid; but for the sake of a good conscience, for the sake of their own solemn engagements, and of the public tranquillity and welfare.

S E R M O N VII.

P R O V . xxii. 2.

The rich and poor meet together : the Lord is the maker of them all.

- T**WO propositions are contained in these words.
- I. That in all nations there are rich, and there are poor people ; and that this difference of conditions is unavoidable.
 - II. That they have all one common Father, whose providence extends over them all, and who permits this inequality for wise and good purposes.

They may be called rich, who have a large property, which sufficeth not only for the necessaries, but for all the conveniences of life, and suited to support them in a genteel rank. They may be called poor, who, having no property, or very little, live, as it is said, from hand to mouth, and are obliged to support themselves by daily labour ; so that if they lose their health, or their employment, and the opportunities of earning their subsistence, they will be reduced to want, and to a dependence upon the charity of others.

All nations, as it is well known, contain in them these two sorts of citizens ; besides whom there is a third and a numerous class of persons, who are placed in the middle

idle state, who may be called poor, when compared with the rich ; and rich, when compared with the poor.

Again, there are some who are excessively rich, and possess more than can be of real benefit to themselves and their families ; and there are some who are absolutely destitute of the necessaries of life, and truly in a starving condition.

These various states God in the course of his providence permits ; and though he doth not approve of them all, yet neither doth he visibly interpose to prevent them. Certainly it is not the will of God that there should be in civil society any persons immoderately rich, or extremely necessitous ; any more than it is the will of God that men should be wicked and irreligious. To permit is one thing : to approve and like is another thing.

And now I proceed to the first proposition.

i. In all civil societies there are rich and there are poor people. This is the unavoidable consequence of the constitution of things. It will appear to be so, if we examine whence ariseth wealth, and whence ariseth poverty.

Now riches arise from three causes ; from the virtues and abilities of men, from the vices of men, and from chance or good fortune, as it is usually called, that is, from events towards which the rich man himself contributes little or nothing.

Riches arise from the virtues and the useful qualities of men. Thus, when a person hath good natural abilities, joined to an honest heart, and is so situated that he hath opportunities of improving and exerting his talents, when he can be serviceable to the public, when he is industrious, prudent, just, sober, civil, and charitable, when he is beloved, respected, assisted, and trusted, he often receives the temporal reward of his labours and virtues, and becomes rich. Hence in those parts of scripture, which contain prudential and political precepts, industry, honesty, and charity are frequently recommended,

commended, as the way to raise a man's fortune; at least, as the way to secure him from friendless indigence.

Again, on the contrary, riches arise also from the vice of men, and in that sense are the Mammon of unrighteousness. We know that there are in all times and places persons to be found, who grow rich and powerful by unjustifiable methods, by extortion, by fraud, by violence, by flattering the great, by courting and pleasing the worthless and the debauched, by prostituting their conscience, by sordid parsimony, by covetous industry, by various oblique and scandalous ways, to which no person of honour will submit. Providence sometimes permits such wretches to thrive; whence we may learn the small value of abundant wealth, in the sight of God, and in a just estimate of things.

Riches also, and indeed very often, arise from that which is called Chance or Fortune; as when they descend to a man by inheritance, and he enjoys the title and estate of his ancestors, and reaps where he did not sow; when he receives favours from those of whom he had no reason to expect them, when they are thrown in his way by unforeseen accidents, and he hath nothing to do, but to stretch out his hand and receive them. These are the three sources of wealth.

To the same three causes poverty may also be ascribed.

It arises sometimes from the virtues of men; and this happens more especially when men live under a wicked and tyrannical government, or suffer oppression and persecution for the sake of religion. History both ancient and modern affords us many instances of such sufferings. In this case a man hath no cause to be ashamed of his poverty. His poverty is his crown and his glory.

Persons who have dissipated an ample fortune, and are become necessitous by vanity, luxury, and debauchery; who even then are not ashamed of their vices; who take a pleasure in recollecting their past adventures, and boast

of their art of confounding their money ; who despise the œconomy and temperance even of those to whom they apply for relief ; such persons are to be found up and down in society, and such genteel beggars are truly most odious and contemptible objects. If sensible and good-natured people are induced to relieve them, what they give, they give (*a*) not to the man, but to humanity.

Persons who are fallen from a wealthy to an indigent state, not through their own fault, but by public or private calamities, these are frequently to be found, and these are proper objects of friendly assistance and support. Every one who hath principles of virtue and religion will be glad to serve them ; and considering the fluctuating state of this world, a prudent person ought to think that whilst he is serving them, he is serving himself, since their case to-day may be his case to-morrow.

But persons who have lost all in times of persecution, and have been obliged to quit house, and friends, and land, and country for the sake of a good conscience, these stand in a much higher rank, these are entitled not only to relief, but to respect and veneration. Thus poverty arises sometimes from honourable causes, from the integrity of good men exciting the hatred and malice of the wicked.

Poverty also often springs from the contrary cause, from the personal vices of men. Many vices there are which have the closest connection with indigence, and naturally produce it, such as laziness, extravagance, and debauchery. Daily experience shews this, and assures us that the transition is easy from a gaming table to a jail, from the house of harlots to the house of correction, and from sloth to beggary. The holy Scriptures make the same observation, and use it as a prudential motive to caution men against such sins as draw after them the loss of every thing that is valuable even in this life.

Poverty

(a) Non homini, sed humanitati.

Poverty also arises from what is called ill fortune, that is, from discouragements, disadvantages, and calamities which the man himself did not contribute to produce. This is the case, when a person is born of needy parents, who cannot provide for him, and put him forward in the world; when he loses his relations and friends in his infancy; when he is defrauded, injured, and oppressed by those who have more power or cunning than he can contend with. Thus also public calamities, war, pestilence, famine, earthquakes, inundations, ship-wrecks, fire, and other disasters, are an inexhaustible source of poverty, and the ruin of multitudes.

But farther; Not only nations are necessarily divided into rich and poor, but there must be also a perpetual fluctuation of property, by which the rich become poor, and the poor become rich; so that neither state is of a fixed and permanent nature. Riches, says Solomon, make themselves wings: they fly away as an eagle. Poverty also sometimes is a bird of passage, and takes her flight from those with whom she seemed to have taken up her abode.

Wealth by various means slips from the possessors, and gets from few into more hands, and then it is like a large river, which, being cut into many channels, becomes a number of small rivulets.

But though in the common course of things it is easier for a rich person to become poor, than for a poor person to become rich, yet neither is this latter case so unfrequent. There are always instances of persons, who setting out with a very small income, either by their own ability and industry, or by sudden turns of fortune, become great and rich.

Not only all societies and communities consist of rich and poor; but it is farther to be observed, that the poor will always be far more numerous than the rich. We see that it is so, and we know that it must be so. The re-

venues of a populous nation bear no proportion to the number of its inhabitants; the division therefore must needs be unequal. Beside, as it is easier to go downhill than uphill, so it is easier to spend money than to get it. Mens appetites are keener than their abilities, and they can without much study find out various ways of gratifying their senses at the expence of their pockets, whilst they have little skill or inclination to pursue the true ways of thriving; and it is hardly conceivable how much is foolishly wasted even by people in narrow circumstances. Riches also and profitable stations being objects pursued by many, they must needs be often pursued in vain. Where the prizes are few, and the competitors numerous, the majority must come off with their labour for their pains. Moreover, though all men have nearly the same passions, they are far from having the same abilities, either for acquiring wealth and favour, or for transacting business, or for getting useful knowledge; they are also far from having the same advantageous opportunities; and so, through internal impediments and external discouragements, the bulk of the people will be gradually upon the decline, till they settle amongst the lower class, and become only fit for bodily labour. But bodily labour hardly ever raised a fortune: at the most, it only secures from hunger and nakedness and beggary. A large income, if it be an acquired one, must be acquired by the head rather than by the hands.

Thus it evidently appears that, whilst there is human liberty, whilst there are virtues and vices, whilst there are vicissitudes of fortune, and revolutions of affairs, there must be in all times and places a mixture of high and low, of rich and poor. Providence permits it, and in some sense may be said to (b) appoint it, since it results from the nature and constitution of this world.

II. Now

(b) See this subject very ingeniously discussed by Aristophanes *Plut.* in a dialogue between Chremylus and the Goddess Poverty, ver. 507, &c,

II. Now let us consider, secondly, the moral reflection made by Solomon upon this inequality. The rich and poor meet together : the Lord is the maker of them all. That is to say ; They have one common Parent, whose providence extends over them all. In that respect they are equal. And if so, there should be no great difference, as to real happiness, between them.

It should be remembered that those accidents and natural evils must be thrown out of the question, which arise not properly from a state of poverty : for poverty and beggary are different things, and we are considering the former, and not the latter.

Let us see then whether there be much disparity in point of happiness between the great and the small, the master and the servant, the gentleman and the labourer, the rich and the poor.

Shallow reasoners, and superficial observers of human nature and human life, will judge without hesitation that the rich have every advantage on their side. Wealth, say they, buys titles, procures high stations, opens the way to honour and to power, commands respect and submission, and either contains in itself every accomplishment, or, which is as good, supplies the defect of every accomplishment. A rich man is above the world, able to say what he will, and to do what he will, and to pursue enjoyments that lie out of the reach of the vulgar.

Yet not much satisfaction can arise from all this. To have honour and authority, unless it be honestly acquired and decently supported, is to be raised to splendid infamy. Power wantonly exercised is the undefireable opportunity of doing mischief, for which a severer account is to be given in the next state, and not seldom in the present state. Wealth used for vile purposes, or for no good purposes, can be no real blessing to the waster or to the hoarder of it. Independency, rightly understood, is sometimes

sometimes a blessing : but it is sometimes a curse and a calamity. He who cannot conduct himself, is safer when he is conducted by others ; and a blind man would be mad, who should chuse to shew his independency by refusing the necessary assistance of a guide. It is often an advantage to be in a state of dependence, as under a good parent, or a good master ; and the days which are spent in that condition, are frequently the happiest days of our life. To do what we please, is a wretched privilege, when it enables us to do what we ought not. To follow pleasure that ends in disappointment and pain, is to court and invite misery, and to hasten it upon us ; as if misery would not come too readily of her own accord, unearned, unsought, and unpursued ! Solomon, who had wealth enough to know its nature, says ; When goods increase, they are increased that eat them ; and what good is there to the owners thereof, saying the beholding of them with the eyes ? Thus far there seems to be no considerable advantage on the side of wealth.

The poor are, or they may be, more free from uneasiness than the rich. As they usually have fewer desires, fewer false and artificial wants, more moderate expectations, and more bounded views, they have fewer disquiets, less anxiety, less sensibility of hardships, and cooler apprehensions of future events ; and these sorts of cares and commotions are no small abatements of human happiness.

In point of health, the poor, I mean those who are poor and sober, have the superiority. Temperance, exercise, and labour, to which their income and their station seem to oblige them, prevent those diseases which indolence and luxury create : and in case of sickness, their remedies are simple, and easily obtained, especially in this country, where the humanity and liberality of the present age hath provided for them in various ways.

Such

Such objects, it is to be hoped, are seldom so far neglected, as to find no assistance.

The extremes either of plenty or of indigence usually occasion various distempers, and shorten the thread of human life. For too much indulgence in eating, drinking, cloathing, sleeping, and other things, and on the contrary too much fatigue and hardship, attended with a spare and unwholesome diet, spoil the constitution, and are the underminers of health and strength. So that examples of a very long life are more commonly to be found amongst those who never were deprived of necessaries, or accustomed to elegancies. They therefore who are in a middle state between wealth and want, should be thankful for their lot, and instead of envying those who are above them, should consider how many are placed beneath them.

In point of decent conveniences, it must be owned that the rich have the advantage: but yet how far such conveniences contribute to happiness is not clear; how far the conveniences, to which a man hath never been accustomed, are necessary to his well-being. If he feels not the want of them, they are to him in the list of superfluities.

The lower part of mankind have too frequently been querulous, envious of those who were better accommodated, and desirous either of rising to an equality with such persons, or of bringing them down to an equality with themselves. This may incline them to think that the levelling system would set all to rights. But a more absurd and pernicious scheme cannot enter into the mind of man.

If the whole property and revenue of any country were equally divided amongst the inhabitants, they would be reduced to a state of approaching very nearly to poverty. There would be an end of all liberal arts and sciences, of all learned education, of all public charities, of all extensive trade and commerce, of all encouragement

ment to industry, of all national credit, and indeed of all civil government. And thus poverty, ignorance, ill manners, independency and anarchy would overspread the land ; and the inhabitants would be reduced to the most wretched state, accompanied with this reflection, that they had brought it upon themselves, and suffered no more than they deserved.

Indeed such a state could not continue ; for wealth and poverty will fluctuate : they are like the sea, which is never at rest, but always either ebbing or flowing. Power and wealth would by degrees return to some, and poverty to others. Men are not formed for a state of equal frugality and independency in this life. God hath made us for one another ; some are qualified to govern, others to obey ; some to teach, others to learn ; some to contrive, others to execute ; some to labour with their head, others to labour with their hands ; and the rich could no more subsist without the assistance of the poor, than the poor without the assistance of the rich.

The very manner in which we enter into this world shews that we are not equal in all respects, for then we ought all to be created in a state of manhood. But infancy is dependency, and we begin by being in subjection, and receive from others the improvements of body and mind. How high soever our station may be, we have obligations upon us of reverence, gratitude, and affection to those who took care of us in our younger years.

Let us now make some application of the present subject.

I mentioned to you before, that though the extremes of over-abundant wealth and of indigence are too often to be found in this world, and though God may be said to permit whatsoever he doth not interpose to hinder, yet he doth not approve of either of these extremes. Reason and Revelation consider them as natural and moral

moral disorders, which men should endeavour to remove.

Civil government is of human institution, and of divine approbation. God, having given us abilities and means to feed and cloath ourselves, doth not put meat into our mouths, and raiment upon our body, but leaves that to us. So, having given us understanding and reason, to discern the necessity of government and good order, he leaves us to form ourselves into societies, and to regulate them according to our common convenience. There is only one model of civil government of which God is the immediate author, and that is the Jewish Republic, as formed upon the Laws of Moses: and from those laws it manifestly appears that it was the will and design of God to guard that people against excessive riches and excessive want. These extremes his Providence intended to prevent or remove, as far as Providence can hinder them, without using such compulsion as would not suit with human nature, and would destroy the free agency of man.

The very same plan and design is contained in the Gospel; so that if all the inhabitants of a Christian nation were to live up exactly to the precepts of our Lord, and the exhortations of his Apostles, excessive wealth and extreme indigence would hardly be found amongst them. There are three precepts or laws of Christianity, which tend directly to remove these extremes; and they are the law of charity, the law of industry, and the law of temperance.

If the law of charity were universally observed, the rich would apply the superfluities of their wealth to the relief of the poor, the persons in a middle state would concur, and contribute their share in proportion, and thus multitudes would be assisted, and none would be left to perish for want, at least, none in peaceable and prosperous times.

If the law of industry were generally observed, the number of the necessitous would be considerably reduced; and laziness, which is one great cause of indigence, would be abolished.

If the law of temperance had the same due regard paid to it, persons in affluent or in tolerable circumstances would avoid foolish and needless expences, and would have the more to spare for those who are in want; and persons of a lower rank would not dissipate their slender fortunes by vain amusements, by dress, by gaming, by drunkenness, by lewdness, by endeavouring to ape their superiors in expensive follies and vices.

From the things which have been said, it is easy to collect the particular duties of the rich, and of the poor.

Liberality and a public spirit are properly the duties of the Great. In the days of our ancestors, and before the Reformation, Religion was in a very languishing condition, and the piety which subsisted was usually of the childish and superstitious kind. But though Christian knowledge and Christian virtues seem to have taken their flight from the Christian world, one Virtue still remained, and that virtue was Charity, or Liberality; charity well-intended, though too often misapplied. However, to that charity were owing Hospitals for the reception of the needy, public Schools for the education of youth, and Colleges in the Universities for their farther improvement.

The same charitable spirit, but more enlightened and better conducted, hath continued amongst us since the Reformation, and great additions have been made to the useful establishments above-mentioned.

As to the rich, they ought also to remember that in them cruelty and insolence towards the poor is highly criminal. The Lord is the Maker of them all, says Solomon; and therefore, as he observes with a remarkable strength of expression, Who so mocketh the

poor,

poor, reproacheth his maker. God takes the insult as committed directly against himself ; and woe to the man who contendeth with his Creator !

We all enjoy one common nature, and so far we are all upon the same foot. Though there be an inequality of circumstances, the original equality still remains. Christianity informs us also of another equality in a far more important point, an equal share in the rights, privileges, promises and blessings of the Gospel. The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is like the sun, which shines equally upon the palace and the cottage ; it is like the dew of heaven, which refreshes the tallest trees and the lowest shrubs. In consequence of this unbounded favour, the meanest person upon earth may be a member of Christ, and a child of God, and shall be an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven in that day when he who exalteth himself shall be abased, and he who abaseth himself shall be exalted.

Pride and wealth are too often connected together. Therefore ought the rich to be particularly careful to avoid this odious vice ; and they especially who are arisen from a low to an high station. For such children of Fortune have frequently ten times more pride than other people ; whether it be because they suspect that they are not sufficiently reverenced by those who were once their equals, or their superiors ; or whether it be that few have a head strong enough to bear a sudden change from necessity to abundance, and from dependency to authority. But in fact, so it is that amongst them you shall find the most glaring and shocking instances of vanity and arrogance.

As to the poor, they have various motives and obligations both to honest industry, and to patience and submission under their present condition. If, as Solomon says, God is the Maker of the poor as well as of the rich, he is consequently their Father too, and their

Bene-

Benefactor. Such a portion of happiness may usually be obtained by them as will make their present condition tolerable. But what are the sons of men, without exception? Strangers, sojourners, pilgrims, travellers. All temporal differences will cease for ever, when we come to our journey's end; and that end is near to many of us, and is not far from any of us.

S E R M O N VIII.

P S A L M cxlv. 9.

The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.

SINCE it is certain that we made not ourselves, and that the things about us are effects proceeding from some cause, there must be One upon whom all depend, and who himself depends upon none.

The magnificence and variety and beauty of the universe, the exact proportion of its parts, the decent order in which they are disposed, and the regularity of their several motions, proclaim the whole to be the work of one Creator, who is of himself without beginning or end, who formed it and gave it laws, who is every where present to govern and preserve it, who is most wise and most powerful, who is a pure mind, separated from matter, and free from all perturbations, most perfect and most happy, and sufficient to his own happiness.

The consideration of this supreme wisdom and power and happiness which belong to the divine nature, would excite in us wonder and veneration and fear; but when to these attributes we join goodness, this most amiable quality seems to add new perfections to all the rest, represents God to us, not only as the absolute Lord, but as the kind Parent of all, and makes him the proper object of gratitude and reliance and love.

It

It is observable that in the Gentile world, they who had tolerable notions of the supreme God, though in many things they erred concerning him, agreed in ascribing goodness to him, reckoned it the principal of his perfections, and called him ^(a) The Best and the Greatest: and indeed there are so many and so clear proofs of the divine goodness, that though some objections may be raised against it from the evil which is in the world, the evidence of it remains for ever superior, firm, and unshaken.

Goodness is the same quality in all beings which have understanding, in God, in Angels, and in men; it is, and it must be, the same in kind, differing only in degree. From the knowledge therefore which we have of goodness, as it is in men, we may frame to ourselves some knowledge of the goodness of God, removing from it all the defects which we observe in human goodness, and ascribing to it the utmost degree of perfection which we can conceive.

Now goodness in us is a disposition and an endeavour to promote the welfare and happiness of others; and from this notion of human goodness we may frame some conceptions of the divine goodness, and say that goodness in God is a disposition to bestow at all times and in all places upon all his creatures all the good, which, according to their several natures, they are capable of receiving, and which it is reasonable that he, as the wise governor and preserver of the whole, should bestow upon each individual.

That this perfection belongs to God, may be proved several ways.

1. That God is good appears from the necessary connection between goodness and other divine perfections. God is supremely wise, and knoweth, beyond a possibility of mistaking, what is best and most beneficial for the whole; he is almighty, and able to execute his purposes, and possessing every thing in which happiness

con-

^(a) In the Platonic Trinity, Ἀρετή stands above Νόος and Φύκη.

consists, he can be under no temptation to hurt and to oppress others.

2. The same truth also appears thus :

To suppose that God is not good, is to suppose him weaker and more imperfect and worse than the worst of his creatures.

In men, every sin in general, and in particular every sin against the rules of goodness, may be ascribed to the temptation of present profit or pleasure, to a power which the mind hath of fixing its thoughts entirely upon the object which it desires, and of overlooking the ill consequences arising from it, and in some measure to error and mistake. Thus a person who oppresses or defrauds others; is led into injustice by views of self-interest, by the urgent desire of gratifying a violent and favourite passion, and of finding present ease and convenience ; and he is mistaken when he fancies that it is his interest to indulge a depraved inclination, or to obtain a worldly advantage by evil means : he is mistaken in this ; for his loss must be far greater than his profit, and his pain than his pleasure. Swayed by these motives, and deluded by these errors, a sinner acts, never chusing evil because it is evil, but because he thinks it agreeable for the present, and hopes that he shall not suffer for it hereafter. But God, if he were an evil being, would be disposed to evil neither by mistake, nor temptation, nor passion, nor advantage ; and would choose evil purely as evil. And upon this absurd supposition, instead of the Best and Greatest, he would be the lowest and the meanest of all beings ; for nothing can be great that is not good. Where there is no goodness, there must be darkness, confusion, disorder, and irregularity. Spite and hatred, malice and deceitfulness, revenge and cruelty cannot produce peace within, any more than without. A mind swayed by these dispositions must resemble a troubled sea, a whirlwind, a black and tempestuous sky ; and a Deity of this kind must be continually

nually (b) miserable, and even for his own sake must change his nature, if he could.

It is said that there was even in very antient times a prevalent notion in many places of two Gods, the one perfectly good, the other as completely evil; the one the author of all the virtue and happiness, the other of all the sin and misery that is in the universe. This system is supposed to have been contrived to account for the rise and continuance of the natural and moral evil which is in the world. Now if there were two such Principles, the consequence, one would think, must have been, that the good Deity would have overcome the bad one, or would have altered and amended him, having so many natural advantages over him, more wisdom, more prudence, more tranquillity and serenity, more extensive views, and a larger understanding.

But the absurd opinion of two coequal Gods was perhaps never entertained, and the sentiments of these Ancients may have been in some measure misrepresenteted. They did indeed believe two principles, the one good and the other bad: but they thought that this evil Being, though he was not created of God, yet was in all respects inferior to him, and subject to his controul. And this wrong notion of two uncreated Powers seems to have been a corruption of an older opinion concerning an evil Dæmon, formed at first by the Creator of things, and then degenerating from his former state, and remaining powerful indeed, but limited, and absolutely dependent upon his Maker. This opinion might arise not only from tradition, but from considering the evil that is in the world. According then to this old doctrine, God made all things good in their kind; but as all rational creatures are necessarily finite and imperfect,

(b) A Deity exposed to trouble may well say;

*Sed nocet esse Deum: præclusaque janua leti
Æternum nefices lugus extendit in ævum.*

Ovid, Met. i. 662.

perfect, and free to choose and to act, some of them abused their liberty, and fell into vice, the chief and highest of which disobedient creatures is an evil Power, and the principal cause of Sin, and of all evil. But, said they, the Almighty, who for a time permits these disorders, so far interposes as frequently to lessen and restrain them, and often makes good to arise out of evil, and at length will cause all to terminate in good, will correct what is amiss, and abolish what is incorrigible; and then shall appear a new and a fair scene of uniformity, beauty, and perfection. In the meanwhile, the disorder lasts for what mortals call a long time, but a time which is nothing compared to eternity, and in the sight of Him, to whom a thousand years are as one day. In this opinion there is a great resemblance to the Jewish and Christian doctrines of the origin of evil, and of the Prince of disobedient Spirits.

The worship of the Devil, as of an evil Deity, is known to be common in some idolatrous and Pagan countries. And indeed some Christians have run into extremes concerning this evil being, called the Devil; and have been apt to ascribe to him more power over the minds of men than can possibly belong to him. These notions they have taken up, perhaps not without a view to excuse themselves for their own sins, by throwing them upon his prevalent temptations. Such persons ought to be reminded, that the almighty and gracious God suffers none to be led into irresistible temptations to offend, and that their own Lusts are the most dangerous devils, whom yet by God's blessing and their own honest endeavours they may resist and subdue.

Thus likewise, as to witchcraft, sorcery and possessions, how many things have been ascribed to evil spirits, which upon a more careful inspection, have been found to be knavery or distemper?

3. That God is good, appears also from the goodness which is seen in his creatures, in men. Goodness in

this world is exercised in some degree by many, and is esteemed and commended by almost all. If this disposition be found in some measure in us, it must be most eminentiy in our Creator, from whom this and all other virtues must be derived. As without a Cause we could never have begun to be, as without a living, powerful, and wise cause we could never have had life and strength, reason and sagacity; so without a kind and good cause we could never have had the affections of benignity and benevolence.

That God is good is as certain as that he is the creator, author, father of all. He hath impressed upon his creatures a natural affection towards their issue. In men, who are rational beings, this affection extends itself not only to the offspring of their body, but to the offspring of their understanding. Whatsoever they have artfully contrived, ingeniously invented, judiciously observed, elegantly composed, and well executed, that they love perhaps not less than sons and daughters. This universal passion to love what proceeds from us is manifestly necessary to promote and preserve the general good, and therefore is good and right in itself, when applied to proper objects, and guided by reason. The same disposition, but void of all weakness and imperfection, must be in our universal Parent, who is the Cause of us, and of all our innocent affections.

In the second book of Apocryphal Esdras, though a book of no sacred authority, there is a just and beautiful observation relating to our present subject. When Esdras laments the unhappy state of the Jews, and expostulates with God concerning it, the Angel gives him this gentle rebuke; “(c) Thou art sore troubled in mind
for

(c) If this be, as it really is, a good observation; what he says in another place, cannot be good:

“O Lord, thou madest the world for our sakes. As for the other people, which also come of Adam, thou hast said that they are nothing, but be like unto spittle, and hast likened the abundance of them unto a drop that falleth from a vessel.” ch. vi. 55.

for Israel's sake. Lovest thou that people better than he that made them?" The same thought is thus expressed by the prophet Isaiah : " Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb ? Yea they may forget ; yet will I not forget thee." And thus by our Saviour ; " If ye being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him ?" " Thou hast mercy upon all, says the Author of the Wisdom of Solomon, for thou canst do all things, and winkest at the sins of men, because they should amend. For thou lovest all things that are, and abhorrest nothing that thou hast made : for never wouldest thou have made any thing, if thou hadst hated it. And how could any thing have endured, if it had not been thy will ? or been preserved, if not called by thee ? But thou sparest all : for they are thine, O Lord, thou lover of souls."

It is the observation of a (*d*) great Philosopher, that the Artist loves the work of his hands better than his work would love him, if it were endued with sense and reason ; and that the person, who confers a great benefit upon another, loves him whom he obliges better than the obliged person loves him. To which it may be added that parents generally love their children more than they are beloved by them. And yet in all these instances, gratitude, one would think, should make the love of the inferior to be the strongest ; but experience shews that it hath not this effect. These observations may be reduced to this general truth, that Love descends more than it ascends ; and we may be permitted, I think, to apply this to God and to ourselves, and to say that our great and good Creator and Benefactor loves us far better than even the most dutiful of us love him.

H 2

4. The

(d) Πᾶς τὸ εἰκεῖον ἔργον ἀγαπᾷ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγαπηθεῖν αὐτὸν τὰ ἔργα, ἐμψύχα γενομένια. *Aristot. Eth. Nic. ix.*

4. The goodness of God appears in its effects, in the blessings which we receive from him.

That we enjoy much good and many conveniences, is a plain matter of fact. So evident it is, that no sect hath had the face to deny it. They of whom we have been speaking, who held two Principles, the one good and the other evil, acknowledged that there was much good in the world, and ascribed it all to a wise and good Author; and the Atheists themselves, the disciples of Epicurus, though they found great fault with our system and condition, and made the disorders in it an objection to a God and a providence, yet sometimes were in a better mood, and received their good things with a silent sort of gratitude, like a swine at a trough; and sometimes proceeded farther, and said that kind (*e*) Nature had given men few wants, and ample provisions, and had spread a decent table for her children; and that when a man had eaten and drank his portion, and spent his day of life, he ought to get up, and make room for others, and retire without murmuring, and with a good grace, and thank his Mother, who had entertained him so handsomely.

The goodness of God appears from the works of the creation.

God did not make us by necessity and constraint, because he is before all things, supreme and independent, and nothing from without could compel him. He made us not blindly and without design, because he hath perfect wisdom and knowledge. He made us not for any advantage which could accrue to him, because he must be self-sufficient, and possess in his own nature all things which happiness requires. He made us not because he wanted us to serve and praise him; for we cannot suppose

(c) Denique si vocem rerum Natura repente
Mittat, &c.

Lucretius iii. 944, ii. 14. 995.

pose his felicity to depend upon the opinion which we entertain of him, and the reverence which we pay to him, nor would he be less happy, though we passed over all his favours in stupid and ungrateful silence: It was therefore goodness in God which moved him to create.

Though it was fit that his goodness should display itself in the production of creatures, and in that sense it may perhaps be *morally* necessary that there should in all times be an inhabited world, yet instead of us he might have made other beings, who would have served his purposes as well. It is therefore a favour to each of us, that we are a living part of the great whole.

The gifts of a perfectly good Author must needs be highly valuable, and worthy of that wise and beneficent Mind which bestows them. Such are those which God hath conferred upon us.

He hath placed us in a world abounding with all things useful and convenient for us, and agreeable to our nature and inclinations, which whilst they supply our wants and answer our desires, are perpetual proofs of his power and goodness, who contrived and disposed them for our benefit. His power and goodness present themselves to us in all the objects which surround us; they appear in the earth which feeds us, in the creatures which serve us, in the heavenly bodies which shine upon us, in the succession of day and night, in the change and regular return of seasons, in every thing that contributes to our satisfaction and well-being.

He hath created us many in number, that we might enjoy the pleasure and the profit of a social life, that we might assist, and comfort, and instruct, and protect each other. Hence arise those intercourses of good offices, those mutual dependences, those several relations which we bear to others, whence we all reap numberless advantages.

He hath made us rational creatures, he hath given us an understanding which we can employ to so many noble and useful purposes, not only in the invention and improvement of the arts and sciences which civilize and adorn society, and add to the conveniences and comforts of life, but in viewing and considering his works, and the wonders of his adorable providence, in searching into his excellencies and perfections, in inquiring into our own nature and powers, in discerning between truth and falsehood, good and evil, in discovering our duty, and the reasonableness of those eternal and immutable laws by which we ought to be directed, and in perceiving the manifold advantages of piety and virtue.

This life, this reason and understanding which we enjoy, are upon the juilest accounts dear and valuable to us ; but to know that we had them only for a time would greatly lessen their value, or rather take it entirely away ; for the thought that we must lose them would make us uneasy and unhappy even in the possession of them. We are in no danger of undergoing this loss : God, who hath given us a soul so excellent in its operations, and capable of advancing in knowledge and virtue in an endless progression, hath also given it an immortal nature, so that we shall continue for ever, and rejoice in our existence, if we use our sincere endeavours to deserve his favour by improvement in knowledge and goodness ; and, when we have offended, by amendment and renewed obedience.

The conditions which he requires of us are to practise virtue ; that is, to live the life of reasonable creatures, to follow what by the nature of things and by his appointment tends not only to the general good, but to our own advantage, to do what our own understanding and conscience recommend to us, and to love ourselves with a prudent affection.

God hath put it in our power to increase our agreeable sensations and reflections, and to diminish those which are

are disagreeable, to such a degree, that we may usually enjoy as much satisfaction as is suitable to our present state, if we use the proper methods to acquire it. In this respect man is the artificer of his own happiness, if he hath the wisdom to manage skilfully the materials which are put in his hands, if he takes care to cultivate his own understanding, to do good offices to others, to employ himself in useful and reputable occupations, and at proper intervals, to pursue amusements which are obvious, cheap, and innocent, for these furnish the sincerest pleasure.

Such are the blessings which we receive from the most perfect Being, from him who stands not in need of us and of our service, and who would have been what he is, though we had never entered into the world.

Add to this, that since all men by wilful transgression depart, more or less, from their duty, and have cause to fear the consequence of it, God, by an act of mere goodness, as it is distinguished from justice, hath such compassion on us, and so loves us, that he hath given us his only-begotten Son, to take our nature upon him, to deliver us from sin and misery, to instruct us in our duty, and to open to us the way to eternal life.

Our Lord, in whom the goodness of God was manifested, came from heaven, freely to offer us the most important knowledge, the knowledge of God, of our own souls, and of our future condition, to deliver us from a state of doubt and fear, and to convince us of the truth of his doctrine, and of the certainty of his promises by fulfilling the prophecies concerning himself, by foretelling future events, and by working miracles.

As a lawgiver, he came to teach us our duty, and to deliver to us in a plain manner pure and reasonable precepts, the observance of which should be rewarded with a happiness surpassing all that we can hope and conceive:

As an example to incite us to the practice of virtue, he came to fulfil the laws of God by a perfect obedience, and by an entire resignation to the divine will under the greatest trials.

As a redeemer, he came to reconcile us to God, by suffering in our stead, and by submitting himself to afflictions and death for our sake.

As a mediator, he ascended into heaven, there to intercede for us, to obtain for us the remission of our sins, and the favour of God upon our repentance, and to give us the assistance of the holy Spirit.

When we duly consider the dignity of our Saviour, and his condescension and sufferings, we cannot think that he could submit to all this, unless to produce some benefit unspeakably great; and we may justly suppose the advantages arising from it to be more extensive and more excellent than it hath perhaps been usually imagined. It is said in the New Testament, that the righteous at the resurrection shall be like to, or equal to, the Angels, and that Christ shall change their bodies even unto the likeness of his own. Men therefore receive more from the second Adam than they lost by the first, and Christ hath advanced human nature, by taking it upon him, to a greater glory and dignity than it had before. Thus is the divine goodness manifested in its effects.

5. Lastly; Another proof of the goodness of God is to be taken from the testimony of Scripture, where in several places mention is made of this attribute. Some of these passages have been already produced, to which I shall only add a few.

Our Saviour assures us, that the goodness of God surpasseth the goodness of all his creatures in so eminent a manner, that it may be truly said, There is none good besides him.

When God makes his name known to Moses, he proclaims; The Lord, the Lord God, gracious and merciful,

ful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth. Goodness is represented as the chief of God's perfections, as that in exerting which he takes the most pleasure. I am the Lord, who exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord. And St. John, in an expression stronger than all these, says; God is love.

These are the several proofs which we have of the goodness of God, from the joint force of which this important truth appears most evident and unquestionable. The objections to this truth should now be stated and considered; but that the time will not permit.

S E R M O N IX.

P S A L M cxlv. 9.

The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.

ALL religion, natural or revealed, and all our better hopes are founded upon the supposition that God is good; and as this is of all truths the most important, so there are many clear and strong proofs of it, and the joint force of them is irresistible. That part of the subject hath been considered.

There are indeed objections to the goodness of God, objections which appear difficult, and which perplex our weak understanding.

Some may think it most adviseable for a Preacher to take no notice of them, and not to call forth doubts of that kind upon so fundamental a part of religion, nor to raise a formidable Apparition which perhaps he cannot lay. But it is to no purpose to think of shunning or stifling this inquiry. The objections are almost as old as the sun and the moon, they have been made and repeated over and over, and every one who ever read, or who ever thought, must be acquainted with them more or less. To be afraid of looking them in the face, is in a manner to give up the best of causes as indefensible; and there is no occasion for such apprehensions, since Reason

Reason and Religion furnish us with sufficient answers. Let it not be forgotten that we have already proved and established the goodness of God, and that difficulties are of no weight against demonstrations.

Now the objections to the goodness of God are taken from the evil that is in the world, which may be comprised under these two sorts, the evil of sin, and the evil of pain.

The Pagans knew by continual experience, that a torrent of natural and moral evil had spread itself over the world, but were at a loss to assign its origin; like the ancient Ægyptians, who had constant evidence of the overflowing of the Nile, but could not find out the spring and the head of it.

How far the evil of sin may have entered into other parts of the creation, we know not; but that its contagious influence hath overspread this earth, is too plain. As we are rational beings, we are able to discern between good and evil, right and wrong; and as we are free beings, we have a power of chusing the good and abstaining from the evil; but even the most upright of us make not the best use that we could of these abilities, and in many things we all offend; whilst the worst abandon themselves to wickedness, and live in perpetual opposition to the laws of nature and to the will of God.

Besides which, we are informed by Revelation, that there are many beings, in order and nature superior to us, who corrupted themselves, and became evil spirits, and continue from the beginning of the world in a state of rebellion and obstinacy, and shall be found in the same hardened state when our Lord comes to judgment.

Concerning the evil of pain, it must be confessed that the dominion of it is not less extensive than the dominion of sin. The frequent disorders of the elements causing general calamities, the wars which are continually

ally carried on, to the destruction of millions, and to the distress of the greater part of mankind, the ill usage which men receive and return in all times and places, the bodily distempers to which they are subject, the distempers of the mind, which are scarcely fewer in number than the former, the fears of death, and the necessity of undergoing it, all these have their seat in the lower world; and the pain which many suffer during the course of a calamitous life surpasseth the satisfaction which they enjoy.

Under the evil of pain is also to be ranked the effect of sin, which naturally and necessarily hurts the mind and the body; and the future punishment of sin, which God, as governor of the universe, hath declared that he will inflict.

Hence it is objected; God is either the author of all these evils, or at least he permits them. How can this be reconciled with his goodness, and how could they enter into a world created and ruled by a beneficent Lord, who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works?

To this difficulty two general answers may be made, in which an humble and modest mind may acquiesce.

1. We are so incompetent judges of God's providence, that we ought not to charge him with want of goodness from those evils which we see and experience.

If things be made and governed by a good Being, we may conclude that the evil which is in the creation could not be prevented or removed, and that, when it is compared with the good, it is so small, that it bears almost no proportion to it. But it is not strange that we should not be able to discover this from our own observation and knowledge of the course of things. We are inhabitants of an inconceivably small part of the world; we know at most the transactions of a few thousand years. In this little spot where we are placed for the present, we find much evil, and we know that it hath

continued

continued what we call a long time. What is this to the boundless universe, and to the ages of eternity? The object of God's providence is the whole world, and in it are innumerable creatures. To all these the divine government extends, ordering all things in the wisest, in the justest, and in the kindest manner. But unless we could survey eternity and immensity, we cannot have a full view of this; and we must not pretend to say that there is a defect of goodness in the administration of the whole, from the consideration of that very little portion of it, which lies within the reach of our contemplation.

2. If this first answer be satisfactory, the second hath still more strength.

It is true that there are objections to the goodness of God, which have in them no small difficulty. But in all questions of this nature, it is the part of every prudent enquirer to consider the difficulties on both sides, and to embrace the opinion which hath the fewest. By this way of judging, the question before us is soon decided; for there are many unanswerable proofs of God's goodness, there are many absurdities which follow the denial of it; and the difficulties which attend it arise in all probability from our limited capacity, and imperfect knowledge, which cannot discover the whole plan and system of divine providence.

From these general answers let us now descend to a consideration of particulars.

It was an act worthy of our beneficent author to create a variety of beings endued with reason, and capable of immortal happiness.

But a rational agent must be a free agent; for to reason and to act require and imply choice and liberty: and every creature and free being must have a power of sinning, unless he had the perfections of his creator, which is impossible.

Thus

Thus the evil of sin entered into the world in such a manner, that it cannot be charged upon God, and prove any want of goodness in him.

If we consider the evil of pain as the consequence of sin, we must acknowledge that we are deservedly subject to it, and that beings who act perversely and unreasonably, ought to suffer for it.

The pain to which the good are liable, if it be to them an occasion of exercising many virtues, and of qualifying themselves for greater rewards in a better state, is profitable and desirable.

The pain to which the bad are exposed, if it may, as it certainly may, be useful to them, to reclaim them from sin, and to remind them to seek happiness where it is to be found, is also of great advantage; and if it have not this effect upon them, it is a punishment which they deserve.

Indeed, if we duly consider the thing, and take in all circumstances, from the very evil which is in the world, no slight arguments may be drawn to prove the goodness of God, since those evils have a tendency to produce such a variety of moral virtues and Christian graces, and are alleviated by so many aids, and tempered and allayed with so many favours. Hence we may reason and infer; If God be so gentle even in his corrections, so kind even in his anger, how great must his goodness, his munificence, and his recompences be! Of all evil the worst is sin; and yet if we had not sinned, (a) the clemency of God had not been manifested, nor would he have had those titles; in which he seems to glory, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. Sin is the occasion of repentance;

and

(a) Quid? quod et egregii dederim tibi muneris anfam,
Muteris laudis dum mea culpa tuae est.
Nam nisi peccassesem, quid tu concedere posses!
Clementis nomen non habiturus eras.

and repentance produceth humility, distrust of ourselves, religious fear and caution ; and when it ends in reformation, it is a powerful motive to affectionate gratitude towards God, according to our Saviour's remark, that he to whom much is forgiven, will love much ; and at this happy change of one sinner, there is, as he also says, more joy in heaven, than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance. Shall we then continue in sin, that grace may abound ? By no means ; for even long-suffering hath its limits, and patience itself may be provoked too far. But the consideration of the easy terms of reconciliation upon repentance and renewed obedience should teach us to adore the riches of the divine goodness ; which thus out of the greatest evil brings forth good.

As to temporal inconveniences and troubles, they are not only of a short duration, and a mere nothing compared to eternity ; but, by God's appointment, they either produce desirable effects, or they are alleviated by many comforts, or they are compensated by many advantages. Labour, though it was at first inflicted as a curse, seems to be the gentlest of all punishments, and is fruitful of a thousand blessings : the same Providence which permits diseases, produces remedies ; when it sends sorrows, it often sends friends and supporters ; if it gives a scanty income, it gives good sense, and knowledge, and contentment, which love to dwell under homely roofs ; with sickness come humility, and repentance, and piety ; and Affliction and Grace walk hand in hand. In general, the disagreeable events and the troubles incident to human life both wean us from an immoderate love of this world, and raise the hopes and desires to better objects, and soften the heart of man for the reception of the gentle affections, of affability, humanity, civility, pity, condescension, and officious kindness ; and prevent or remove a certain narrow, selfish,

selfish, and uncompassionate disposition, which often attends great health and a flow of prosperity.

The doctrine of future punishments, as it is contained in the Gospel, hath often and often been made an objection to the divine goodness, and to the truth of Christianity: and this objection hath unhappily received additional strength from the many injudicious and unsatisfactory replies which have been made to it; for when an argument is ill answered, it looks as if it were unanswerable. Yet it seems not hard to weaken all its force by the following suppositions, which are founded both in natural and in revealed Religion.

1. There are, as we have shewed, many plain, direct, and undeniable proofs of God's goodness. Now clear truths are never to be forsaken and given up on account of difficulties; and we ought rather to conclude that those difficulties would vanish, if we had a more comprehensive view of things.

2. The punishment of sin is not to be accounted an act of arbitrary power, proceeding merely from divine appointment; for in all government correction is absolutely necessary, for the reformation of offenders, or for the good of the whole. And besides this, such is the nature, and such the effects of vice, that it must be its own punishment, it must make an alteration for the worse in all the powers of the mind, and it must be attended with the loss of many pleasures which are as naturally produced by virtue.

3. We are told that God hath committed all judgment to his Son, to him who loved us, and died for us, and who cannot be supposed to join no clemency to justice.

4. We know also both from reason and revelation that the recompences and the punishments of the age to come shall be and must be infinitely various, and proportionable to the good and to the bad actions and qualities of men.

5. We

5. We are told likewise that when judgment shall be pronounced, every mouth shall be stopped, stopped not by outward violence, but by inward conviction. All nature shall assent to the equity of the sentence, and it shall be impossible to make any rational objection to it.

In matters of mere favour, God will not be accountable to his creatures. It is their duty to be thankful for the portion which they receive, and not querulous for that which they receive not. If a man should say to his Creator, Why didst thou subject me to the law of mortality? Why didst thou not make me an angel? The answer is; Nay but, O man, who art thou that contendest against God? Is it not lawful for him to do what he will with his own? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? But in matters of justice and equity, God in the Scriptures, as we may say, seems to lay aside his privilege, as Creator; he appeals to heaven and earth, and to the common notions of men, and condescends even to make them his judges, and calls upon them to produce their reasons, and to make their objections.

6. Lastly, the doctrine of the future state of retribution is usually delivered in figurative expressions, which of course are somewhat obscure and ambiguous, and it is of the same nature as prophecy, which is never fully understood till the event explains it. So we must wait for the event, before we can form a sure judgment concerning it; and in the mean time objections must be unreasonable, and may be rejected as such. Of the state of rewards it is said, that it doth not yet appear what it shall be; the same holds true concerning the state of punishment; it doth not yet appear what it shall be. Sufficient it is for us to know that it shall be as God thinks fit, and that God is good and gracious. But there is one thing which Christians ought never to forget, namely, that of those, to whom much is given, the more will be required, and that they who know the

will of their Lord, and do it not, shall receive many stripes.

Another objection to God's goodness is raised from the doctrine of absolute reprobation ; that is, of a decree, by which the greater part of mankind are doomed first to sin, and then to eternal misery ; whilst a few elected persons are as unavoidably impelled to righteousness, or have the righteousness of Christ graciously imputed to them, and shall be crowned with glory and happiness. So the former are delivered up to cruel Fate and unrelenting Necessity : the latter are favourites of heaven, and God hath fixed his affection on their very persons, without any regard to their moral qualifications. And indeed, when we consider them with respect to their abilities and their social qualities, they seem usually to have nothing about them of a very engaging or endearing nature.

Now this strange doctrine, which is fathered upon Christianity, stands upon no other foundation than a few misinterpreted texts of Scripture, and they who believe it ought also to believe that goodness in God is an unknown and incomprehensible quality : for such a method of government differs from our notions of goodness as much as darkness from light. Such a system as this seems calculated to produce a religion narrow, contracted, gloomy, sour, and unbenevolent ; a religion from which reason is discarded, to make room for enthusiasm ; a religion which fills the mind either with a bold security, or with cruel despondence and despair, according to the different tempers that it meets with.

Another objection to the divine goodness is taken from a supposed defect in Christianity ; namely, want of universality. Many ages were past, before the gospel was revealed ; and it hath been revealed, comparatively speaking, to a few.

The answer to this is contained in an observation, which we made before, that in matters of favour God

is not accountable to his creatures. It is sufficient, if he hath placed every one in such a condition, and given him such powers and opportunities, that he may perform what is required of him, and so live, that when he departs hence, he may enter into a better state than that which he hath left.

Much of the same kind is this objection also, that the greater part of men have been involved in darkness and uncertainty as to their future state; that nothing concerning it was made known to the Gentiles, and very little to the Jews.

This is not altogether true; for reason suggests many good arguments in behalf of a future state, and the most antient traditions are all in favour of it. Many things also are recorded in the Old Testament, which plainly led to a belief of it. Men are naturally disposed to desire it, and therefore they are naturally disposed to think that those innocent desires will not be disappointed; and this doctrine hath been entertained in all times and places, though not without some degree of doubt and hesitation. But supposing that it was not fully cleared up before the Gospel was revealed, yet if Good men knew it as soon as this short life was over, and had the agreeable (*b*) surprise to find a glorious scene exceeding all their hopes, this would surely be enough to clear and justify the conduct of Providence towards them.

Another objection to the divine goodness is made from the sufferings of the brute creation. The (*c*) beasts commit no sin, and yet endure much misery. As for us, it must be owned that most of the evils to which

(*b*) ————— Illic, postquam se lumine vero
Implevit, stellasque vagas miratus, & astra
Fixa polis, vidit, quanta sub nocte jaceret
Nostra dies.

Lucan. ix. 11.

(*c*) Quid meruistis, oves, placidum pecus, &c.
Ovid. Met. xv. 116.

we are exposed, are no more than we deserve upon many accounts : but as to the inferior animals, mankind might say of them, in the words of David, when the people died for his folly ; Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly ; but these sheep, what have they done ?

This must be acknowledged to be no small (*d*) difficulty ; and the Scripture is, in a manner, silent upon the subject ; only it tells us, in general, that they are objects of God's providence, and that the same hand that feedeth us, feedeth them also. Solomon says, A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast ; whence it is fair to conclude, that if a righteous man is good towards them, much more is God ; for they are the work of his hands, not of ours. It is therefore not at all unreasonable to suppose, that as they have in them a living

(*d*) It must be confessed that the empire of Death, which is established here over man and beast, appears as a defect and blot in our system. Every creature here subsists by the destruction of other creatures. If we were to form an imaginary world of beauty and happiness, there should be nothing in it subject to this cruel law ; there should be, as the Revelation expresses it, no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor pain.

The Pythagoreans, who held the transmigration of souls, thought it unlawful to feed upon animals, and to dislodge the souls of their ancestors which were put into the bodies of brutes. But they might easily have perceived, that it was on many accounts absolutely impossible to observe this precept. The ox kills as many creatures for his subsistence, as the lion and the tiger ; and a Pythagorean, who had made a meal upon vegetables, and drank water, or milk, or wine, or vinegar, slew his ten thousands at his dinner.

The Cartesians, to remove the difficulty, have affirmed that beasts are mere machines, void of sense. But all the phenomena are against them, and their notion must always appear as extravagant as any Stoical paradox.

What if we should suppose, that the souls of brutes are spirits, who have misbehaved themselves in a former state, and are imprisoned in those bodies, by way of punishment ? You will say, perhaps, that punishment ought to be attended with a consciousness in the intelligent agent, that he suffers for past transgressions. But how do you know that they have not this knowledge ? and supposing that they have it not at present, yet they may in another removal to another state retrieve their consciousness and reminiscence.

I dare not lay much stress upon this solution, which I suppose will appear fantastical to many. I shall only say of it, that it is far better than the Cartesian hypothesis.

living immaterial principle, which all their actions shew, when they die, he who made them can dispose of them in various ways, of which we have no notion, which may prove greatly to their advantage, and be an ample compensation to them for all that they have undergone. In the mean time, they enjoy the good which falls to their lot, without an uneasy recollection of things past, or a painful apprehension of things to come.

The œconomy of divine Providence with relation to these inferior creatures, is in a great measure hidden from us. We know not all the reasons for which they are called into being, and placed in this humble situation. We know not all the purposes for which they serve. We know not for what future ends they may be designed. Therefore we must not make objections to the goodness of God from his dealings towards them, since such objections may be only the result of our own ignorance.

Whilst we thus endeavour to vindicate the goodness of God, we must take care not to entertain false notions of it.

Because God is incomprehensible, some have concluded that we can frame to ourselves no conceptions of his moral perfections; that they differ from human virtues, not only in degree, but in nature; that therefore goodness in God is a quality which quite surpasses our apprehension. It is no wonder that profane persons are fond of this notion, which suits very well with their inclinations; but it is strange that the serious and the religious should ever adopt it. For see what absurd consequences follow: it follows that, when we worship God, we worship we know not what; and that we worship him, we know not why; and that we have no reason to love him, to reverence him, and to put our trust in him; but too many reasons to fear him.

Because God is perfectly good and merciful, therefore sinners would willingly suppose that he will not punish.

They

They think that God cannot be angry, and so far they think right: but thence they injudiciously conclude that he cannot punish. Now, because he is not only wise, but incapable of anger and of human passions and perturbations, for that very reason, he is the only Being, who is capable of punishing without error or excess, and of administering impartial justice. God is good, but he is just and wise; therefore we must not explain one perfection, so as to overturn the rest; but observe, that the goodness of God is regulated by wisdom and justice, as his wisdom and justice are tempered with mercy and goodness. This indeed seems evident, that an allwise and good Mind never punisheth for the sake of punishing, for revenge, but for the good of his creatures, and for the advantage of the whole.

Let us conclude with a plain and practical inference. Since God is so good to us, we ought in return to love him.

We find many motives to love him from a general consideration of his goodness to mankind made manifest in the works of creation and redemption. We shall find farther incitements to it, if we enter each into our own hearts, and reflect upon his kindness to us through the whole course of our lives; who hath protected us from many dangers, which we could not foresee, or knew not how to avoid; who hath heard us in the day of trouble, when we fled to him, and had no other helper; who continues to give us opportunities to serve him, and to repent of our faults, and to work out our salvation; and shews us so much patience and forbearance, so much favour and mercy, when we perhaps have been guilty of so many neglects and transgressions, and have made him so unworthy returns for all his benefits. And yet he is good to us, he supplies our wants, he spares us, and invites us to come to him, and offers us pardon and peace.

Man,

Man, of all creatures which fall within the compass of our knowledge, hath had the greatest experience of the mercy of God ; and, if he loves him not, is guilty of ingratitude loaded with every aggravating circumstance.

That we may avoid this crime, let us not suffer those things to be in any degree dear to us, which God hath forbidden us to love, and which are not worthy even of the slightest approbation and the coldest desire. Let us not give too great a share of our affections to those things which he hath permitted us to enjoy ; let us not throw away our hearts upon fleeting objects, nor indulge an unhappy fondness for them, which always gives more pain than pleasure. It is highly reasonable that the first place in our mind be reserved for Him, to whom alone we owe all things, and to whom we can make no other return.

S E R M O N X.

JEREMIAH xxiii. 23, 24.

Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.

IN these words are set forth three divine perfections, to expose the folly of those wicked men who thought, or who acted as if they thought, that they could sin securely, and that God had no knowledge, and took no notice of their ways. God therefore, by the mouth of his Prophet, declares that he is present in all places: Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord. He declares that no transactions can escape his inspection: Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. These two perfections are mentioned expressly. A third is plainly implied, namely, his irresistible power; for if a sinner, who thinks to conceal himself from his Maker, is not only mistaken, but pursues his own ruin, the reason is, because God, who is present every where, and who beholds every thing, hath also a power to deal with every one as his wisdom shall direct him. His presence is infinite, his knowledge is unlimited, and his power is irresistible.

There

There are three ways of discoursing upon the perfections of God.

In the first way we prove that there is a God, and that he must have these powers and qualities which we ascribe to him.

It were to be wished that men not only believed in God, but believed in him upon good grounds; that they were able to give a reason of this their faith, and in no danger of being seduced by the cavils of profane persons. And therefore discourses which may furnish them with this kind of knowledge cannot be improper and unnecessary.

The second way of considering the divine attributes is when supposing that God is, and that he possesses all perfections, we explain them as far as the sublimity of the incomprehensible subject permits, and confute the wrong opinions which have been entertained concerning them. Many mean conceptions, many false doctrines, many pernicious errors have prevailed concerning the nature and the perfections of God; and what hath been, may be again: for which reason, it is expedient to caution men that they fall not into the like mistakes, and, by shewing them what follies and absurdities the human understanding is capable of embracing, to make them industrious in cultivating their own, and thankful for the light which the Gospel has given in this and all other moral subjects. There are also always persons who want instruction or admonition upon this head. Through ignorance, superstition, prejudice, or vicious dispositions, they receive and retain wrong notions of the nature of God, particularly of his goodness, mercy, and justice. Some suppose that he is partial, and a respecter of persons, and dread him with a slavish terror, as a cruel and inexorable master; whilst others think that his clemency will not permit him to be offended at sin, or to punish it, or that he may be appeased by easier methods than amendment of life.

There

There is a third way of discoursing upon this subject, in which, supposing that they to whom we address ourselves have just and honourable notions of all God's perfections, and confining ourselves chiefly to practical truths, we shew them the effects which such a belief and such a knowledge ought to produce, and endeavour to excite in them a behaviour suitable to their faith. This is the important point, this is the end to which all our knowledge ought to be directed.

In each of these ways I propose to consider the doctrine contained in the text.

I. I shall therefore, first, endeavour to prove and represent, as briefly and clearly as the subject permits, God's omnipresence, his unlimited knowledge, and his irresistible power :

II. And, secondly, shew the effects which these truths ought to produce in us.

I. God is present every where.

A proof of this may be taken from the creation. Of all that we behold, there is nothing that could make itself, and make itself for wise ends and purposes. The sun, moon, and stars, the heavens and the earth, the land and the waters, could not (*a*) consult together, and come to an agreement to contribute each of them what was necessary for the common good of the whole. Chance or Fate could not perform this; they are mere nothings, and words without a meaning. The world is plainly the offspring of one great and wise mind, which produced it, and disposed all its parts in that beautiful order in which they continue, and gave them those regular motions which they preserve, and by which they are preserved. Now God must of necessity be present with the things that he made and governs: therefore in him

(*a*) *Nam certe neque consilio primordia rerum
Ordine se quæque, atque sagaci mente locarunt,
Nec quos quæque darent motus pepigere prosector.*

So far he talks very well.

Lucretius, i. 1020.

him we live and move and have our being, he fills heaven and earth, he fills the universe of which we can discern no end, and which perhaps hath no bounds.

This proof of God's omnipresence is the easiest to be understood, and is sufficient for religious purposes, as it shews that wheresoever any being is, or can be supposed to be, there also God is. There are other arguments to shew that God must be infinite and unlimited, which I shall now mention.

Concerning the manner how God is present every where, we cannot possibly form to ourselves any clear notion.

Our conceptions of God can only be collected from his works, from ourselves, and from the things about us. The things about us, which discover themselves to our senses, cannot help us to conceive any thing concerning the divine presence, because God is a spirit, and no object of our senses. Nor will the acquaintance which we have with ourselves teach us to know how God is present every where, because we are in some measure strangers even at home. We are sensible that we have souls, which think and act, and are present where they think and act; yet the manner in which they are present is unknown to themselves.

It is vain to attempt what is unsearchable: all that we can do is to avoid mean and false notions concerning the presence of God.

We must not imagine that he hath any parts or shape, or is present in a bodily manner.

We must not imagine that he is more present in one place than in another. When any thing of this kind is said in Scripture, the meaning is, that extraordinary manifestations of his glory were there made.

Nor must we imagine that God is present in the same manner that human souls and other finite spirits are present. God is every where in a manner entirely different:

rent : he acts upon every thing as far as he thinks proper ; but none of his creatures act upon him, produce any alteration in him, or make him more or less happy.

The justest notion therefore which we can form of God's omnipresence is this, that he is present every where in knowledge and in power.

He is present every where in knowledge. His knowledge is perfect, incapable of increase or diminution, and free from all the defects observable in the human understanding. Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him ? saith the Lord.

This perfection is united with the former : for if God be every where, every thing must be known to him. It appears from the whole creation, which proclaims the wisdom of its author and governor ; and it is proved from that degree of understanding which God hath conferred upon us. From him this and all other gifts proceed. He therefore must possess them in a most eminent manner. But the knowledge of God, as it relates to us, is a subject which more particularly requires our notice. Not only all our actions are known to him, but the motives upon which we act, and the ends which we propose to ourselves in acting, the disposition of our minds, our secret thoughts and hidden designs. By this perfection God, the judge of all creatures, is enabled to dispense rewards and punishments in an exact proportion to their behaviour. Nor do the hearts of men only lie open to the divine knowledge, but even their future actions. Hence arises a perplexing question, how the foreknowledge of God can be consistent with the liberty of action in men ?

It is certain that God foresees the future actions of men ; and it is equally certain that men are free beings. The difficulty therefore of reconciling these things should be ascribed to the imperfection of our limited understandings, and to the incomprehensible nature of God.

That

That all future events are known to God, is a doctrine of revealed religion. It appears from the many prophecies in Scripture concerning the good and evil actions of men.

'That we are free beings is evident both from reason and from revelation. Freedom is a power which we have to do a thing or not to do it, from the time when we begin to think about it, till the time when we perform it.

We cannot indeed give a proof of this freedom by our actions, because we cannot do a thing and not do it at the same time.

But we have an inward sense, a strong and clear assurance of an inherent natural power to refrain from it, or to do the contrary. We perceive plainly that we are masters of our behaviour; that, when a choice of two things is proposed to us, we can chuse the one or the other. So plainly do we perceive this, that either we are free, or our nature is such, that we are continually and unavoidably deceived and deluded, which we know not how to reconcile with the wisdom and goodness of our Creator.

And as we perceive that we are at liberty to act wisely or wickedly, so we judge like free beings of our past actions, and acquit or condemn ourselves in our own thoughts. Hence arise approbation of mind, or reproaches of conscience, as we find our conduct to have been reasonable and profitable, or absurd and pernicious. This natural and irresistible inclination to blame or to approve ourselves, would be very improper, if we were over-ruled in all things by a fatal necessity, in which case we could really do neither good nor evil, but both would be done in us and for us by a superior compulsive power.

Lastly, the Scriptures every where treat us as if we were free beings, and agree with our reason in assuring us, that we are accountable to God for our actions.

We

We cannot indeed conceive how God foresees things which depend upon our own choice, which we may either do or let alone : but one thing we can easily conceive, and certainly know, namely, that finite capacities cannot comprehend the extent and the several ways of infinite knowledge.

Notwithstanding the difficulty, which no thinking man can overlook, of reconciling foreknowledge and liberty, yet it is very observable, that men from the remotest antiquity believed them both, accounted themselves to be free agents, and thought that the Deity knew the future actions of men ; and hence arose the various kinds of divination, or collecting future events from some indications given by the Deity. This is evident in the oldest (*b*) Pagan writer whose works are extant, and who plainly admits, both these doctrines ; and this prevalent opinion of the divine foreknowledge did not arise from reasonings upon the divine perfections, but from ancient (*c*) traditions of divine revelations and predictions.

God is also present every where in power. He is the only independent being, he is before all things, he made all things, he upholds and governs all things, from him all powers are derived, and therefore nothing is able to resist or defeat his will.

We cannot easily fall into wrong notions concerning God's supreme and irresistible power, if we remember that the power of God is, first, a power of doing all that is consistent with the nature of things, that is, which are possible ; and secondly, a power of doing all that is consistent with his own nature and perfections, or all that is fit, reasonable, just, wise, and good.

If the Scriptures any where represent God as acting by no other rule than his own will and pleasure, with absolute

(*b*) Homer.

(*c*) Vetus opinio usque ad Heroicis ducta temporibus, &c.

Cicero De Divin. i. 1.

Iute authority, like the potter who fashions the clay into this or that shape ; it is to be observed, that matters of mere gift and favour are there represented, in which justice and equity are not concerned, and for which there can be no other rule than the will of the giver. Thus, that a person should be a native of this or that country, born in this or that age, that he should receive more or less power, knowledge, abilities, wealth and health ; this is to be resolved into the mere good pleasure of God, who doth what he will with his own, not indeed without sufficient reasons, but for reasons which it is not necessary or fit that we should know. But it is not so in matters where justice and equity are concerned.

There are many passages in the Scriptures, where God with a wonderful condescension submits these his actions to be tried by men, and makes his own creatures his judges ; shewing that mere might is not the foundation of his proceedings, and appealing to the everlasting difference of right and wrong, which are discoveable by all rational beings.

These seem to be the clearest notions which we can form to ourselves concerning God's unlimited presence, his perfect knowledge, and his irresistible power. It is certain that the best representation which we can make of the divine perfections is very incomplete : but though we know not God as he is, we know so much of him as may give us peace, and contentment, and resignation, and reliance, and faith, and hope ; as may deter us from sin, excite us to virtue, and guide us to immortality.

II. Let us therefore, now, consider what effects the fore-mentioned truths should produce in us, and what uses we ought to make of the doctrine that God is present every where in power and knowledge.

1. We should endeavour to resemble God in these perfections, and in the manner in which he exerciseth them. We are the offspring of God ; we are his children, by nature,

nature, as men ; by adoption, as Christians. The relation of father and son always supposes a resemblance, perhaps a very faint and remote likeness, but yet some kind of likeness. Let us then see how far we can, and in what manner we should imitate the power of God.

God hath conferred upon us several powers. As we are men, we have dominion over the inferior creation ; as we are members of civil society, and thereby governors, or fathers, or masters, or teachers, we possess different degrees of authority ; again, as we surpass others in wealth, strength, wisdom, knowledge, experience, sagacity, we usually acquire power over them. It is therefore our duty in the exercise of these powers to set God before us, and to take example from him.

The power of God is supreme, boundless, and irresistible ; but his right of dominion over us and all other beings ariseth not thence. He is not therefore our lawful Ruler because he is strong and we are weak ; but first, because he is our Creator who hath conferred upon us all that we possess, all that we are, and therefore in gratitude we are bound to obey him ; and secondly, because he is most wise and good, and always doth and requires that to be done which is most beneficial for us, and therefore in prudence we are bound to obey him.

Most amiable and venerable is such a power, a power from which no evil is to be feared, and every thing desirable is to be hoped and expected by every creature that acts suitably to the station in which it is placed.

From this manner in which God governs the world, we may learn how to use those small degrees of dominion and authority which he hath committed to us, namely, in doing good and restraining evil, without prejudice and partiality, without pride and insolence, in shewing mercy and clemency to all, to the very brutes, much more to men, who, if our inferiors in some things, in many respects are our equals, and in some perhaps our superiors. Tyranny and oppression is an intolerable

and

and detestable abuse of authority. We ought neither to be guilty of it ourselves, nor to flatter or excuse it in others; for God forbids and abhors it, and will certainly punish it: he hath given no person licence to sin; nor can he be supposed to confer upon weak and wicked men a power which he does not, which he cannot, exercise himself.

As the power, so also the knowledge of God is a perfection which we should endeavour to imitate, by acquiring as much of it as our abilities and opportunities permit. Man is made to honour, love, and serve God; but, that he may be disposed to this, he should be acquainted with his obligations to him, with the nature and extent of his duty, and with the perfections of his Maker, as far as they are discoverable by reason, or revealed in the scriptures. These things require a skill which cannot be obtained unless we love truth, and spend part of our time in pursuit of it.

2. The consideration that God is present every where in knowledge and in power, should deter us from sin.

It is a sublime description which the Psalmist gives us of God's presence, knowledge, and power. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in the grave, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light to thee are both alike.

An ancient (*d*) philosopher, who hath been generally and deservedly esteemed, hath fallen almost into the

same thoughts and words; which shews that (*e*) exalted minds have a singular sagacity in the discovering of truth. He observes that the wicked shall not go unpunished, and adds; “(*f*) Boast not thyself, how fortunate soever thou mayest be, that thou shalt escape the divine Justice. Overlooked by her thou canst not be, no not though, small as thou art, thou shouldst descend into the depths of the earth, or though raised on high thou shouldst fly up into heaven.”

Man, as he is a rational creature, is able, if he makes a right use of his understanding, to discern his obligations to serve God, and to perceive that God requires of him only what is just and equitable. As he hath by nature affections of love and gratitude, when he duly considers what God hath done for him, he will be inclined to make him suitable return; and as he hath strong desires of happiness and immortality, when he reflects upon the rewards of righteousness with any serious attention, he must wish that he may partake of them. One might therefore at first imagine that man, who hath these abilities and inclinations, might be led to his duty by the gentler and nobler motives of persuasion, by the still voice of reason, by love and gratitude, and by the honourable hopes of rising again to a more excellent state, and of approaching nearer to his Maker. But it is not so. In man there is a mixture of the Angel and the brute, of good and bad, of dignity and meanness, of worthy resolutions and of base dispositions; and the very best of us at particular times, and under particular temptations, stand in need of all kind of motives and helps to keep us from falling. The fear of punishment, though a less ingenuous,

(*e*) Clemens Alexandrinus says somewhere, speaking of Plato, Αἱ μέγαλαι φύσεις καὶ γνώμαι παθῶν εὐσοχῆστι πως περιττοὺς ἀνθεῖσαν.

(*f*) De Legibus, x.

genuine, yet is often a necessary and an efficacious motive to amendment, or to perseverance in righteousness.

We ought therefore frequently to call to mind those very plain and obvious, but very awful and terrible truths contained in the words of the text. Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? God is every where present in knowledge; to his view lie exposed all our follies and iniquities, those which we misrepresent and falsely call weaknesses and natural infirmities, those which we have forgotten, those of which we are ashamed, which we would conceal from the world, and, if it were possible, from ourselves. God is every where present in power. If we offend him, he is able to punish us; and that punishment shall begin as soon, and last as long, and lie as heavy, as he shall determine and appoint. We cannot avoid him; we live and move in him; he is present within us and without us, and there is no way to escape him but by flying to him (g). He can make all the objects with which we are surrounded conspire to disquiet and afflict us; he can make us our own tormentors; he can let loose upon us innumerable evils, which we have never yet felt, and of which we have no notion. What a restraint ought this to lay upon us! and how careful should it make us not to incur his displeasure! These are truths with which we are all perfectly well acquainted, and which for that reason ought to be frequently recommended to our consideration; for so it is, that the things which are most familiar to us often escape our notice, and are least regarded by us.

3. The consideration of the knowledge and power of God should teach us humility.

We possess, as was before observed, certain degrees of power and knowledge, which are various in various per-

K 2

- sons,

(g) Ut Deum evadas, fugias ad eum. *Augustinus.*

sions, and in which some surpass others. On account of those advantages, when they fall to our share, we are too much disposed to entertain a foolish and conceited esteem of ourselves, together with a contempt of our inferiors. They who thus misbehave themselves may be truly said, as the Scripture speaks, not to set God before their eyes. Pride is a very unfit companion for poverty and dependence; and vain men should remember that they receive all from God, and that they can acquire and preserve neither strength nor skill, unless by his blessing, by his appointment or permission. They should also remember that human knowledge at the best is mere ignorance, and human power mere weakness, when compared with these perfections, as they are in the divine nature.

4. Lastly, if we use our best endeavours to serve God, the consideration that he is present every where in knowledge and power is a particular encouragement to reliance and contentment, to faith and hope.

We are exposed to many evils and troubles; but he knows what they are, and how far we are able to bear them; and can and will lessen or remove them, or, which is the same thing, strengthen and uphold us under them. We are surrounded with enemies, with evil spirits, and with men not less evil than they; but he who hath set bounds to the raging sea which it cannot pass, hath also limited the malice of perverse beings, and will protect those from all their adversaries who place their trust in him.

Our wants are daily returning upon us; and neither our own skill and industry, nor the favour of the world, can secure to us those things of which we stand in need. Thus are we indigent and dependent creatures; but by depending upon the Almighty we partake in some sort of his self-sufficient nature; we enter into the possession of all things needful, by casting our cares upon his supreme goodness, wisdom, and power.

We

We are perhaps in a low condition ; poverty and obscurity is our portion ; consequently it is not in our power to do much service to mankind, our upright and honourable inclinations are concealed from the world. But they are seen of God, who will recompense not only our good deeds, but those good desires and intentions which for want of opportunity and ability we could not put in execution.

We are placed in a state where we must not expect satisfaction and happiness from the objects which are about us, from any created beings. God alone can give us as much of it as is expedient for us in this life. From him we must seek it, and in his presence we shall find it.

Present he is to us all, as creator, ruler, and preserver; but there is another kind of divine presence mentioned in Scripture, of which our Saviour thus speaks ; If a man love me, my Father will love him ; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

Blessed is he who can secure to himself this inestimable treasure ; whatsoever his condition be, his heart will rejoice, and his joy no one can take from him.

S E R M O N XI,

J A M E S i. 17.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

BEFORE we explain these words, it will be requisite to shew the connection which they have with the foregoing part of the chapter. All the inconveniences and persecutions which Christians undergo for the sake of religion are, as St. James observes, temptations or trials of their faith and virtue, which God permits or appoints for their improvement, which he enables them to bear, and for which, if they be patiently endured, he rewards the sufferers a thousand fold. If any man, being overcome by these temptations, misbehaves himself, the fault, says the Apostle, is to be ascribed neither to the temptation itself, as if it were irresistible; nor to God, as if he placed any one, or suffered him to be placed, under a necessity of sinning; but it is to be ascribed to the man himself, to his own wicked heart, to his own folly and iniquity. God is the author of no moral evil; God is good, he is unchangeably good, he is the perpetual author of good, and he gives all necessary assistance to those who seek it sincerely and qualify themselves to receive it.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father.

This

This seems to allude to the words of our Saviour: If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? An earthly parent, how bad soever he may be in other respects, will scarcely refuse a piece of bread to his own child, or give him poison instead of food. Much less will our heavenly Father give us any thing that is in itself pernicious, or deny us any thing that is absolutely necessary, if we humbly and piously apply ourselves to him.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

St. James calls God, the Father of lights, in which expression God is compared to the sun, as to an object which best resembles its great Creator; for the Sun is in some manner the Eye, and the Soul, and the Ruler of the world, who liberally and impartially and universally dispenses his kind and fruitful influences of light and heat; but these influences are subject to many variations. Sometimes he is eclipsed, and his light is turned to darkness; and sometimes clouds interpose, and deprive us of his presence: he rises, and he sets; he approaches nearer, and then he turns away and retires from us. God is a Sun who never rises and sets, who hath no changes and variations, of whose kind influences no creature can deprive us, who is an everlasting spring of spiritual light, and an inexhausted fountain of good.

These words, thus explained, are a lively representation of God's unchangeable nature; upon which I shall discourse in the following order:

I. I shall consider God, as he is unchangeable in his own nature and perfections:

II. I shall consider him in his dealings with us, as he is our governor; and shew that he is unchangeable in his will, his purposes, and decrees:

III. I shall

III. I shall consider those actions and that behaviour of God towards mankind, which seem to argue in him inconstancy, and change of mind:

IV. Lastly, I shall take notice of the practical uses which ought to be made of the doctrine, that God is for ever the same, and subject to no alteration.

I. I shall consider God, as he is unchangeable in his own nature and perfections.

From these plain and undeniable truths, that we are, and that we had a beginning, and that we made not ourselves, it follows that there is One above all, One who always was, who is independent and without a cause, who is the author of every thing else, who possesseth in a supreme degree all the perfections of which we find small portions and faint resemblances in ourselves.

This author of all must be unchangeable. He cannot change for the better, because he hath in himself all excellencies: he cannot change for the worse, because neither can he have a will or a power to hurt himself; nor can other beings be able to diminish his perfections, since they have no other strength than he gave them, and receive their nature and their qualities from him. Thus reason teacheth us to conclude that God is unchangeable.

The holy Scriptures also teach us the same. They do not endeavour by strict and methodical reasonings to prove that it must be so; but they affirm that it is so, in very strong expressions.

In Exodus, God speaking to Moses, gives himself a new name, the name *Jehovah*; concerning the meaning of which there are (*a*) three opinions.

First, that it signifies, He who is of himself, supreme and independent.

Secondly, He who is without beginning and without end.

Thirdly,

(*a*) Vide Clericum ad Exod. iii. 14. vi. 3.

Thirdly, He who causeth things to be, or come to pass, according to his will and pleasure, and who fulfils and performs whatsoever he declares and promises.

Whichsoever of these senses we follow, the name Jehovah implies, amongst other things, the unchangeable nature of God.

In the same book, God says to Moses, who asked him his name, I am that I am. Thus shalt thou say, I am hath sent me unto you. The expression of St. John in the beginning of the Revelation is of the same (*b*) extraordinary kind; Grace be unto you and peace from the Who is, and who was, and who shall be; that is, from him whose name is, Who is, and who was, and who shall be.

When God ascribes to himself the name, *I am*, it denotes that he is in a manner peculiar to himself. Others things are; but they are in a way altogether different. Material beings are; but, as they are void of sense, and know not that they have a being, they are only a small remove above nothing. Our souls are, in a manner far more excellent, for they feel and know themselves to be; but we are so changeable in our nature, so absolutely dependent for the beginning and continuance and circumstances of our being, that, compared to God, we can scarcely be said to be. To him only it belongs to affirm of himself, in the strict and the true sense, *I am*.

The same perfection is ascribed to God in other places of Scripture, and in other expressions. He is called, the King immortal, who alone hath immortality, the incorruptible God, the living God, the Lord who changeth not, who is from everlasting to everlasting, who is the same, whose years fail not, the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Most

Most of these things may be said of Angels and of human souls ; We are living, immortal, incorruptible ; our years fail not, and we shall be the same, that is, thinking and rational beings, through all ages. Yet God alone is living, and immortal, and incorruptible, because he alone is so of himself, necessarily, independently, and in the most exalted and excellent sense.

As to his perfections likewise, God is unchangeable ; for his perfections are himself, they are closely united to his being, they cannot be separated from it, and they are all connected with each other. As God is unchangeable, so he is unchangeably what he is, most powerful, wise, good, just, true, merciful, pure, and holy. This also is abundantly confirmed in the Scriptures, in which it is so often said that his truth and faithfulness, his mercy and righteousness, endure and stand fast for ever and ever.

II. I shall consider God in his dealings with us, as he is our ruler, and shew that he is unchangeable in his will, his purposes, and decrees.

This is a manifest consequence of the things which have been said ; for if God is unchangeable in his nature and perfections, whatsoever he decrees and resolves concerning mankind in general, or any of us in particular, he must and infallibly will accomplish. To resolve and not to perform is a certain mark of imperfection. He who resolves and performs not, either hath not the means to execute his purpose, and that is weakness and want of power ; or he alters his mind without a sufficient cause, and then he is fickle and inconstant ; or he is convinced that he ought not to do what he intended, and then it is plain that he was ignorant, mistaken, or blameable, when he made his resolution. Now none of these things can have any place in God. As he is perfectly wise, just, and good, he can decree nothing which is not right and reasonable ; and as he is almighty, nothing can interpose to prevent the execution of

of it. It would be needless and endless to cite the passages of Scripture which establish this truth ; for the history of the Old Testament and the writings of the Prophets abound with proofs and with declarations that the counsels and the purposes of the Almighty stand fast for ever and ever ; that the rise and fall of empires, and the prosperity and adversity of his chosen people were appointed by his decrees, which were to be exactly and inevitably fulfilled.

III. I shall consider those actions and that part of God's conduct towards mankind, which seem to argue in him inconstancy and change of mind.

First ; It is often said of God in the Scriptures, that he repents. It repented him that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at the heart. He repented that he had made Saul king. And in many places he is said to repent him of the evil that he had denounced.

When God is said to repent and to be grieved, it is manifest that such popular expressions are to be understood as spoken in condescension to the weakness of our apprehensions. All that is meant by them is, that as men repent and are grieved when things fall short of their expectations, and withdraw their favour from those who make an ill use of it ; so God deals with sinners, though without any perturbation, without any change in himself ; and as men again, upon the amendment and good behaviour of such persons, will sometimes alter their resolutions to punish them, will be appeased, and will treat them kindly ; so God, who is uniform and unchangeable, is always ready to pardon those, who by a change in themselves from sin to righteousness become proper objects of his mercy.

Secondly, We learn from the Scriptures, that God gave the Jews ritual laws, which in themselves and of their own nature were not good, and which he afterwards repealed by his Son. Human wisdom indeed, which is very limited, imperfect, and short-sighted, contrives laws as judiciously as it can, and afterwards discovers

vers defects and errors in them, and then alters or repeals them : but surely it might be expected that from God, who is unchangeably and perfectly wise and good, should proceed laws like himself, laws perfectly wise and good, unchangeable and everlasting.

And such a Law hath indeed proceeded from God, namely, the Law of nature and of reason ; a Law which some injudicious persons take much pains and delight in vilifying and undervaluing, not understanding what they say, nor considering that, such as it is, it hath been the only Rule which God's Providence hath afforded to a great part of the inhabitants of this world, except some ancient traditions concerning the creation of the world, and the soul's immortality. This Law of nature is a law, which the human understanding duly cultivated and improved, and divested of prejudice, is capable of discovering ; a law which teacheth us to love and honour God, to be kind and merciful to all his creatures, to keep our minds employed in acquiring knowledge and virtue, and our body in subjection to our mind, and our passions and inclinations in obedience to our reason.

This is the end and intent of the moral law which God gave to the Jews ; this is the sum and substance of the Gospel of Christ ; this would perhaps suffice for all religious purposes, if man were a reasonable and an innocent person.

But it is to be considered that man, though he be a rational, yet is also a weak, imperfect, ignorant and sinful creature, more or less ; and therefore if God reveals himself to men, and gives them laws, there is a necessity that he should stoop in some measure to their defects, and give them not only those laws which in themselves are most excellent, but such laws as they can practise, laws which their situation and circumstances, their follies and iniquities render expedient ; and this is the reason of the Ceremonial law. Hence it comes to pass that

that in the whole conduct of God towards men, contained in the Old Testament, and in the representations which he there makes of himself, and in the style of the Scriptures, there are continual examples of great condescension and accommodation to the weakness and to the ignorance of men.

The Gospel is the natural and the moral law in full perfection ; but as we are imperfect and cannot live up to it, it was necessary, that is, it was suitable to perfect goodness and mercy, to use some abatement and condescension. Therefore God, in compassion to our infirmity, to exact unsinning obedience substitutes repentance, which is accepted through the propitiation and mediation of Christ.

Thirdly ; We find in the Scriptures some promises and threatenings, which are so expressed that they seem to be absolute and irreversible ; which yet, as the event shewed, were not accomplished ; and this seems not to agree with the unchangeable nature of God.

The following observations may serve to explain this matter, and to set it in a true light.

First ; All the promises and threatenings contained in the New Testament are conditional, and the condition is plainly expressed. We are taught there that goodness shall be rewarded, probably in this world, certainly in the world to come ; that obstinate disobedience shall infallibly be punished ; and that repentance shall restore us to the favour of God. Thus our happiness or misery is made to depend upon our own choice and behaviour.

In the Old Testament likewise the far greater part of God's promises and threatenings are of the same kind : they are conditional, and the condition is named expressly. Of many places that might be produced, I shall mention only two : one from Jeremiah ; At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation—to pull down and to destroy it ; if that nation—turn from their evil,

I will

I will repent of the evil that I thought I would do unto them: And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation—to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight—then will I repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them. Another from Ezechiel; When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity—for his iniquity that he hath done, shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness—and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.

Secondly; Some of God's decrees concerning societies or particular persons have no dependence upon the moral behaviour of men; and these consequently are absolute and irreversible. Such were these, for example, that Abraham and Sarah should have a son in their old age, that the posterity of Abraham should inherit the land of Canaan, that from Abraham and from David should arise the Messias, that the posterity of Esau should serve the posterity of Jacob; and many such like.

But thirdly, these decrees excepted, which are prophetic and providential, all other declarations, though they may seem absolute and unchangeable, yet are not so; for God reserves to himself a power of altering them, or suspending the execution of them.

Thus; When God promiseth favour or temporal advantages to one or to more persons, this condition is supposed, though it be not named, that they behave themselves in a proper manner. If they be guilty of some heinous iniquity, God is at liberty, if we may use the expression, to recall the favour, or to continue it, as he judgeth expedient.

When God threatens temporal evil to one or to more persons, though the threatening be denounced without any exception, yet if they repent, God may inflict or not inflict it, as he sees proper.

I shall

I shall give examples of this, some of which will shew at the same time, that wise and good men understood that the declarations of God, though made in an absolute manner, might be altered by him.

When David had grievously offended God in the matter of Uriah, the prophet Nathan was sent from God, and part of his commission was to declare this to the King, The child that is born unto thee shall surely die. The declaration was plain and peremptory; yet David, who was well skilled in things relating to divine revelation, never ceased to pray for the life of the child, till he died.

Again; The prophet Isaiah was sent to Hezechiah, to denounce this sentence of death: Thus saith the Lord, Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live. But Hezechiah prayed and wept, and God heard him and reversed the sentence.

Again; When the sons of Eli, the high-priest, had been guilty of most heinous offences, and their father had taken no care to restrain and correct them, severe judgments were denounced against the family, in the following words; The Lord God of Israel saith; I said indeed that thy house and the house of thy father should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me.

These are proofs that God's declarations, though made unconditionally, yet often depend upon the conduct of men, and that God reserveth to himself a right of fulfilling or revoking his promises or threats, according to their behaviour.

And that this is no sign of inconstancy in God, appears from these considerations:

First, God hath declared, as we shewed before, by Jeremiah and Ezechiel, that his promises and threatenings are to be commonly understood to admit such exceptions and limitations.

Secondly,

Secondly, Wife and good men in all times understood it to be so.

Thirdly, Human governors make laws in which they positively declare that they will punish such and such transgressions ; yet they reserve to themselves a power of mitigating or not inflicting the punishment. They grant favours and privileges unconditional to some of their subjects, and to their heirs after them for ever ; but in case of great crimes against the state, they are at liberty to take away the favour ; and no one can justly account this a breach of promise. In like manner, God revealing himself to the Jews as a legislator and governor, condescended to the customs of men, promising and threatening absolutely, and yet reserving to himself the liberty of acting as the circumstances of things should require.

This is one reason for which God in the Scriptures often confirmed his promises and threats by an oath : to shew that the decree was fixed and unalterable, and depended not on the future behaviour of men. And in the sacred Books it appears that whatsoever was thus once confirmed was always punctually accomplished. Therefore Eli, when he heard that God had resolved the destruction of his family, and had sworn to it, did not attempt to pray that the sentence might be reversed, knowing that prayers would be (*c*) ineffectual ; but, which was the only thing left for him to do, submitted with humble resignation. It is the Lord, said he, Let him do what seemeth him good.

It may be objected that God speaks thus to the rebellious Israelites, in the Book of Numbers ; As I live,— your carcases shall fall in the wilderness—ye shall not come into the land concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein. Here seems to be a breach not only of a promise, but of an oath. But this difficulty is removed

(c) *Define fata Deum fleti sperare precando.*

moved by observing that the promise of the oath to bring them into the land of Canaan was not made to them personally, but to them as they were a nation ; and to the nation it was fulfilled, though that generation died in the wilderness.

IV. It remains in the fourth and last place that we take notice of the practical uses which may be made of the doctrine that God is for ever the same, and subject to no alteration.

1. The consideration of God's unchangeable nature, compared with our changeable condition, may teach us to entertain modest and humble thoughts, and to know ourselves to be, what we are, most imperfect creatures in all respects; in our bodies, which lie exposed to a thousand dangerous impressions and accidents from the things about us, and of themselves tend to decay and dissolution; in our understanding, which is liable to error; in our memory, which often fails and forsakes us; in our friends and fortunes, which are a most uncertain possession; in our good dispositions, which at the best are not steady and uniform, but mixed and filled with many faults and defects.

2. Since God is set forth in the Scriptures as the bright and perfect original which in all things we should resemble as nearly as we can, his unchangeable nature reminds us that we must endeavour, like him, to be fixed and constant in all that is good, in our love of virtue, and in our lawful promises to one another. It was said of a great man, that He (*d*) was good, because he could not be otherwise. The meaning is, that he was unalterably good, both by temper and by habit: a character which belonged not to him, nor to human nature. But it is a perfection towards which nearer and nearer advances may be made by a pious mind, which hath the Gospel for its guide, and the holy Spirit of God for its assister.

3. The unchangeable nature of God suggests very powerful dissuasions from vice. The Scripture knows no decrees concerning the reprobation and salvation of particular persons, without regard to their moral qualifications. But there is a law which declares that obstinate and impenitent vice shall end in destruction. This law is as eternal and unchangeable as the nature of good and evil, as the nature and perfections of God. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but this decree shall not pass away; and therefore a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the everliving and immutable God.

4. Yet this unchangeable nature of our Creator, considered in another view, affords no less comfort and peace to the greatest offenders, if they will repent and turn to him. Their offences cannot be greater than his mercy and goodness, which endures to all eternity, ready to receive those who make themselves proper objects of his mercy.

5. If the consideration of God's immutability produce in us the profitable effects before-mentioned, repentance, humility, a desire of improvement, and a resolution to persevere in our duty, it will also strengthen our faith, and enliven our hope, and enable us firmly to rely on his promises of providing for us and protecting us at all times; and then, though we be weak, and all external things frail and transitory and deceitful, by depending upon the Almighty we secure to ourselves blessings and privileges of which no creature can deprive us; we rise, as it were, above ourselves, above time and the world, and partake in some sort of the unchangeable and all-sufficient nature of our great Creator.

S E R M O N XII.

JOHN iv. 24.

God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

TH E S E words are part of a discourse which our Saviour had with a woman of Samaria, to whom he discovered himself to be a prophet, and by whom he was consulted about an important question on which the Jews and Samaritans were at variance ; namely, whether the worship appointed by the Law of Moses were to be paid to God at the temple of Jerusalem, or at a mountain in Samaria ; to which question Christ gives two answers.

First, he informs her that the debate would be decided in a short time, and in an unexpected manner. The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. That is, The worship of God, according to the ceremonial law, shall soon cease, and in its room shall be established a more perfect service not confined to any place.

Secondly, he tells her concerning the controversy between the Jews and the Samaritans, that the Jews were in the right. Ye worship ye know not what : we know what we worship ; for salvation is of the Jews. The meaning seems to be this :

You (*a*) Samaritans do not serve God in a proper manner ; you ought to worship him at Jerusalem, where

(*a*) The Samaritans, in the days of Herod, having a mixture of strangers dwelling with them, and more intercourse with the Romans than the Jews

God himself appointed the temple to be built, and the service of the temple to be performed. We Jews know the will of God, concerning these things, and that in Jerusalem he hath chosen to place his name. You know nothing, except what you have received from us. We have not only the Law to guide us, but the Prophets also: our nation hath been honoured with a succession of persons sent from God to instruct us in divine things; and from Judæa, not from you, must the great Prophet arise who shall be the Saviour of the world.

To this our Lord adds; But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth. That is, The worship of God which consists in sacrifices and other carnal ordinances draws now to an end, and a new revelation will be made, directing men to honour God in a more spiritual and rational manner, in piety and in purity, in heart and soul, in a way more acceptable to him; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. He is a spirit, and therefore he is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

I. God is a spirit.

The holy Scriptures, in compliance with our capacities, and with the imperfections of human creatures and human language, represent God as having the body, the passions, and the infirmities of a man. They make mention of his eyes and ears, his hands and feet, his sleeping and waking; they ascribe to him fierce anger, and jealousy, and grief, and repentance, and joy, and desire. The unpolished language of the Hebrews, which also at the first was probably the language of Idolaters, might be another reason for its abounding with such expressions. But that no man might be so weak, or so perverse

Jews had, were the more easily induced to pay religious honours to the Emperors and to their Statues. To which Christ alluded, when he said that they worshiped they knew not what. *Baſnage Hist. des Juifs*, vol. I.

374.

The interpretation which I have followed is more probable.

perverse, as to take those expressions according to the letter, and entertain mean and unworthy thoughts of his Maker, the same Scriptures often add to those very descriptions something which manifestly shews how they are to be understood, and remind us, that if God hath a body, the heaven is his throne, and the earth is his footstool; if he hath hands, they are hands which reach to the ends of the creation; if he hath eyes, the darkness to them is no darkness, and from them nothing is hidden: and in other places tell us, that he is perfect, that he is blessed or happy, that he is unchangeable, that he is every where present, that he is a spirit, that no man hath seen him or can see him, that he is incomprehensible, and that the most exalted notion which we can possibly frame of him falls infinitely short of the truth.

God is a spirit. Consequently he is not a corporeal being, nor can he be the object of the human senses, he hath no body or form, he is the invisible God, whom no man hath seen or can see.

He is a spirit not united to matter, as the soul of man is to the body. The material world is not his body, but his creature and his servant. He acts upon it according to his will and pleasure; but it acts not upon him, or produces in him any alteration.

He is a spirit, who like us hath knowledge and power, but hath them without suspension or intermission, and in the highest perfection.

He is a spirit differing from all other spirits by many ways which we cannot possibly conceive and excelling every other spirit beyond all imagination, because he is the Creator and they the creatures, he independent, and they subsisting only by his power and permission.

This is the meaning of the words, God is a spirit.

II. Let us now, secondly, consider the duty arising thence. Since he is a spirit, he must be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

To worship God in spirit and in truth is in general to pay him a rational service, a service suitable both to his nature and to our own ; which if we would perform, we must observe the following directions.

First, we must ascribe to him all perfections ; and this we may be enabled to do, by considering our powers and our weaknesses, our good qualities and our defects, and by ascribing to God in the most eminent degree what is excellent in our nature, and also the perfections which are opposite and contrary to our defects.

Thus, we find in ourselves a certain degree of understanding, liberty, power, and goodness. If then we ascribe these in a supreme degree to God, we shall consider him as perfectly wise, knowing all things, incapable of being deceived, almighty, and able to perform whatsoever he pleaseth, ruling over the world, and governing all things with justice and equity, with clemency and mercy.

Again ; when we survey our own imperfections, we find, besides mortality, and a life of a short continuance, besides sin and misery, and error and ignorance, we find that we began to be at a certain time ; that we received our being from God, that we depend upon him for its continuance ; and that though our souls are immortal, yet it is by his gift who made them of such a nature, and they could not continue a moment without his permission and against his will. There are perfections contrary to these imperfections, and therefore we conclude that God is without beginning and without end, receiving nothing from any other being, independent, sufficient to his own happiness, the first cause of all things, and the author of every good gift.

To ascribe to God these perfections is one part of the worship due to him. We are sufficiently instructed in these things; sufficiently for the purposes of religion, by the Gospel which is received and preached amongst us, and by the many excellent treatises which we have upon

upon these subjects; and there is no great danger that we should err in this part of our duty. But a bare acknowledgment that God is a perfect being is not enough. We should frequently call it to mind and dwell upon it with pleasure, and entertain an habitual and practical knowledge of it, and so remember it as to be the better and the wiser for it; and consider what effects it should produce in us, and what behaviour and temper, what love and reverence, what faith and reliance, what resignation and humility, what pious sorrow, what hope, what diligence and improvement the perfections of God are adapted to excite in us.

2. If we would serve God in a rational manner, we must be careful to ascribe to him no imperfections. In this point men of all ages and of all religions have been remarkably disposed to fall into error, to acknowledge in general that God is perfect, and at the same time to entertain notions of him which are by no means consistent with perfection.

Thus, the Gentiles used to call the Supreme Being, *Best*, and *Greatest*. The expression was just, and conveyed noble and honourable sentiments of God. But these same Gentiles, forgetting or overlooking all that was implied in this expression, worshipped God in the sun, moon and stars, worshipped him under images of men, of beasts, and of monsters, added to the supreme God inferior deities, and paid them equal reverence with him, ascribed to them all human weaknesses and vices, gave divine honours to dead men, and worshipped their deities with childish and absurd, sometimes with impure, impious, and cruel rites and ceremonies.

The Jews, though they had a divine revelation to guide them, and in it many excellent rules of morality and noble descriptions of all the divine perfections, yet often from the time of Moses to the time of the Babylonian captivity fell into image-worship of God, and, which was far worse, into the worship of the Gentile deities;

deities; and afterwards, though they kept themselves free from idolatry, yet they entertained many mean and unworthy notions of God, and ascribed to him such a government of the world, and such a judgment concerning human actions, as is contrary to all notions of right reason, supposing that ceremonial observations were as valuable in his sight as virtue, and would supply defects in morality, and that God cast off all regard to mankind, and cared for none except themselves and their proselytes.

When the Gospel began to be preached, not only the Jews in general, but even the Apostles could scarcely believe at first that the Gentiles should be admitted into this new covenant; they thought it a strange, an amazing thing, that God should shew as much favour to a Greek or to a Roman as to a child of Abraham; yet was this so far from contradicting the law of nature and reason, or the divine perfections, that it must seem to us at present no less amazing how they could adopt and entertain such narrow sentiments.

Much of this wrong way of thinking many of those Jews who first embraced Christianity brought along with them, and could not shake off, contending that it was necessary for Christians to embrace the whole Law no less than the Gospel. St. Paul hath largely discussed this controversy in his Epistles; asserting, in opposition to these false teachers, the doctrine of Christian liberty, and shewing that men are justified by faith, or obedience to the Gospel, and not by an observance of the ceremonial law.

One plain design of Christianity was to teach men to entertain worthy thoughts of God and of the duty due to him, and to avoid the above-mentioned errors of the Gentiles and of the Jews; and yet Christians, as if they had never been told that God was a spirit, and was to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, and as if they had thought it unlawful to surpass either Jews or Gentiles, corrupted

corrupted in all imaginable ways the purity and simplicity of the Gospel, introduced images of Christ and of the holy Ghost, and of God the Father, fell down before them, and paid them honour and reverence, made themselves new mediators and prayed to Saints and Angels, ascribed a divine nature to consecrated bread and wine, which the Lord had commanded to be eaten, not to be adored, taught that faith and reason were opposite to each other, and that it was necessary to believe contradictions, established a spiritual tyranny over the conscience, and as much as in them lay, permitted men to be neither free nor rational creatures, made a great part of religion to consist in absurd and uncommanded austeries, in a reliance upon the virtues and merits of other men, in pomp and shew, in hatred and cruelty towards all who differed from them in opinion.

And amongst many who are free from these errors, there are notions to be found which detract from the perfections of God. Some magnify his absolute and uncontrollable power at the expence of his goodness; others hope that he may be appeased by a few acts of devotion and outward reverence, without amendment of life, which opinion can never be reconciled with his wisdom, justice, and holiness.

3. If we would form to ourselves just notions of God, we must not only ascribe to him all perfections, and remove from him all imperfections, but we must account him incomprehensible, and be sensible that his nature surpasseth our conceptions, and that it is not given to us to know him as he is. If we think that we can fully and clearly apprehend him, or any of his perfections, we must at the same time lessen them and make them finite and defective, by bringing them down to our finite and deficient understanding. Hence have arisen the errors of those who have fancied God to be like themselves, and cloathed with an human body, because

cause they could not imagine what a pure spirit was, and how it could subsist and act.

But here the opposite extreme is to be shunned. We ought to be sensible and to acknowledge that God is an incomprehensible object; yet we ought not to suppose that we can have no true and just conceptions at all about him and his perfections. The experience which we have of ourselves, and of the operations and actions of our own mind, will give us a representation of God, not adequate indeed to his nature, and yet true and just as far as it reacheth. We are made in his image, and we partake of his perfections; and whatever is excellent in the effect, must be originally in the first Cause. Life, understanding, knowledge, wisdom, goodness, activity, and power, are the same in kind in all rational beings, and differ only in degree; or else they are words without a meaning, and there is no such thing as sense and truth. We may then affirm of our Creator, without any danger of error and delusion, that he is very wise, very good, and very powerful; that he ever was so, and ever will be so; that he is the sole Author of all, upon whom all depend, and from whom all receive every thing that they possess: and thus far our knowledge of him is clear enough, and sufficient for all the purposes of morality and religious duty.

4. If we would worship God in a spiritual manner, we must take care to entertain just notions of religion.

The principal parts of religion and the ends for which we are made and designed were these:

First, to love and reverence God above all things, and to shew it by those actions and that behaviour which gratitude and veneration and reliance naturally suggest.

Secondly, to love our neighbour as ourselves, and to do to others as we would they should do to us.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, to amend what we can discover to be faulty and deficient in ourselves, and to cultivate and improve our understanding.

All other parts of religion are inferior to these ; they are means and helps to the obtaining of these ends ; and as they conduce more or less to this purpose, they are more or less important.

By considering our duty in this light, we shall be better able to perceive the meaning of our Saviour's precept, to serve God in spirit and in truth ; and we may preserve ourselves from the blind superstition, and that intemperate zeal for smaller matters, to which the bulk of mankind hath ever betrayed a strong propensity.

But here likewise, a contrary extreme is to be avoided. We must remember that morality, though it be the principal part, is not the whole of religion. Our Lord came to be our instructor, our redeemer, and mediator. A diligent endeavour therefore to learn what he requires us to believe and to do, and a reliance upon him as upon a guide, and a Saviour, and an intercessor, and an observance of his ordinances, is as much our duty as sobriety, or charity, or any other moral virtue.

5. Thus far we have considered the spiritual and true worship of God, principally as it relates to the notions which we entertain, and to the judgments which we form, concerning his perfections and our religion. I shall now consider it with a more particular regard to the effects and to the behaviour which it requires. Therefore, fifthly, to worship God in spirit and in truth, is to endeavour to imitate and resemble him.

A speculative knowledge of God's perfections will be of small service to us, unless we be deeply and suitably affected by them, and excited to a desire of resembling our heavenly Father in all things, as far as our weakness will permit. His goodness, his long-suffering and mercy in particular, require our imitation. These we should consider as they are in the divine nature, or as they appeared

peared in the Son of God, who took upon him our nature, and became an example more obvious and familiar to our apprehension, and upon which we may more easily form ourselves and our behaviour. From his doctrine and practice we may learn that to do good should be our chief care and occupation, and is our greatest glory and honour. To do good to others, when it is advantageous at the same time to ourselves, exposes us to no inconvenience, and is attended with a present reward: even this is right, and in some degree commendable; to do good to those who are poor and unable to return it, or unthankful and unwilling to acknowledge it, this is far more excellent; but to do good, and to suffer evil for it, this is the highest pitch to which human virtue can arise.

6. If we would worship God in spirit and in truth, we must be attentive when we address ourselves to him, and appear in his presence.

This is a duty in which we are often deficient; and our defects of this kind proceed from coldness and indifference to things sacred and serious, and from too great a fondness for the world, and for sensible objects. Hence it comes to pass, that though we know that we ought at certain times to worship God, and though we observe those times, and meet together for that purpose, we suffer our thoughts to stray, and our imagination to wander through the amusements and the diversions and the affairs of this life. Thus we change the spiritual worship of God into a ceremonial worship, or into something that deserveth not even that name, into something lower and meaner than any part of that ceremonial worship which the Gospel hath abolished as useless and imperfect. We almost act like those profane Jews, who, having vowed a sacrifice, chose for that purpose the blind and the lame, and the sick, and the torn, and the corrupt, the refuse of the flock. Offer it now unto thy Governor, says God in the Prophet; will he be pleased

pleased with thee, or accept thy person? Not much unlike to this is the behaviour of those who present to God the sacrifice of fools, sounds without sense, words without meaning, and a body without a mind; whose very devotion is blameable, and ought to be concluded at least with acknowledgments of the fault which they have committed in it, and with a prayer to God to forgive those prayers which they have been uttering with heedlessness and irreverence.

This is not to worship God in spirit and in truth; it is rather not to worship him at all in any sense; it is to have no notion of his supreme majesty and authority, and of our own wants, weakness, and dependence, one serious thought of which might be sufficient to dispel all other thoughts, and to make us as attentive and as much in earnest as when we endeavour to make ourselves acceptable to men, and to acquire some little advantage in our temporal affairs.

7. Part of that true and spiritual worship which is due to God is thus described by our Saviour: Thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, who pray in the Synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret. And when ye pray, use not vain repetitions as the Heathen, who think that they shall be heard for their much speaking; for your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of before you ask him.

The public worship of God is without question a necessary and important duty; but forasmuch as we are often led to it by motives not the most commendable, by compliance with custom, by respect for our superiors, by love of reputation, by interest; private worship hath in some respects the advantage over it, and that intercourse between God and the soul which is quite concealed from the sight and knowledge of others, is often

the

the sincerest and the truest act of reverence and faith which we pay to him.

If we accustom ourselves to this secret conversation with God, and preserve that habitual reverence towards him, and that opinion of his perfections and of our own defects which the Gospel teacheth us to entertain, we shall never fall into that vain and senseless babbling which our Lord ascribes to the Gentiles. If the heart be duly disposed, words will be ready to express our sentiments. Eloquence is not required of us as necessary to recommend our prayers to our heavenly Father; and yet, if it were required, even in this we need not be deficient; for the (*b*) affections are always eloquent. If we feel our wants, our wants will teach us to pray; and if we are sensible of benefits received, gratitude will teach us to return thanks.

8. Lastly: the true and spiritual worship of God consists in nothing more eminently than in submitting ourselves entirely to his good providence with patience and contentment in our station, and acquiescence under it, and an expectation of receiving good things from the hand of God in that manner, and in that degree, and at that time, whether here or hereafter, which shall seem best to him.

Indeed, if we are in a state of prosperity, in a full possession of all temporal blessings, there seems to be little opportunity for the exercise of this duty. Our principal duty then is to receive the good things of this life with gratitude and thankful acknowledgment, to consider them as uncertain and transitory, to use them with moderation and discretion, and to employ them to the honour of God, and to the service of mankind. But since God hath so ordered the course of human things, that there is no perfect happiness, no uninterrupted ease, no sincere pleasure in this life; but troubles, and sickness,

(*b*) Imperitus quoque, si modo sunt aliquo affectu concitati, verba non defunt. Quintilian x. 7. P. 953.

sickness, and pain, and disappointments, and losses and sorrows are scattered up and down here below, and wait for us and overtake us in some part or other of our progress through mortality ; we shall scarcely ever want opportunities of exercising the patient and submissive virtues of resignation to the will of the Almighty. In all times and in all circumstances, to rely upon him as upon our great friend and benefactor, and firmly to believe that he orders all with perfect wisdom and goodness, and that they who love him shall receive from him whatsoever is expedient for them ; this is to honour and worship him, not in words and in pretence, but in deed and in truth, with the heart and understanding and all the powers of the soul, and to pay him the most rational and the most acceptable service.

S E R M O N X I I I .

R O M . ii . ii .

There is no respect of persons with God.

HOW is this possible, since all men are what God hath made them, and since no one thing can more differ from another, than one person seems to differ from another? Consider man in his body, his fortunes, his situation, his temper, his understanding, and his heart, compare him with his fellow-creatures, and you will find that more variety can hardly be conceived than is to be observed in the human race.

As to the body, one is defective, and another is well-formed; one is deprived of some of the senses, or hath them in a low degree, another enjoys them all in their full vigour; one languishes under a weak and a sickly constitution, another is blessed with health and strength; one lives, if he can be said to live, in continual bodily pain, another is quite free from such disorders; one hath length of days, another is cut off in the flower of youth.

As to circumstances; one is poor, and another is rich; one meets with a series of disasters and disappointments with few friends and with many adversaries, and his assiduous labours obtain no reward; another is successful and favoured by the world, every one is ready to serve

serve and assist him, and things take a surprising turn in his behalf ; one is doomed to obscurity, and is exposed to insults, is a servant, a drudge, a captive, and a slave ; another is powerful, and in high stations, and honour and respect wait upon him.

As to temper ; one is easily satisfied, and not soon discomposed, and possesses serenity, and peace of mind ; another is by constitution timorous, or fretful, or anxious, or desponding, or melancholy, and is plagued with forebodings, with fears and gloomy horrors.

As to the passions ; they seem to be more impetuous in some, and therefore to require more skill and pains to keep them in due order ; whilst others experience less difficulty in governing them, and find them more compliant to rule and reason.

As to natural abilities ; one hath a strong memory, a lively fancy, a good judgment, a fine taste, and a large capacity ; another is so deficient in all these respects, that small improvements are to be expected or produced in him.

As to external advantages, of country, situation, and education, upon which so much depends ; one is placed in a land of liberty, learning, religion, and good manners, and wants no means and helps of enlarging the mind and improving the heart ; another hath his hard lot in regions of darkness and tyranny, is thrown amongst savages and barbarians, and dwells by the dens of uncivilized men, and of wild beasts, little worse than they.

And yet these are all the offspring of one and the same God, who is said to be good to all, and to be no respecter of persons.

To clear up the divine impartiality from the objections arising out of this diversity of capacities and conditions, we must in the first place form to ourselves a right notion of the fault which we call respecting of persons, and we must distinguish between matters of mere favour, and

matters of justice. Now amongst men, and in their intercourse with each other, favours and gifts, to which another person hath no claim, are free, and either lawfully bestowed or lawfully withheld, and none can be accused as a respecter of persons, who makes one rather than another the object of his kindness, if he is guided by prudence, or by innocent affection. Indeed it should never be forgotten, that what we call matters of favour are oftener matters of right and justice than we commonly imagine, and that usually there are persons who have a fair claim to our good offices. But yet sometimes, as in the choice of friends and acquaintances, or of dependents and servants, or in the disposal of what we have to give, we cannot keep company with every one, or employ every one, or oblige and assist every one, and we may prefer one deserving person to another perhaps equally deserving, without being respecters of persons. But in points of justice and equity, in protecting or acquitting, in recompensing or correcting, in matters of trust, and when power and authority is committed to us by the Public, whosoever favours the guilty, or hurts the innocent, or gives or refuses without a sufficient reason, or contrary to the eternal rules of right, such an one is partial, or prejudiced, or a respecter of persons.

The same distinction holds true in relation to God's dealings with his creatures. His giving them more or less, his placing them here or there when he calls them into being, is a matter of favour, and no account should be asked or expected, and what is called respect of persons hath nothing to do with it. But in his behaviour to his creatures consequent to their behaviour towards him, in this he acts by the rules of justice and of equity, and in this his justice and his equity shall be so manifest, as to clear him from all imputations of partiality.

If you examine the passages of Scripture where God is said to be no respecter of persons, you will find that this perfection is ascribed to him, not directly as he is Creator, but rather as he is Ruler and Judge, and dispenser of rewards and punishments; and so with relation to men, when they are commanded not to respect persons, they also are considered, not as doing favours, but as exercising acts of dominion, authority, judgment and justice, in a public, or in a domestic and private character.

These considerations remove in a great measure the objections to God's providence, and shew that it cannot be charged with partiality.

But, secondly, the present diversity of condition amongst men is so uncertain and variable, and lasts for so very short a space, that it becomes in this view far more incon siderable than is usually imagined.

Man is called into this world, to dwell here for a few days or years, and then to depart and launch out into eternity. This is his first stage of life, his entrance into being, and his course through this first period is presently ended. One is in a flourishing condition, and another struggles with adversity; and whilst we gaze with admiration or envy upon the one, and slight or pity the other, the scene closes, and the vision fades away. How trifling are these temporal and transient conveniences and inconveniences, compared with the endless duration that opens before us! It is our future lot and situation that alone can determine us happy or unhappy upon the whole.

But, besides this, even the present, the temporal condition of men is perpetually varying, and nothing is permanent and durable; but all men, more or less, pass through the vicissitudes of what we call good and evil.

Nor is this all yet; for even temporal happiness depends not so much upon externals as we are apt to think. Many other circumstances are to be taken into the account; and of two persons, of whom the one passes for happy, and the other for unhappy in human estimation, perhaps the sum total of pleasure and pain which they experience is nearly equal.

We are also to take this into consideration, that natural evil, such as poverty and pain, flights and disappointments, is not always a real calamity, but rather discipline and correction; tending to make the sufferer better, to guard him from danger, to save him from ruin, to teach him wisdom, and to guide him to happiness; and in this respect it becomes desirable and beneficial.

Thirdly, The evils of which men complain are often evils of their own procuring.

Virtue has a natural tendency to make men happy, and a natural connection with happiness. This connection is sometimes suspended and interrupted by accidental causes, and by the iniquity of others, in the present disorderly state of things; but usually, and upon the whole, the effects of goodness are highly advantageous. Vice hath the same connection with misery, or rather is more intimately united with it: it hurts the body, the fortunes, the temper, the understanding, and the reputation. Sometimes a good man is exposed to poverty and misery; but a wicked person is never truly happy, never so happy as he would have been if he had adhered to the cause of Virtue. If the evils to which men are obnoxious were duly examined, and traced up to their causes, we should find that the greater part of them are the consequences either of thoughtless folly and indiscretion, or of deliberate wickedness. Therefore these sufferings are not to be charged to the divine administration, but entirely to those who bring them upon themselves.

Fourthly,

Fourthly, the impartiality of Providence, whatsoever difficulties may attend it in the present state, will be fully cleared up in the next, and we must wait with patience to that time for the fuller solution of some of our doubts.

As to the temporal conveniences and inconveniences of life, we have shewed them to be no reasonable objection to the divine goodness and impartiality. It is indeed the moral and religious difference between men that embarrasses the question, and creates the main difficulty. One hath an opportunity of improving his heart and his understanding, and is a good man and a good Christian; another is deprived of this knowledge and of these advantages, and hath nothing to guide him, besides the dictates of natural conscience, and the faint glimmerings of unimproved and uncultivated reason; and this by no fault of his own, but by having his hard lot in the dark regions of rudeness and of ignorance. God is the Father of them both; but he makes a wide difference between them, and seems to treat the one as a son, and the other as a stranger: one is a favourite child of God, the other a forlorn child of Nature.

In answer to this, the Scripture faith, that God will judge the world in righteousness, and deal with every one according to his talents, and to the use which he hath made of them. The following suppositions may therefore be admitted, as agreeing very well with Reason and with Scripture.

All men have it in their power to do all that God requires at their hands.

All those who, upon the whole, and in the main, act suitably to their abilities and capacities, have a secret influence of God, to help them so far as is needful.

All such persons have Jesus Christ for their redeemer, though he never was revealed to them.

All who have thus behaved themselves shall enjoy the beneficial effects of it hereafter, and be removed to a better condition than this, in which they shall be happy in various degrees; but yet according to the extent of their desires and capacities, and shall have the means and opportunities of making a greater progress and improvement in goodness and happiness.

All they who by their own perverseness and wilful depravity have misemployed and abused the talents committed to them, shall suffer for it in such degree and manner as the supreme Wisdom shall judge expedient.

Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required; and unto whomsoever little is given, of him little shall be required. This is the voice of Reason, this is the express declaration of our Saviour. This removes much of the disparity of conditions, and makes it an ambiguous point whether of these stations is the more eligible; a point which lies beyond all human skill to decide. Who knows whether the lot of the Savage be not better than that of the Philosopher, and the lot of the slave than that of the king? But thus much we know, that every one ought to be contented with that state in which his wise and good Creator hath placed him, and to conclude that it will be the best for him, if he makes the best use of it. Upon these suppositions the divine impartiality stands fully justified.

We have thus far considered the inequality amongst men, and shewed that it is consistent with the divine equity. Let us now take another view of the question, and shew that men, in many respects, and with a few exceptions, are rather more upon the level, more like one another, than we usually imagine.

All men have a mortal body and an immortal soul, and are liable to the same agreeable or disagreeable impressions from external objects, have the same senses, and much the same powers and faculties.

All are inhabitants of the same place, have the same earth to feed them, the same sun and stars to shine upon them, the same air to breathe, and the same heavens to cover them.

All have the same ordinary means and methods to improve themselves, such as diligence, application, sobriety, civility; and all suffer by the contrary vices, by laziness, dissoluteness, carelessness and rudeness.

As they are reasonable creatures they have the same great Law, the law of Reason, or Natural Religion, to guide and instruct them.

As they stand equally in need of the divine assistance, they all have it, as far as it is necessary; or may secure it, if they behave themselves suitably to their situation and circumstances.

They are all subject to one supreme Governor, to whom they are answerable, and before whom they all must appear, and be accepted or rejected, not according to the rank which they held here below, or to the things which they possessed, but according to their conduct, and to their use or their abuse of the divine blessings.

Christianity indeed, or the knowledge of it, is rather matter of favour than of absolute necessity, and therefore hath not been revealed to all; but this arises from other causes, and not from any thing in the nature of Christianity that might confine it to particular times and places. It is plainly intended for universal use, and adapted to mankind; and herein it differs from Judaism, which was partial and local, and calculated for one nation.

Where the Gospel is revealed, it is for us and for our children, for the rich and the poor, for the learned and the ignorant; the same duties are propounded to us all, under the same rewards, and the same penalties.

These things being duly considered, it appears that men resemble each other in the most important things, are children, of the same earthly ancestor, and of the same heavenly Father, and brethren belonging to one and the same family.

Hitherto we have been removing objections against the divine impartiality, objections arising principally from the variety of conditions, and the disorderly appearance of things in this present state of trial and pilgrimage.

Now we will proceed to prove directly that God is and must needs be impartial, from his own nature and perfections, a point very easy to be proved, and therefore not requiring a long discussion.

All partiality manifestly arises either from vice, or from weakness and ignorance; consequently it can find no access to an all-perfect Being.

As God is almighty, self-existing, eternal and independent, all his creatures are at the same distance below him; that is, at an infinite distance. Compared with each other, they differ in a vast variety of degrees; but compared with him, they are what finite is to infinite, and bear no proportion at all. Therefore he must behold them all, as they are created beings, with the same indifference, and the same disposition. Before they existed, there was nothing that could recommend one more than another to his favour; and after they were called into being, nothing but their diversity of behaviour can produce in him any different regard for them.

As he is perfectly wise, he must treat them according to the laws of wisdom, equity, and justice, laws which are everlasting and invariable; and not by the dictates of partiality, which is blind, fanciful, mutable, and unaccountable.

As he is perfectly good, he considers them all as his offspring, and his children. He designed them for happiness, he created them to do them good, and not to do them

them harm ; and nothing can hinder him from exerting this beneficence, except their own fault, their undutiful behaviour.

Thus the impartiality of God appears from his own nature and perfections, and from the express testimony of Scripture ; and the objections to it, and the difficulty of reconciling it with the course of nature and of providence arise from our imperfect view of things, and our inability to comprehend the several parts of this vast system, and to look through infinity and eternity.

The practical use to be made of this doctrine is as follows : After adoring our great Author as the fountain of all good, and placing our whole confidence in him, that he will bless our endeavours to serve him, and lift up the light of his countenance upon us, we should try to imitate him in this perfection, and like him to be no respecters of persons. Be ye perfect, says our Lord, as your heavenly Father is perfect ; and consequently, be ye impartial, as he is impartial.

It is indeed extremely difficult for mortal man to be impartial. But we must endeavour to acquire this upright disposition, and to act suitably to it. This must be done by divesting ourselves of those bad qualities and inclinations which lead us to unfairness and partiality in our conduct ; and they are in general our passions, when they are irregular, and exceed their bounds, and are turned into vices.

Thus ; Pride and insolence always produce partiality. The love of power teaches us to oppres others purely to shew our power, to favour those who submit to us in all things, and to be unkind and cruel to those who refuse to be our slaves.

Pride is usually accompanied with the love of praise, and then he who flatters most will be best rewarded, and he who cannot submit to such mean arts will be slighted and rejected ; and so every favour will be dispos'd of to those

those who least deserve it, and the childrens bread given to the dogs. It is a melancholy thing to observe, that many persons, who have their good qualities, yet have this weakness, and cannot bear plain dealing, nor see through the artifices of parasites, nor distinguish between compliment and sincerity.

Covetousness and self-interest are unavoidably accompanied with partiality. Such persons usually sell their favours to the best bidder, without any regard to any other qualification, and have no consideration for those who can make no other return than thanks and gratitude. As an inordinate love of gain is the root of all evil, so is it particularly of partiality and prostitution, both in matters of courtesy and in matters of justice; and persons of this temper lie under strong temptations to violate the rules of honesty and equity, when it may be done with impunity, and with present profit.

Party zeal, either civil or religious, when indiscreet and intemperate, hath the same bad influence in biasing the judgment; and the foulest things are then said and done without remorse, to serve what is imagined to be a good cause.

Anger and envy also, when indulged, always lead men to carry their spleen and resentment beyond all reason and decency, to overlook the good qualities, to aggravate the defects, to misrepresent the innocent actions of those at whom they are offended, to listen to any calumnies raised against them, and to refuse them the offices even of justice and common humanity.

Credulity, and easiness, and indolence of temper, are also parents of partiality. Persons of this turn of mind are led by others, and depend upon their judgment of men, as well as of opinions, and will give themselves no trouble to look into things, and to get proper information, but will say and believe as they are directed; and thus it is often seen that even a good-natured person will do an ill-natured action.

Again,

Again, there is in some a fantastical and capricious temper, by which they adopt unaccountable likings and dislikings, and are kind to one and cold to another for no reason besides humour and prejudice. The evil effect of this folly is often found in families, where one child and one dependent shall be indulged and humoured, and another slighted and kept at a distance, for no imaginable cause; the usual consequence of which absurd conduct is, that the most favour is shewed to those who least deserve it, who make the worst returns for it, and who are the most spoiled by it.

Lastly, Love and friendship are too often accompanied with partiality. Pity it is, that love and friendship, which are in themselves so good and amiable, should make us misbehave ourselves towards any of our fellow-creatures, and that these fair parents should produce so foul an offspring. But whenever our affection for any person is excessive, and not founded upon reason, it induces us to serve the beloved and idolized object at the expence of our duty to God, to mankind, and to ourselves, and by shewing too much kindness to some, to shew too little to others who have an equal right and claim to it.

From these disorderly passions we must endeavour to divest ourselves, and set our affections upon truth, justice, integrity, and equity; and remember our Saviour's rule as the best direction, to do to others as we would that they should do to us. According as we observe or neglect this precept, God will deal with us when we shall appear before him to give an account of ourselves. With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you; and as ye have judged others, so likewise shall ye be judged. A decree very comfortable, or very formidable, as our behaviour shall make it turn either to our future advantage or detriment.

S E R M O N X I V.

M A R K xii. 30.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.

I SHALL not omit any thing of practical use upon this subject, if I can shew you,

- I. On what the love of God should be founded :
- II. In what it consists, and what effects it produces.
- III. By what means we may bring ourselves to perform this duty.

I. Let us consider on what the love of God should be founded.

Love, if it be a rational affection, and not a blind passion, is founded upon the beneficial nature of the person whom we love. Either he hath shewed kindness to us, and then our love ariseth from gratitude ; or we know that he delights in goodness, and therefore, though we have no personal obligation to him, we conclude that he would serve us, if he were sensible that we deserved it, and if it were in his power, and therefore we love him. Thus we love persons with whom we are not acquainted, and whom we probably may never see, because we have heard of their good report. Thus we love persons long ago dead, whose virtues we have read in history with wonder

wonder and pleasure; we represent them in our thoughts as benefactors to mankind, to whose bright examples we are obliged, and who would have been our friends, if we had lived and conversed together.

There are many perfections, besides goodness, to which we ought to pay a due regard, wheresoever we meet with them; but there is not one besides goodness, which hath any right to our love. True it is, that a good being, by possessing all other perfections, is able to exert his goodness upon all occasions, and therefore deserves a greater degree of our love, than one whose goodness is more confined, and less beneficial.

This is easily applied to God. By natural light and by revelation we find that he surpasses all in goodness, as much as in every other excellence; that he is the Best and the Greatest. As he is the Greatest, we ought to reverence him; as he is the Best, we ought to love him.

Some have weakly and injudiciously affirmed that the motives, inducing us to love God, ought not to be taken from the benefits which he confers upon us, but from the sole consideration of his infinite perfections; and that thus our love will be refined and disinterested. They bid us consider God in a manner in which it is impossible to consider him, as a Being from whom we receive nothing; they bid us love him, and they exclude the only just cause which we have of loving him. We cannot love God, purely because he is infinite, independent, everlasting, all knowing and almighty, most just and most wise; but we love him, because he is our Father and our great Benefactor, whose power gave us being, whose Providence preserves us, whose goodness prevents us with blessings, whose long-suffering bears with us, whose mercy forgives us: and this love is by no means faulty in its motives, since it is founded upon gratitude,

gratitude, and a due sense of the favours which we have received from the author of all happiness; the first Cause of every good gift. The Scriptures, which frequently call upon us to love God, do as frequently remind us of our obligations to him, to excite our love: and in this, as in other instances, we shall find it a never-failing truth, that the foolishness of God is wiser than men; that the precepts relating to piety and morality, and the arguments used to enforce them, delivered with much plainness and simplicity in the holy Scriptures, are preferable to all the refinements which have been added to them; for indeed these refinements are usually fantastical, and the inventions of men who have more imagination than judgment.

II. Let us proceed to shew in what the love of God consists, and how it should exert itself. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.

These expressions, with all the heart, with all the soul, with all the mind, with all the strength, seem not to have each a distinct particular sense, though endeavours have been used to find and ascertain them. They seem rather to mean in general, that our love for God must be sincere, active, and constant; and they were intended, it may be, to imitate to the people of Israel that they must worship and love and honour God, and him alone, and not serve other Gods besides him, and divide their hearts and their reverence towards different objects of devotion: for thus is the precept introduced; Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God, &c.

The emphatical force of these words; with all the heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and the perfect goodness of God, who is worthy of the highest degree of our affections, and whom it is impossible to love too

too much and to serve too well, might incline us to think, with some interpreters of Scripture, that a perfect love is here required in the most exalted sense that can be imagined, that we ought to entertain no thought and design, and perform no action, which relates not directly to God and to his service: but then if we consider that this is what mere human nature cannot in any manner accomplish, that it is what the best of men, even with the divine assistance, never performed; if we consider that this precept was given to the Jews under a dispensation not so spiritual and excellent as the Gospel; and that God absolutely required this proof of their obedience, and made it a necessary condition of obtaining his favour; and that some of them are said in Scripture to have fulfilled this condition, as David and others, who were righteous men indeed, but neither free from many failings, nor so good as many Christians have been: if we consider this, we may well descend to a more moderate interpretation, and say that the love of God is a grateful sense of his goodness, and a sincere desire to please him.

As to particulars :

1. The love of God is a love by which we give him the preference. We must seek his favour more than any other objects of our desires, and be willing to part with them all rather than to lose it. The love of God therefore subdues all affections contrary to itself; that is, all vicious habits, and disposes us to love those things which are innocent and lawful, with moderation, and so as to be ready to resign them if God should require it. This is what we are able to do, and what the children of this world constantly do, to gratify a favourite vice, to which they sacrifice all other inclinations and interests. They love health, and long life, and reputation, and relations, and friends, and honours, and power, and sensual pleasures, and riches. But if the love of riches, or of sensual pleasures, or pride and vain-glory be the predominant

nant passion, they will for the sake of it give up not only things for which they have a small value, but things which they really love and esteem in a considerable degree.

The person who loves God hath his trials and temptations : the three Idols of the world, Wealth, Power, and Pleasure would seduce him from his obedience, and for the sake of them he sometimes experiences inclinations to evil ; but his love to God prevails over these inferior desires, and by degrees subdues them.

He who loves God, loves also many other things ; he loves life, and health, and reputation, and liberty, and innocent diversions, and useful employments, and his friends and family ; but if at any time it becomes necessary for him to part with these, or with his virtue, he can quit them, and embrace poverty, solitude, confinement, contempt, disgrace, and pain, and persecution, and death, rather than offend God, and cease to serve him.

2. A constant effect of the love of God is frequently to contemplate upon him ; for whatsoever hath a place in our heart, must have a place in our thoughts. We should often reflect upon his perfections, particularly upon his goodness, with wonder and delight, with gratitude and thanksgiving, and at the same time upon ourselves, as upon the objects of that goodness. They therefore who scarcely ever think of God in the days of health and prosperity, or ever seriously address themselves to him except in danger and distress, may be certain that they have no love for him.

3. Another effect of love towards God is, to entertain just and honourable notions of him. Love is ever attended with esteem ; and when it is misplaced, or greater than it ought to be, it fancies the object of its liking to be much more excellent than it really is. Hence it is that we often cannot discover the failings of our friends

friends and favourites, which to every other eye are visible enough. If therefore love to our fellow-creatures can make us overlook defects where there are so many, certainly love towards God ought at least to preserve us from fancying defects in him in whom there are none. God is all perfect; but in his government of the world, in the present state of irregularity, of wickedness, and of misery, which he permits, there are some difficulties. He who loves God is persuaded that these discords destroy not the harmony of the divine administration, that all is ordered for the best, and that the ways of Providence shall in due time be cleared and justified; and by this persuasion he preserves his mind free from repining discontent under his present circumstances, and from injurious thoughts of his Maker and Governor.

4. Another constant effect which the love of God produceth in us, is an endeavour to promote his honour and his interests; for we would willingly add to the happiness of those whom we love and esteem, and we ever have their welfare at heart. We know that the happiness of God is perfect, and incapable of receiving increase or suffering diminution from any thing that his creatures can do. Yet he hath put it in our power, in some sort, to exert this act of love even towards him. In condescension to our capacities and affections, he represents himself as wanting something which we are able to do for him, as desiring that goodness and happiness may abound here below, and that vice, with all the evils attending and following it, may be restrained; he represents himself as honoured by the obedience, and dishonoured by the wickedness of men; and if in this we endeavour to accomplish his will, and advance his honour, he receives these acts of love as real services done to himself. Here then is an effect of a sincere love towards God, namely a zeal to promote his glory and wor-

ship. The same effect may be considered in another light; and we may say,

5. That the love of God ever produces a desire to imitate and resemble him, as far as our nature permits, particularly in those perfections, for the sake of which we love him.

If we love any person with a sober and rational affection, it is for the sake of his good qualities; and consequently, we love those good qualities, and would make them our own. If we love God because he is beneficent, merciful, long-suffering, forgiving iniquities, not willing that any should perish, inviting all to eternal happiness, and offering them the means to obtain it, we shall in some degree possess the virtues which bear a resemblance to these divine perfections: and therefore the Scriptures with great reason frequently require this proof of our love to God, telling us that he who loves God loves mankind, and that he who hates his neighbour and pretends to religious zeal and sublime devotion, is an hypocrite and a liar.

6. Lastly, Our love to God ought to be accompanied with an acknowledgment that we love him not so much as we ought, and with a desire to love him more. We think that we can never do enough for those whom we love, though perhaps we have done more for them than is consistent with our duty to ourselves and to the rest of mankind. With relation to God, such a temper is most reasonable, and the only compensation which we can make for all the coldness and carelessness which so often interrupts our duty towards him. The Gospel sets before us in its precepts a system of exact morality, and in the Author of those precepts an example of virtue allayed with no imperfections. From these precepts and from this example we should form our conduct: but neither do we live the life of Christ, nor so keep his commandments as not to fail in many instances. The body pres-

sing

ring down the soul, the passions from within, and the objects from without, disturbing it, and taking it off from wiser employments, fully its very best performances with continual frailties and defects. God is not extreme to mark what is done amiss: he is ready to pardon these weaknesses; but then he requires of us that we be sensible how short we fall of our duty, and in how many things we offend, that we own ourselves sinners, and that we wish to make him more suitable returns. If we have any love for him, we shall at least confess ourselves not sufficiently grateful, and desire to be more diligent and useful servants, and endeavour, as we daily draw nearer to our end, to draw nearer to him also, and hope that a time will come, when, removed from the vanity and temptations of this world, and admitted into a better, we shall find every good disposition improved, and every bad one rooted out, and shall enjoy the happiness of never offending God any more.

In these things the love of God consists, and in these effects it shews itself where it is sincere; whence we may learn that this duty is justly called the first and great commandment. Such indeed it is, both on account of its immediate object, God himself, who is the first and greatest of all beings; and on account of the extensive influence which it has on our actions; since it is a principle from which not only a general, but a cheerful obedience to God's precepts will flow, and without which there can be no such thing as religious perseverance.

The love of God is often put in Scripture for the whole of our duty, for all goodness in general; and so are some other single acts of religion.

The love of God, where it is used in a more fixed and restrained sense, signifies that part only of our duty which relates to God, a grateful sense of his goodness, and such acts of devotion, faith, and reliance, as arise from it; as in the place whence the text is taken, where we are told that to love God is the first and great com-

mandment, and that the second is like unto it, namely, to love our neighbour as ourselves. If to love God were the whole duty of man, the love of our neighbour would not be a second commandment like unto the first, but a part of the first, and comprehended in it.

The love of God is the first and great commandment, and yet a commandment liable to be misrepresented and misunderstood; for love is an affection or passion; and it is not usual for men to have very accurate notions of the passions, and to know exactly what they are, and in what they consist; as any person may soon find upon making the trial. The most familiar and intelligible way of explaining any passion to common capacities is to shew them the effects which attend it, and the actions which it produces. This method is used in the holy Scriptures; and, that we may not mistake the nature and the extent of the duty of loving God, a rule is proposed to us by which we may know whether we practise it, and we are assured that a careful endeavour to learn the will of God, and to act according to it, is a sufficient proof of our love.

The love of God differs so much from the love of sensible objects, and from our other passions, that it can hardly be called a passion in the same sense in which they are so called. It differs in this, that it is at first raised, and afterwards kept up, by reason alone. It is therefore a religious habit and a virtue, which no other passion is, unless it hath God and morality, and religion for its objects. In this also it differs from them, that, being both produced and preserved by reason, it is a sober and moderate affection, accompanied with no blind impetuosity, no restless uneasiness, no violent commotion of mind, like other passions; and as it ariseth not to the same height with them, so neither doth it sink as low at other times, but shews itself in an uniform and sedate love of righteousness, of every thing that God approves.

Some persons, not duly considering this, sincerely desire to please God, and carefully endeavour to lead a good life, and yet sometimes are afraid that they have no love for God, because they experience not in themselves that warmth of affection to which others pretend, and which is expressed and required in some books of devotion. They may learn from the Scriptures that where there is obedience, there is always love, and that whosoever delights in holiness and justice and goodness and mercy and truth, may reasonably conclude that his heart is right towards God.

Others, looking upon the love of God as upon a mere passion, a disposition of mind producing devotion, and ending there, have excited in themselves a high zeal and affection for God, and a firm persuasion that they were his favourites; and, having done this, have thought themselves arrived to Christian perfection, whilst at the same time they have perhaps been under the dominion of evil habits, and addicted to wrath, malice, covetousness, uncharitableness, censoriousness, injustice, pride, ambition, sensuality. This strange mixture of hypocrisy, vice, and enthusiasm, hath been common in all ages, and ever will be so. There are always those whose religion and devotion is, to use the words of St. Paul, sounding brass, or clamour and confidence; whilst true goodness is modest and unaffected, and teaches men to make less noise, to live more honestly. To preserve us from such delusions, Christ hath told us that we should either keep his commandments, or not pretend to love him, and that it signifies nothing to say to him, Lord! Lord! and not to do what he requires.

Other love towards God than this the Scriptures know not: they never recommend that spiritual fever, those warm transports, and that bold familiarity which some zealots affect; nor that cold, refined, mysterious, and disinterested devotion, which another sort of fanatics require; for first, the love of God is sober reason and not blind

blind passion ; reverence and not presumption ; secondly, it is gratitude, and we love him, because he first loved us.

III. I should now, in the third place, say something of the proper means to bring ourselves to practise this duty. It shall be in few words.

Since the precept of loving God is called the first and great commandment, we may conclude that it requires a temper and a behaviour, which, like all other excellent accomplishments, is not to be acquired without diligent application. A person cannot say to himself, I am resolved to love God, and immediately execute that resolution. It is not a sudden start of devotion, and warmth of affection, but a pious habit, and the result of many wise thoughts and many good actions ; and the proper method to attain it may, I think, be traced and discovered by observing what are the causes which hinder men from loving God as they ought.

First, wrong notions of God's perfections ; notions which detract from his providence, from his wisdom, his knowledge, his justice, and his goodness. These must produce either an irreligious disregard, or a slavish and superstitious fear of him.

Secondly, habitual vices. We cannot love God, unless we believe that he loves us. The person who is enslaved to sin, and resolved not to deliver himself from that bondage, cannot think of God without horror and confusion, and will find it impossible to consider him as his chief good.

Thirdly, as all evil habits have this bad effect upon us, so in particular an immoderate love of the present world creates in us as great an indifference towards God. It turns every thought, every desire, every design another way ; makes us incapable of taking any pleasure in religion, of having any taste for things which affect not the senses, or even of wishing for those spiritual rewards which God promiseth to the obedient.

If therefore we would love God, we should acquaint ourselves with him, as far as our understanding will permit, and consider him as a Being in whom are all the perfections which are proper to excite the profoundest awe and respect and religious fear; and in whom this terrible majesty is so tempered and allayed with mercy and goodness, that he becomes the object of faith and hope, and humble confidence, and gratitude. We should keep ourselves, at least, from the dominion of sin, from repeated and presumptuous transgressions. If at any time we find that motives of gratitude prevail little upon us, we should have recourse to other motives though they be of an inferior and less noble kind; such as present interest, reputation, the fear of infamy, and of punishment in this life, and in the next. We should seriously and frequently consider what this world is through which we are passing, and what its envied and much desired enjoyments, those especially which reason and religion condemn, and what we shall think of them in the hour when we bid them an eternal farewell. By these degrees we may hope to raise our affections to the Author of all good, and love him with our whole heart and soul,

S E R M O N XV.

LUKE xii. 5;

I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear : Fear him who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell ; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.

FEAR is a passion deeply implanted in our nature, which, like the rest of the passions, may be directed to proper objects, and moderated, and kept in decent order by Reason ; but cannot be totally removed. It is to be found in all men, and it ariseth from a love of their own being and happiness, and a desire to preserve both. This makes every thing that they think will hurt them the object of their fear. Even they who by natural constitution and habit have what is called courage and resolution in an eminent manner, and boldly encounter dangers, yet still have fears of one sort or other ; as fear of disgrace, fear of censure, fear of sickness, fear of poverty, and the like. They have doubtless some fear of death ; but it is overcome by other fears, as well as by hopes.

Of all the passions this seems to be that by which the bulk of mankind is most influenced. By it human governments are manifestly upheld, and that which keeps societies in any tolerable order is chiefly fear of present punishment amongst the baser sort ; amongst the more

inge-

ingenuous, fear of incurring the contempt or hatred of men, and the fear of being condemned by their own consciences, and of offending God.

By this method principally, by exciting their fear, God thought fit to govern the people of Israel, particularly when they came ignorant rough and unpolished out of the land of Ægypt, and from a state of abject slavery. The law is represented by the Apostles as a dispensation of rigour and severity, when compared with the Gospel. It was delivered from the midst of thunder and lightning, and blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and with all the awful solemnity proper to strike terror. Many offences both against the ceremonial and the moral law were to be punished with death; no atonement was to be made for several sins; terrible temporal judgments were denounced, which God declared that he would inflict upon them in an extraordinary way, if they disobeyed him. Of these there are remarkable instances recorded throughout the history of that people, multitudes of whom were miraculously destroyed by fire, by pestilence, by the sword, by the opening of the earth, by sudden death, by serpents, by wild beasts, for their repeated rebellions and trespasses.

The Christian religion is indeed a milder and a more spiritual dispensation than the Law, as it hath none of the burdensome ceremonies enjoined by that covenant, as it annexes a general forgiveness of sins to repentance and future obedience, and as it threatens not, and inflicts not the same temporal distresses and calamities, in case of disobedience, and so treats men more like sons, than like slaves and hirelings. But then, to deter them from sin, it sets before them, what is more to be dreaded by a rational creature than temporal calamities; it sets before them divine indignation and wrath, in the world to come, upon those who obey not the Gospel; it sets before them the terrors of the Lord, and the day when he will reward every one according to his works, and that

Hell which shall be the portion of incorrigible offenders. These things are more clearly made known in the New Testament, than they were under the Law, and are there perpetually inculcated.

Our Lord knew what was in man, and what was the most proper manner of dealing with him, and of enforcing his duty upon him; and he hath judged it absolutely necessary to raise his fears as well as his hopes. There are therefore not only promises but threatenings, not only rewards but punishments, propounded in the Gospel; and God, who is there represented as the God of mercies, and the Father of all consolation to his servants, is said to be a consuming fire to the wicked. If we are there commanded to love him with all our souls, we are also taught to fear him, and to fear him above all things. I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea I say unto you, Fear him.

The fear of God is plainly used in Scripture in two senses. It is often used in a large sense for all religion in general. By a way of speaking very frequent in the sacred writings, some eminent part of our duty is put for the whole. So the fear of God, the love of God, the knowing of God, the remembrance of God, faith in God, reliance upon him, seeking him, and coming to him, are put for the whole of religion.

The fear of God is used also in many places of Scripture, in a more restrained sense, and in its proper sense, for one single duty, for an habitual awe and dread of God; as in the text, where our Saviour exhorts us, never to let the fear of man deter us from our duty, and force us to sinful compliances, because all that men can do, at the worst, is only to kill the body; that is, to hasten a little a dissolution which would soon be at hand, and which nothing can prevent. Thus far the utmost of their impotent malice can reach, and no farther. But God can do this, he can kill the body; and what is more,

he

he can raise and reunite it to the soul, and then cast both soul and body into hell. We ought therefore to subdue the slavish fear which we are too often disposed to entertain of mortal creatures, by opposing to it a stronger and a juster fear, a fear of that all-seeing and almighty Being, from whose presence we cannot fly, and from whose power even the grave cannot shelter us, and who can make death be to us, not the end, but the beginning of woe.

I. We will now, first, consider on what the fear of God, as it is a duty and a good disposition, is founded.

II. Secondly, we will give an account of the different degrees of this religious fear.

III. Thirdly, we will conclude with a few observations on the whole.

I. First; we will consider on what the fear of God, as it is a duty and a good disposition, is founded.

It is founded on a due sense of our own imperfections, and of the perfections of God.

To shew that our imperfections are numerous, we need not go up to our own nativity, and to those defects or spots which we bring along with us into the world, defects which have been often greatly exaggerated, and which, if true, would be rather our misfortune than our fault. Such as we are, we did not make ourselves, we are God's creatures; and with all our imperfections, we have it in our power, by the grace of God, to perform as much as he will require at our hands.

Nor again, in order to shew that our imperfections are numerous, and more than sufficient to humble us, is it necessary that we should fetch proofs of it from the behaviour of profligate persons, of those who live in a deliberate and habitual disobedience to the laws of Nature and of God. We need only consider the condition of those, who in the estimation of the world pass for good people, and who seem to be in a middle state between exemplary holiness and gross wickedness. Sup-

posing

posing men, for the most part, to belong to this class, and taking a survey of such a state, we shall soon and easily discover a multitude of defects, more than sufficient to awaken in us a fear of our Creator.

We are surrounded with temptations to seduce us from our duty. Worldly pleasures, and worldly cares, and temporal interest, and bad example, and our own evil inclinations entice us to transgress; and various inconveniences threaten us, if we resolve upon all occasions to hold fast our integrity. In these trials of our virtue, sometimes we act the good part, and honourably repel the temptation, and sometimes we are overcome and brought into bondage. Then we are sorry and ashamed, and resolve to amend, and we enter upon better courses, and then we yield again to the sin that easily besets us. Thus, like unprofitable servants, we perform the work of our Lord by halves, and are undoing what we did before.

When we do ill, we are ready to find out some vain excuse or other to extenuate the fault, and to represent our condition as less dangerous than it is; and when we do well, we are disposed to entertain too favourable an opinion of ourselves, and to rely too much upon our own strength,

Though we do not slight and neglect religion, though we have a view to it in many of our actions, yet we do not so steadily and so principally seek the kingdom of God and its righteousness, as we know and verily believe we ought to do; but suffer the things relating to this life to have a greater share in our affections than is due to them. Hence ariseth a desire of more worldly prosperity than may be expedient for us, a great deal of misplaced care and idle industry, and too violent fears of outliving the perishing objects our affections, or of leaving both them and this world.

Hence also ariseth levity and dissipation, a weak indulgence to pomp and shew, to amusements and diversions,

sions, which devour too much of our time and of our substance, both of which might be so much better employed.

And as in matters of practice we are thus deficient, so are we often not less in matters of belief, and entertain wrong notions relating to God, and to religion, which slide in and mix themselves with those notions that are true and well-grounded. And though, if we can answer for our sincerity and industry in our religious inquiries, we need not be anxious about our belief, and may rest assured that we shall not be condemned for errors which we could not avoid ; yet in our searches after truth, if we can give them that name, we are apt to impose upon ourselves, and to desire that things should be as we would have them ; we are easily misled by pride, and carelessness, and hastiness, and worldly interest, and other weaknesses and favourite propensities ; we are positive in our own notions, and uncharitable towards those who cannot comply with them ; our understanding becomes the dupe of our heart, our passions are our moral instructors, and thus we get wrong opinions and false judgments, which, springing from evil causes, are worse than bare mistakes, and must be ranked amongst our offences.

But supposing men to be better than we have described them, to be free from all habits of sin and dangerous errors, to be daily improving in goodness, and to be able without presumption to hope that they are in the favour of God, still they have sufficient motives to a religious fear, not only on account of the various defects from which none is exempt, but because of a power natural to all men, which in one respect is a perfection, in another respect is an imperfection, a power of doing well or ill. As we are free beings, we can amend and return to our duty, and are very happy in having such a power ; but then again, as we are free beings, the consequence is, that we can change for the worse, and end our course ill, after having begun it well.

well. The consideration of this should teach us, never to be too confident and secure, but wisely distrustful of ourselves ; not to be high-minded, but to fear. The consideration of this made St. Paul watch carefully over himself, lest, after all his great and successful labours in the Gospel, himself should lose that reward, which he had instructed and assisted thousands to obtain. And for the sake and use of those who have made even the fairest progress in goodness, God hath recorded this remarkable decree in the holy Scriptures ; When the righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeh iniquity, and doth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doth, shall he live ? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned : in his trespasses that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die. The divine Wisdom doth not make laws and denounce threats against faults which can never be committed; and therefore these words are sufficient to raise the fear even of a very good man, when he duly considers both them and himself. Thus is a religious fear of God founded, partly, as I have been shewing, upon a due sense of our own imperfections, and partly upon a due sense of God's perfections, as I shall proceed to shew.

There is no perfection in the divine nature, which is not a proper foundation, and may not suggest motives, for this fear. God is most holy, and abhors iniquity as entirely opposite to his pure and undefiled nature. He is every where present, and from him nothing can be hid. He is all-wise, and cannot be deceived. He is the just governor of the world, and as such he cannot but observe the actions of men, and will certainly render to every one according to his works : and though he be good and merciful to all his creatures, yet he must be supposed so to love them, as to love justice and righteousness also. He is almighty, and can punish the rebellious

rious many ways, by turning them out of being, or by making that being a pain to them for as long a time as he sees proper. He is also supremely good ; and though this of all his perfections may seem the least suited to make us dread him, yet whosoever judgeth so is much mistaken ; for indeed there is not any one quality of the divine nature so adapted to strike us with an ingenuous fear, with the fear of a child towards a parent, as this, and of such efficacy to deter us from sin, and to make us avoid incurring his just displeasure. Sin against God, as he is almighty, is the excess of madness and folly ; but as he is most kind and merciful, it is the basest ingratitude. The greater his goodness is, the greater is our guilt, if we be undutiful servants, and the greater will be our punishment, and that remorse and horror which St. John in so strong and eloquent a manner expresses in the Revelation, when he makes the Wicked say to the mountains, Fall on us, and hide us from the wrath of the Lamb. He says not, from the wrath of the Lion, though in the same book he calls Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah ; but, from the wrath of the Lamb, from long despised patience, and much injured mercy.

II. We have considered on what the fear of God is founded : let us proceed, secondly, to shew the several degrees of this fear.

It ought to be observed that the fear of God differs in its degrees, according to our moral conduct, and the disposition of our mind. For instance :

A person is sensible that his practice is not at all suitable to his knowledge and judgment ; that he deliberately and continually offends God ; that he is not in his favour ; that according to the doctrine of the Gospel he shall be condemned at the last day, unless he amend ; and yet he goes on in his evil ways. One who is in this situation and disposition and who seriously reflects upon it, cannot help fearing God. He fears him

as

as his worst enemy ; he fears him as a righteous and inflexible judge who will not spare the guilty. This fear is indeed well-grounded and rational and natural ; yet, producing no good effects, it hath no virtue in it, it is no act of religion. But if it deter him from sin, it is then to him the beginning of wisdom, and it becomes another kind of fear, and truly religious, as will appear from a second instance.

A wicked person becomes sensible of his dangerous state, resolves to deliver himself from it without delay, and begins a new course. He knows that this repentance, these good resolutions, and this change for the better, are things which God requires, which he approves, and which he hath promised to accept when they bring forth the fruits of a regular obedience. He hath therefore hopes of pardon, without which it is not possible for any one to amend : but these hopes are mixed with many and great fears, lest he should relapse into his former vices, lest he should not accomplish all that is necessary for his salvation, lest he should be called out of this world before he has finished his important and difficult task. This is a religious fear, because it is mixed with hope, and honourable notions of God, and because it produces good actions.

There is, further, a religious fear, which, bringing forth a regular obedience, and not being accompanied with so much dread and terror as that last mentioned, shews that the mind in which it is lodged is advanced to a higher degree of goodness. For instance :

A person makes it his constant endeavour to live up to the laws of God ; his behaviour is such that he is able to apply to himself the gracious promises of the Gospel ; he has a well-grounded hope that his sins are forgiven, and that he is in the favour of God, and in a state of salvation ; yet fear, in a less degree, he still will have. The purity and holiness of God, which he ought to imitate as far as he is able, and the many frailties of

which

which he is conscious, and the possibility of changing for the worse, will produce in him a fear lest he should not make improvement enough in goodness, and lest he ever should forfeit the favour of God. This sort of fear is not a restless tormenting passion, like that arising from guilt; it is only a fear sufficient to produce caution and diligence, without destroying the peace of the mind. This seems to be a truly religious fear, such as accompanies a virtuous life.

There have been persons indeed, who, by a long and patient continuance in well-doing, after many trials of their obedience, and many proofs of their perseverance, have acquired a full persuasion of God's favour for the future as well as for the present, have in a manner enjoyed beforehand the blessings reserved for them in a better world, and have had no doubt and no fear of losing their reward. Such was the case of St. Paul, when he said to Timothy; I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day. Such a person is not, according to the strictest meaning, afraid of God, of whose love and favour he is secure; but he hath a profound reverence and veneration for him, which in a lower sense may be called the fear of God. Every rational creature, though even free from sin, must feel this kind of awe upon his mind, when he seriously considers himself and his Maker. The holy Angels feel it without question. Now reverence and veneration are nearly allied to fear; and the difference seems only to be this, that they are not necessarily attended with uneasiness, whilst all fear hath something of it.

The fear of God therefore is a disposition of mind, different in degree, according as our state is with relation to God and to religion.

There is a fear that God is offended at us and will punish us ; which is the fear of a wicked person.

There is a fear arising from a sense of our guilt, mixed and allayed with hopes that God will accept our amendment. This is the fear of a penitent sinner.

There is a fear lest we ever should forfeit the favour of God, and fall short of that future reward which at present we may reasonably expect. This is the fear of a good man, and it is capable of increase or of diminution, according to his behaviour.

There is an awe and reverence which a due sense of God's perfections and of the infinite distance between him and his creatures would excite in our minds, though we were secure of his favour, and had no fear of losing it. This is the happy state of those who have arrived as near to perfection as a good person can whilst he is on this side of heaven, and who are sensible that their course is nearly ended, and the time of their departure is at hand.

III. I conclude with a few observations on the foregoing doctrine.

From the things which have been said concerning the fear of God, as it is a duty and a Christian virtue, it is easy to know what kind of fear that is which is a weakness or a fault. As a religious fear of God arises from right notions, so a blind superstitious fear proceeds from wrong conceptions of him and of ourselves.

If we believe God's government over his subjects to be such as in any other Being we should call arbitrary, founded upon mere will and pleasure and over-ruling power ; if we fancy that he is provoked at such things as would offend no good man, and is to be pacified again by such homage and such services as no wise man would accept ; that is, if we clothe him with our infirmities, and make him in some respects weaker than some of our own selves are, these unworthy apprehensions must arise

arise in our minds from an abject and servile dread of him, and produce a religion over-run with error and superstition.

It may be thought that the fear of God and the love of God are affections so different, that they cannot reign together over the same mind, that fear must be cast out by love, or love swallowed up in fear. It must indeed be acknowledged that we cannot greatly love and greatly fear the same person; but fear and love are so far from being inconsistent, that there is seldom love without fear in some degree and of some sort or other.

Thus, if our love towards God be sincere and active, our sense of his goodness, and our desires of making suitable returns strong and lively, we must have some fear, if not of God, yet of ourselves, a fear lest we should not sufficiently testify our gratitude, nor perform all the acts of obedience of which we are capable. This is a religious fear, which may not improperly be called the fear of God, since he is the occasion, though not the immediate object of it, and since it produces good effects.

Or suppose we were fully assured of his favour and of future rewards, a blessing which God hath sometimes vouchsafed to his servants at the close of a well-spent life, fear would then indeed be cast out by love, but there would remain that veneration towards him, joined to a due sense of human imperfection, which may be called the fear of God.

Could we arrive to such a state, we should be happy indeed. However, happy are we, if that pious fear dwell in us, which, rebuking us for our faults, and raising in us a due distrust of ourselves, and quickening our diligence, produces in us a care to serve God, and along with it a peace of mind, and the hopes of a better state.

S E R M O N XVI.

P R O V . iii. 5, 6.

Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not unto thy own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

AMONGST the helps which God hath given the children of men, to enable them to pass their days with ease and satisfaction and peace of mind, is that disposition of mind which we call hope; hope that if things go ill with them, they shall be altered for the better, and that if their present condition be tolerably good, it shall continue to be so. Without this disposition we should be very miserable, and with it we cannot be so; and we are all naturally inclined to admit and cherish it, unless some grievous calamity befalls us, or melancholy oppresses us and sinks our spirits. Now hope is ever accompanied with trust, reliance, and confidence on something, and it is either well or ill grounded, and it concerns us much that it rest upon a solid foundation, and that we build not our house upon the sand.

The Scriptures direct us to trust in God, and assure us that all other reliance is foolish and insecure; which will easily appear by considering what there is besides him, on which we are apt to repose our trust.

The good things of this life, which are the objects of our hope, are usually length of days, and health, and easy circumstances, and reputation, and friends, and a mind

mind capable of enjoying them. These things men hope to obtain and secure.

Therefore, first, they sometimes trust in a thing of which they have a confused notion, and which they call Fortune or Chance, which they hope will be always favourable to them. And yet as much evil as good may be expected from this imaginary Deity, allowed to be a blind Goddess even by her own votaries: so that this reliance is extremely absurd, and is not indeed so properly trust, as thoughtless stupidity, and inconsideration, from which the first untoward accident will awaken them.

Secondly, they trust in the favour of the world, and hope that at least, if they behave themselves well, they shall be well used. But here they are liable to be often disappointed, through the vices and disorderly passions of others, and will probably experience the ill effects of envy, calumny, insolence, contempt, fraud and violence, whilst there are so many worthless, selfish, and dishonest persons to be found in all societies, and in all ranks and degrees of men.

Thirdly, they trust in their friends. But these friends may desert them, may want the will or the power to serve them, may be removed far from them, or may die before them. Indeed there are few immutable friendships amongst mutable men.

Fourthly, they trust in their own riches or power, that is, in possessions which may be lost, or which may give them no pleasure and satisfaction, and which cannot secure health, or reputation, or peace of mind, or esteem and love.

Fifthly, they trust in themselves, that is, in their own abilities, caution, forecast, prudence and diligence; and so far they are much in the right, that it is more reasonable to place a confidence in ourselves than in other men; for here we are sure at least of a friend who will never fail and deceive us willingly. But man finds himself

himself insufficient for his own happiness on all accounts, exposed to many evils from without and from within ; and all the advantages which he possesses, of body, of mind, and of fortunes, are of such a nature, that he cannot ensure to himself the continuation of them till the morrow.

There remains then nothing in which we can reasonably trust, except the divine Providence ; and here we shall find every thing that can be required for our satisfaction and security. God is perfectly good, and consummately wise, and supremely powerful, and constant and unchangeable, and everlasting, and hath frequently and expressly promised that he will take us under his protection, if we sincerely desire it, and seek it in a proper manner.

Concerning this duty of reliance several observations may be made, to excite us to it, and to direct us in the performance of it.

First, that our reliance may be rational, we should know what it is that God hath promised, and what we may expect from him ; else we may be disappointed in our hopes.

From the Gospel we may learn that no absolute promise is made to us of length of days, or health, or wealth, or friends, or reputation ; and yet these are the common objects of mens desires. If so, it may be asked, What is there left, as to this life, worthy to be an object of our wishes, or in any degree answering the great things which are delivered in Scripture concerning the advantages of religious trust, and the favour of God to those who confide in him ? Yes, there is one thing left, which is worth all the rest, and that is contentment and peace of mind. What we may expect from our heavenly Father, is that we shall probably receive a competency of the necessaries of life, and a heart capable of enjoying it ; that we shall certainly obtain what upon the whole is most convenient for us and conducive

to

to our true happiness ; that if disappointments, distresses, and calamities of any kind befall us, we shall be endued with strength of mind to support them ; and that if our measure of worldly blessings fall short in some respects, it shall be abundantly made up to us in another and a better way.

He therefore who will trust in God must set his heart upon no particular present advantage, nor chuse for himself, but leave that entirely to his heavenly Father as to the only proper judge, and acquiesce in his sacred will. If he is satisfied, he hath his reward ; for he who is contented cannot be unhappy.

Secondly, it is absolutely necessary that reliance be accompanied with obedience, with a serious and settled purpose, and with honest endeavours to do the things which are pleasing to God. For God hath established as it were a sort of intercourse of giving and receiving, of mutual good offices between himself and us ; and as he declares that he is ever ready to bestow favours upon us, he expects something of a return, and represents himself as desiring something that we can accomplish. He hath assured us that in him we may find a defender and a benefactor ; but it is upon this condition, that we behave ourselves gratefully and dutifully. On this point the Scriptures are clear and express. What man is he that feareth the Lord ? Him shall he teach in the way that he shall chuse. Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established. The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord. The Lord never faileth those that seek him. Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon thee. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. And in the text, Trust in the Lord, with all thy heart, and lean not to thy own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Thus God's protection and blessing are annexed to obedience : they who
will

will not serve him must not presume to trust in him, and to cast their cares upon him.

Reliance on God is founded upon his goodness. But as he is good, he is also just and holy, and cannot delight in any wicked creature. Vice, making us most unlike and opposite to God, cuts off all intercourse between him and us; and thus, though he continues unchangeably good and merciful, yet we without obedience can receive no benefit from his goodness and mercy.

Reliance upon God is founded on the relation between him and us, by which he is our Father, and we are his children: but he calls none his children, except those who serve him and endeavour to resemble him.

Reliance upon God is founded on his promises: but he hath made no promises to the disobedient; they are all conditional, and extended only to the good.

Reliance then is a duty which is not to be exercised, and cannot be exercised, by the wicked. Some indeed may be found amongst them, who, having an odd mixture of immorality and fanaticism, grossly impose upon themselves, rely upon faith without works, or upon works which God hath not required, and entertain wrong notions of his perfections and of his government, and think that he approves them, though they continue to neglect or violate his practical precepts. These persons may hope also that God will protect them and provide for them, though they have no imaginable cause for such expectations.

But most commonly they who will not serve God put no confidence in him. They account his commandments to be grievous and impracticable; they fear him perhaps, but they love him not. They therefore find no inclination to address themselves to him, and no hopes of being the objects of his care. As long as they continue disobedient to him, they seek out other friends and protectors; they trust in the world and in themselves,

selves, and endeavour to put him far from their thoughts.

On the contrary, obedience to God will naturally be accompanied with reliance on God, because a religious person has all possible encouragement to exercise it, and nothing to hinder or deter him from it. It is therefore expedient that we should examine our hearts, and see whether we have this relying disposition, since hope, as well as faith and charity, is required of us, and since the want of it is a proof that we are imperfect Christians at the best, and serve many masters, and have inconstant and inconsistent affections and inclinations. If we distrust God's providence, if we have doubts of his good will towards us, if we cannot bring ourselves to cast our cares upon him, certainly something is defective and faulty in us, and must be amended; our faith is cold and weak, and our conscience reproaches us for some wilful offences, and therefore we cannot trust in God.

But here arises a difficulty which it is necessary to clear up. If reliance be an indispensable duty, and yet at the same time impracticable without righteousness, if it be mere folly, rashness, and presumption, unless accompanied with obedience, those Christians who are duly sensible of their offences, and with all humility acknowledge themselves unworthy of any divine favours, may by this consideration be deterred from trusting in God, though they must condemn themselves for the omission; whence anxiety and despondence will follow. It is therefore to be observed, that God has removed all the severity of this doctrine by his merciful declarations in the Gospel to those who repent. From the moment in which we enter upon a new life, God is our Father and our protector, and with our reformation our reliance may reasonably begin.

Thirdly, reliance should be accompanied, as with an observance of God's commandments in general, so in particular with supplications to him to bless us.

Our

Our Saviour, who exhorts us to trust in God, commands us to recommend ourselves to his protection by first seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and particularly by asking his assistance in all our undertakings. He hath told us that if we seek we shall find, and that our heavenly Father is always ready to give to those who ask him. Be careful for nothing, says the Apostle; but in every thing, in all your affairs, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. This God requires of us, not as if he wanted to be taught by us what is proper for us, nor as if by much persuasion and intreaty he were to be influenced to bestow upon us what else he is not disposed to grant, nor as if he stood in need of our homage, and received any benefit from it; but he hath appointed this method purely for our sake, and for our good, because prayer to him keeps up in our minds religious dispositions towards him, honourable thoughts of his power, wisdom, and goodness, and a sense of our perpetual dependence upon him, and natural inability to protect ourselves.

God, as he is immaterial and invisible, seems to be at an infinite distance from us: but by trusting in him at all times, and addressing ourselves to him upon all occasions, and by preserving this intercourse and conversation and communion with him, we have him ever present to us. If we neglect him, and put him as far from our thoughts as he is from our senses, he is to us as though he were not at all. Amongst men, a long absence and continued silence and disregard produces a strangeness and coldness and indifference even between friends and relations. The same holds true between us and our heavenly Father. If we never approach him, so long as we have any thing else to occupy or amuse us, never till some pressing occasion drives us, and we know not which way to turn ourselves; we shall approach with the diffidence of strangers, and the conscious shame of offenders,

offenders, and shall find it impossible to trust in him, and to hope for a favourable reception.

Fourthly, reliance upon God should be accompanied with diligence and prudence in our worldly affairs.

If God hath bestowed upon us health and strength and natural abilities, it is, that we should make use of them. By giving us the means to provide for ourselves, he hath in effect given us a provision ; nor will he work miracles in favour of indiscretion or laziness. When our Saviour exhorts us to repose an entire confidence in God, Behold the fowls of the air, says he ; they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. True it is that God provideth food for them ; but they take the pains to seek it out, and to gather it up, and to provide for their little families, and, by being examples to us of industry and activity in their way, teach us that Providence will do nothing for the sluggard. As faith without works of goodness will not carry us to heaven, so faith without works of industry will not carry us through this world with any credit and satisfaction. We ought therefore to take as much honest and prudent care as if there were no Providence at all, and to rely upon Providence as if our care signified nothing at all.

It is evident that our Lord's promises of this kind to his disciples are not to be applied in the very same extent to all Christians in all ages. The office to which his Apostles were appointed was such as would usually engross their whole time and pains, and leave them no leisure to follow their former worldly occupations, or to enter into new ones. Therefore he discharged them from all care about their maintenance, and promised that God would supply all their wants. And indeed, as they were to be successful in their ministry, and to convert multitudes, and also to work beneficial miracles, they could never fail of an hospitable reception. Those converts who had received from them the word of God,
and

and remission of sins, and the hope of everlasting life, some of whom also had been healed of their infirmities and diseases, could never be ungrateful to such benefactors, to such physicians of soul and body, as to permit them to want accommodations and necessaries. More than this was beneath their acceptance, and more than this Christ would not suffer them to take. Freely ye have received ; freely give.

Fifthly, reliance excludes immoderate cares, and vain desires, and fretful discontent and dissatisfaction ; for he who firmly believes that all is ordered for the best, and shall conduce to his happiness, cannot live in slavish subjection to these turbulent passions. If they have the dominion over him, it is a sign that his faith and his trust in God is weak and unstable. But here we must take care, whilst we recommend a trust which excludes a great and frequent irregularity of affections, not to insist upon an evenness of temper which is scarcely attainable, and rather to be wished than expected. If none can be said to trust in God, unless his mind be always serene and composed, and ruffled by no accidents, religious reliance will nowhere be found in such perfection. Our natural affections, such as hope, and fear, and joy, and sorrow, and desire, and love, and anger, and aversion, are harmless in a certain degree, which when they exceed, they become faulty, more or less. But they are so easily stretched or relaxed, and so soon out of tune, that to keep them constantly in due order is beyond human skill. Besides, in these affections, constitution goes a great way ; some are secure and ever willing to hope, and some are diffident and apprehensive by nature. Melancholy also, and dejection of spirit, is often a distemper arising from bodily causes. We must not entertain so hard thoughts of our Creator and Governor, as to imagine that he will not make all proper allowances for human weakness. Of the two it were more reasonable perhaps to suppose that he will

account

account our sins as infirmities, than our infirmities as sins, since mercy is represented as God's favourite perfection, in the exercise of which he most delights. He will not cast us off, because our confidence in him is sometimes shaken and interrupted, if upon the whole, and in our serious judgment, we fix our hopes upon him, and commit ourselves, our ways and concerns to him.

But however, reliance, though it will not make a man insensible to trouble, and a stranger to any commotion of mind, yet will have a considerable effect towards regulating his affections and composing his heart, and producing an acquiescence to the will of God; it will set him free, at least, from those eager desires, and ambitious views, and restless apprehensions, and foolish troubles, and trifling disappointments, which are the portion of those who mind nothing besides the things of this world.

Lastly, though reliance be so advantageous to us even for the present, that it ought rather to be considered as a privilege than a duty, yet it is a noble virtue, and a disposition of mind most agreeable to God.

God hath made singular promises in favour of it. We are told in Scripture, that he careth for those and will sustain those who cast their cares upon him; that he will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon him; that such shall want nothing, nothing that a wise and good man would desire; whence it plainly appears how much he values this temper.

Reliance is thus acceptable to God, because a firm and rational reliance upon him is the consequence of a true love for him, and of a sincere endeavour to please him, and a sign that we have made no small progress in religion.

Reliance is in particular a proof that we are not covetous, or immoderately fond of the world; for as our Lord hath not promised us honours, riches, power, uninterrupted

interrupted prosperity; as, on the contrary, he hath spoken slightingly of them, and represented them as rather dangerous than desireable, the Christian who puts his whole trust in God will be satisfied with a small share of these things, and will esteem himself favoured by Providence, if he receives his daily bread for himself and for those who depend upon him.

Reliance upon God disposes and qualifies us to resist many temptations. If at any time our duty and our worldly interest are inconsistent, and something naturally dear, or useful to us is to be quitted for the sake of God, a trust in him, and a confidence that he will make up the loss to us in another way, will enable us to chuse the better part; and without this persuasion it is not at all probable that we shall give him this proof of our obedience.

Reliance upon God is acceptable to him, because it is the greatest honour that we can pay to him. By it we shew our belief of his wisdom, knowledge, power, veracity, equity and goodness, and a belief which is not a barren speculation, but hath a proper influence upon our heart and our actions. It is a persuasion that God will protect us through the whole course of our lives, and give us what is expedient for us, though the inconstant state of worldly things and the many dangers which surround us here below conspire and endeavour to raise in us fears and doubts and distrust. It is a persuasion that the state in which we are placed is the most proper for us, when, if we were to consult only our senses and passions, they would tell us that it is attended with many inconveniences.

Reliance upon God, where it is in an eminent degree, raiscs the soul in a manner above itself, and gives it in some sort a resemblance of the invariable nature of its great Author.

The majesty of God shines forth in his unchangeableness, which so gloriously distinguishes him from the creation.

creation. The world at first arose out of darkness and disorder; but before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth was made, he is God from everlasting. The creation undergoes perpetual changes through the revolutions of years; but the throne of God is fixed above time and the world, whence, unalterable and the same, he beholds the successive variety of things. Heaven and earth must be dissolved, and pass away, and put on a new form; but God is always what he is; infinite perfection alters not.

Some sort of resemblance of this divine perfection may be discovered in the person who trusts in God, such a resemblance as can be between the Creator and the creature.

He is in a world where nothing is certain besides uncertainty, and nothing constant besides inconstancy; but he views these disorders as one not greatly concerned in them: his circumstances change, and his mind remains the same, stayed upon God, and strengthened against all events.

The Scripture calls God, The rock of ages, alluding to his unchangeable nature. Much the same expression is used in it concerning those who rely upon God; They who put their trust in the Lord shall be even as the mount Sion, which may not be removed, but standeth fast for ever.

S E R M O N XVII.

R o M. xii. 12.

Rejoicing in hope.—

TH E joy of which the Apostle here speaks, is that serious, and pure, and spiritual joy, which the hope of an happy eternity produces in the soul of the true servants of God and of Christ. It is therefore to be feared that to discourse upon it is to treat of an inward feeling which experience hath not sufficiently taught us. And in matters of sentiment or perception, if the heart is not our instructor, discourse will hardly perform that office. Words are sounds which strike the ear ; but the soul is not touched with a representation of dispositions which it never felt.

Yet this consideration should not dissuade and discourage us from attempting to recommend the same temper which St. Paul recommended to the Christians to whom he addressed himself. If he thought it needful to require it, we are obliged to follow his method, and to insist upon every virtue, every accomplishment, that constitutes the true character of a Believer. Nor ought we to despair of success ; for they who have not yet felt that fulness of joy which arises from hope, are able to feel the absence and the want of it ; and this may incite them to endeavour

endeavour to acquire it ; and such endeavours, properly pursued, will at length produce it :

Indeed it seems strange and unaccountable that persons professing themselves Christians should not on some occasions have cast one thought towards heaven, and by the assistance of faith have contemplated upon the good things which God hath prepared for those who serve him. Will they stay till Death comes to call them hence, and then lift up those eyes which are ready to be closed, and raise those desires which were never felt before, towards that better world to which hope should daily direct the soul, as to its supreme good and ultimate view ? Instead of deferring such thoughts till they are neither fit for them, nor for any thing else, they should fix their views upon that state of peace and rest, even whilst it is, or seems to be afar off, and in the expectation of it anticipate those pleasures which both content and purify the soul; being spiritual like her : which alone can sweeten all the bitterness of life, and be equal to those desires that nothing less than immortality can perfectly satisfy.

To this happy state St. Paul invites us, when he exhorts us to rejoice in hope ; that is ; Let the hope of immortality dwell in your minds, and produce in you a pure and a constant joy.

But that this hope may be acquired and preserved, these things are absolutely requisite ; first, to meditate often upon immortality, so as never to lose sight of it for a considerable time ; secondly, to assure ourselves of its truth and certainty, by the assistance of Reason, and of Revelation ; thirdly, to secure to ourselves the possession of it in due time, by a behaviour conformable to the precepts of the Gospel. For if we never contemplate upon this immortality, it can have no effect upon our mind ; if we are not fully convinced of its certainty, it can afford no true and stable pleasure and joy, but will make

as feeble an impression upon us as our roving imaginations, or waking dreams ; and if we cannot have some expectation of possessing it, it must be, when it is called to mind, a source rather of fear and anxiety than of complacency and satisfaction. So then, he who would rejoice in hope, in the hope of immortality, must think of it ; must believe it ; and must expect it. These are three qualifications and conditions, which we will now take into consideration ; and, to use the words of St. Paul, May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope, through the power of the holy Ghost !

I. The first occupation and duty of a Christian is, to think frequently of immortality. Many inducements there are to incline all persons to look forward, and to anticipate future events of the favourable kind, unless such evils as they know to be incurable leave no room for expectation. They who are disappointed, unsuccessful, and uneasy, and who feel nothing agreeable to their wishes in their present state, often seek resources of consolation in the favourable changes which time may bring forth. They fix upon that distant prospect ; they reckon upon better days to come, and they please themselves with expectations, which perhaps they may never see accomplished. They have examples before their eyes of others who have been first depressed and then exalted ; and why should not the same thing happen to them ? One may easily forgive them these pleasing dreams, if they keep up the spirits from despondence and despair ; if they soothe and calm the melancholy passions ; if they have nothing in them that wounds the innocence, nothing of the criminal kind ; although, in truth, their felicity is a sort of illusion, and their acquisitions are phantoms, which the busy Imagination can make and unmake with equal facility.

In general, and for the most part, it is Adversity which seizes upon the Future, as Prosperity dwells upon the Present. The Scripture informs us that holy persons of old turned their thoughts towards heaven the most assiduously in the time of distress; that they lived and died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth; and desired a better and an heavenly country, and chose rather to suffer affliction than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. The Psalmist, after having prayed to God to hear his cries and to answer his supplications, after having reflected upon the prosperity of evil doers, to whom God seemed to have given up all the good things of this world for their lot and portion, comforts himself with the thoughts either of another and a better life, or of seeing better days in this life; for his words will bear either sense. As for me, says he, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness. In another Psalm, after having pathetically deplored his banishment, and his absence from the House of God, he hath recourse to faith and hope, as to his only refuge; Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God. In the person of Job, we have an example of faith and virtue tried to the uttermost, and coming off victorious. This holy man is persecuted in his fortunes, in his family, in his body, forsaken of the world, forsaken of his friends, and in all appearance forsaken of his God. He calls to his assistance that hope which conscious innocence, and true faith, and sincere piety can never entirely lose. If my calamities follow one another, says he, like the waves of the troubled sea, if my children die before me, if my friends desert me, yet I have a Deliverer who can neither

die nor change. I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that these eyes shall behold him.

Thus it is ; Calamities naturally incline a religious mind to seek in the Future those consolations which the Present refuses, and to admit and cherish the hope of immortality. It is too often observable, that persons who enjoy a large portion of health and prosperity have less inclination, because they seem to themselves to have less occasion, to employ their thoughts in this serious way. Their advantageous situation engrosses their whole attention. Dissipation and diversions are enemies to sober consideration, and there is an irreligious as well as a religious way of taking no thought for the morrow. But yet even these persons, if they have, I will not say, some degree of faith, but some share of common sense, some sparks of natural reason sufficient to distinguish them from the brutes, some kind of forecast and reflection, cannot be quite insensible of their precarious state. The well-known instability of worldly possessions, and particularly of health, which as to the present life is all in all, should discourage them from trusting in an happiness which is neither solid nor certain, and incline them to use the means which may secure to them that life which can never fail. Without this religious wisdom they are every moment exposed to see every object of their pursuit and their affections disappear and forsake them.

For this reason our Lord in the Gospel proposes to our consideration the parable of a rich and worldly-minded man. And yet if by a parable we understand a mere fiction, it is scarcely a parable ; it is rather a true story, which is exemplified every day. This man, finding himself possessor of great wealth, and of health to make use of it, proposes to enjoy it to the utmost, and says to his soul ; Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. He is not one of those who make no other use of their possessions than, as Solomon says, to behold them with their

eyes ;

eyes; who will neither bestow them upon others, nor upon themselves. His folly is not of that kind; and yet a folly it is; and his Maker says to him; Thou fool; thou hast goods, as thou fayest, for many years; but thou hast not life for many years: he who gave thee thy soul, will this night require it of thee. So is he who layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God. He alone can say to his soul, Thou hast goods laid up for many years, who is able to rejoice in hope, in the hope of immortality.

And indeed, Death, which is always certain, is another reason to determine us to think of our immortality. The days of our life are known to Him, who telleth the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names, who foreseeth all that shall befall each of us, and all that the revolutions of time shall bring forth. But, having made us free and rational agents, he hath in some measure put it in our own power to lengthen our days by temperance and prudence, or to shorten them by folly and debauchery. In wisdom and in kindness to us, he hideth from us that fatal and formidable moment which shall decide our eternal lot. But we know, concerning the period of life, all that we ought to know, that death is inevitable; and we are ignorant of what we ought to be ignorant, of that day and that hour; that under this uncertainty we may pass through life with more tranquillity, and conduct it with the more liberty and discretion, and neither neglect the care of our body, nor our worldly affairs; and that, under the certainty of a dissolution, we may attend to the consequences of it, and pay a just regard to our spiritual concerns. And as Joseph, the wise Governor of Ægypt, in the years of plenty laid up in store a provision for the years of famine; so man, who is born to die and to rise again, should ponder upon that great change which will befall him by a law which cannot be broken, and by a power which cannot be resisted. He that hath a due sense of

these

these things will not suffer a morning or an evening to pass over his head without a thought of his latter-end, which for wise reasons is hidden from his eyes ; and for reasons no less wise should be ever present to his mind.

This to the careless and the inconsiderate will seem strange advice. Such thoughts as these, they will say, are the suggestions of mere spleen and melancholy, or will be the sure producers of it. It woud cast men into continual despondence and heaviness of heart. To think of death daily, what is it but to die daily ? And since we must die once, and only once, why should we chuse rather to die a thousand times ? Be it so. They who do not like to think of death, let them think of immortality, which will answer all religious purposes as well. Let them consider that a time is approaching when death shall be swallowed up in victory. By performing their duty they may hope for that time, and in that hope the servants of God may rejoice.

To anticipate future events of the agreeable kind, is one of those dispositions which are found in active and lively minds. Such for example is the love of honour, fame, respect, reputation, and glory, observable in persons of a liberal and ingenuous spirit, which is a sort of self-love. Rigid and morose Moralists have treated it as mere weakness and folly ; but if it deserves no commendation, it deserves no reproof whilst it is regulated by reason, because it tends to the advantage of society, it serves to many useful purposes, it excites to many profitable actions, and it is justified by the word of God, which propounds it as one of the rewards of well-doing.

A person who is smitten with this passion is pleased with the thought that his abilities, and his achievements, of the learned, or the ingenious, or the political, or the military, or the benevolent and charitable kind, shall secure to him ages to come, and perpetuate his

name

name and his memory. In imagination he possesses a renown which as yet exists not, and he hears the applause which grateful Posterity will bestow upon him: This certainly is a pleasure, though none of the most valuable. How much more satisfaction must it give to a servant of Christ to meditate upon the glorious immortality, not of his name, but of his soul; upon the approbation, not of mortal men, but of righteous Spirits, of holy Angels, of his Redeemer and Judge: and by faith to take possession of those treasures, which neither rust nor moth can consume, nor envious and dishonest men can steal away!

II. Hope that is seen, is not hope, says St. Paul. It is true, because hope looks forward, and the present is no part of its object; when possession comes, hope ceases. But hope of things not expected or believed, is a contradiction; for doubt and distrust exclude hope. Therefore the second duty of a Christian, who is to rejoice in hope, is to be well assured of the reality of a future state. Here Faith is to be called in, and to perform her part; and the Grace of God must co-operate with her, even that influence of his holy Spirit, which he will not refuse to those who request it of him, and seek not frivolous pretences to give way to distrust or unbelief.

The immortality of the soul is a truth of which there are many proofs, proofs felt and acknowledged by the wiser Pagans, against which no arguments of equal weight can ever be produced.

There are in the Universe two sorts of substances, matter and spirit; and we plainly perceive two sorts of qualities or attributes belonging to the one and the other, which cannot meet together in the same substance. None besides Atheists will deny that God is a pure spirit distinct from matter; and since it must be owned that there is such a thing as spirit, we have no reason to suspect that the human soul is not of that kind and order of beings,

beings, as all her operations shew, such as life, and thought, and free agency; operations which cannot belong to bodily substance, which has no activity, unity, and simplicity, but is for ever divisible into smaller parts.

The moral proofs of a future state are still plainer and stronger. If there be a Supreme Being, the Maker and Governor of the world, man is a creature accountable to his Creator; neither his vices nor his virtues can be overlooked by the Almighty, but will receive a suitable retribution.

Thus Reason, even without the assistance of Revelation, obliges us to follow the eternal rules of Morality: for if it be barely possible that the soul is immortal, if there be no demonstration of the contrary, as most assuredly there is not, man ought not to expose himself to future remorse and misery of which he can see no end, for the sake of pleasures, falsely so called, in the possession of which human happiness can never consist, and to renounce sobriety, justice, and charity, which are real benefits, and give a solid and durable satisfaction.

These dictates and deductions of Reason are fully confirmed by the surer testimony of Revelation, which clearly establishes the doctrine of everlasting life, if we can unfeignedly assent to her authority. Here then we are to request, in the words of St. Paul, that God the Father of glory would give us the spirit of wisdom, the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, that we may know what is the hope of his calling. We are to join in that petition of the Disciples to their Master; Lord, increase our faith. The desires of too many are directed another way, and would willingly express themselves thus; Lord, increase our fortunes, give us the favour of the world, and new acquisitions. But the Lord hath expressly declared that the life of man consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth; and

and Experience fully confirms his declarations. Both the religious and the irreligious can bear testimony to its truth.

Believing then the Scriptures to be the word of God, we should carefully meditate upon them, and set before our eyes the behaviour of our Lord and of his Disciples as examples to follow.

III. For, lastly, if we hope to possess that immortality which Christ promises, we must perform what Christ requires; which comprehends faith and works, belief and practice.

As to points of belief, strange have been the notions which Christians in process of time have adopted concerning them. A love of disputing, of deciding, and of domineering, begat religious controversies, and religious controversies begat new terms of Christian communion; many obscure, or unintelligible, or false and corrupt doctrines, were imposed upon the conscience, and all hopes of salvation were made to depend upon them; no vices and crimes were thought so certainly to exclude men from the kingdom of God, as the smallest deviations from this speculative religion, deviations which were branded with the opprobrious title of Heresies. It is the Church of Rome which hath carried this spiritual tyranny to the utmost excess.

This is not the faith of the Gospel, which is plain and simple, which hath for its object a God and Father, a Redeemer, a sanctifying Spirit, a Divine Law, a future state of rewards and corrections, a Saviour born, dying, rising again, ascending into heaven, and coming thence at the last day to judge mankind. These are essential Articles of belief; and to receive these with submission and sincerity, is what I call faith; and yet even this can hardly be called faith, unless it produces obedience. The faith which justifies and saves is ever represented in the Gospel as an active principle, regulating the behaviour of a Believer, and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness.

teousness. Eternal life is the gift of God in the Gospel; but it is given to those only who live, not according to the flesh, but to the spirit; and whosoever hath this hope purifieth himself, as God is pure; for without holiness no man shall see the Lord.

And now I propose to conclude with some necessary remarks upon a duty which is frequently recommended in the New Testament, and said to have been frequently practised by the Disciples and the first Christians, namely, to rejoice in trials, temptations, distresses, afflictions, tribulations, and persecutions,

This precept hath ever been considered by the profane and the irreligious as absurd and extravagant, as requiring men to divest themselves of their own nature, and to have neither passions nor feelings. Even they, who are by no means to be ranked amongst the scoffers, find it difficult to give an unfeigned assent to it, and to hope to comply with it; and therefore are disposed to explain it away. And indeed there are not wanting objections which may be urged against it. For it may be said that in the New Testament there are frequent exhortations to patience, contentment, and resignation in adversity. These dispositions seem to contain all that should be required of us, and all that we can do. Now these meek virtues may produce an even temper and a composure of mind, but nothing like joy or exultation, nothing of the cheerful kind. The example of our Saviour is also set before us for our imitation; and if we consider his behaviour under his sufferings, we see the most perfect resignation, but we see no rejoicing. Once it is recorded of him that he rejoiced, and that was when beholding the Disciples who accompanied him, he considered the goodness of God towards men of a low rank and condition, neglected and despised by the world, but honest and well-disposed persons, to whom were revealed the mysteries of the Gospel and the way of salvation, whilst they were hidden from the eyes of the wise and

prudent

prudent in their own conceits. In that hour, says St. Luke, Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Here was joy; but it was not joy in tribulation.

Christians therefore may be inclined to think that the exhortation to rejoice in afflictions is one of those strong and figurative expressions which require great abatements; one of those sublimer and heroic duties, which are rather to be admired than practised, especially in these days, when the faith and the hope and the zeal of Christians is not so eminent as they were in the times of the infant Church, supported and animated by miraculous gifts, and extraordinary supplies of the holy Spirit.

Now I shall readily grant to these objectors all that can fairly be required, that to rejoice at and in temporal evils, is not within the power of human nature. But the text, upon which I have discoursed, is the key to open to us the true sense of all such passages. Rejoice in hope, says the Apostle. So then, strictly and properly speaking, it is not in tribulation that Christians can rejoice, but in the happy consequences and the profitable effects of such tribulation, in the reward which shall be bestowed upon such sufferers.

And if we examine the passages in the New Testament which recommend this joy and exultation under temporal evils, we shall find that they relate chiefly to the sufferings which men undergo, not as they are men, but as they are Christians, for the sake of a good conscience, of their religion, and of their Lord and Master. And in this case, strictly speaking, it is hope, or the expectation of a reward, that is the object of their joy. When you are afflicted for my sake, says Christ to his Disciples, Rejoice: not because you are afflicted, but because you are afflicted for my sake; for great is the reward that is laid up for you.

As to the various calamities to which we are obnoxious by the common course of things, patience and resignation are rather required of us than joy. Indeed there is room here also for some degree of satisfaction, when we have cause to think that they are fatherly corrections tending to our amendment, and trials which decently undergone shall be rewarded in the kingdom of heaven.

The Writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews states the matter justly, when he says; No chastening for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.

Amongst the temporal evils to which we are exposed, is the loss of friends and near relations, that tax which most of us pay for dwelling here any considerable time. In these trials, sorrow will arise, and tears will flow. St. Paul sets this also in a true light, requiring of us no Stoical indifference and unconcern. He gives us leave to be sorrowful; and we could not help being so, whether he gave us leave or not. But he says; Sorrow not like the Pagans, like those who have no hope: for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

S E R M O N XVIII.

E P H E S . v . 20 .

*Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father,
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

WE are required in the Scriptures to address ourselves to God in prayer or supplication, and in thanksgiving. The duty of prayer was considered in a former discourse ; the duty of thanksgiving shall be our present subject.

Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is unnecessary to prove that the words, always, and for all things, ought not to be interpreted too literally and rigorously, lest perhaps they should be extended to impossibilities : but it is very expedient to shew the full sense of them, and to correct the mean and narrow notions which many form to themselves concerning this duty.

The acknowledgment and the returns which we ought to make to God for the favours which we receive from him, are habitual gratitude, and actual thanksgiving ; and he who is deficient in either, may be truly said to give thanks to God always.

Habitual gratitude requires, in the first place, that we be acquainted with the benefits which our Creator hath con-

conferred upon us; and as benefits increase in value by the dignity of the benefactor, by the unworthiness of the receiver, and by the easy terms upon which they are granted, we must have a competent knowledge not only of the good things which we possess, but of the perfections of God, of our own defects, and of our Christian duty.

Thus at first sight it appears that thankfulness to God is of a more extensive nature than careless and worldly-minded persons imagine, and that it requires several things, which perhaps never once entered into their thoughts. It requires a knowledge which is not to be attained unless by serious reflection, by examining ourselves, our abilities, and our imperfections, by meditating devoutly upon the works of nature and of providence, by studying the holy Scriptures, by earnestly desiring and industriously endeavouring to understand the religion which we profess.

We are indeed surrounded with God's benefits: and some of them will force themselves sometimes upon the observation of the most indolent and inattentive: but the greater part of them will escape the notice of those who make no use of their reason and sagacity any other way than in providing for their temporal welfare.

To know all that God hath done for us, is not enough, it shews perhaps that we have a good understanding, not that we have a good mind. It is the first step towards thankfulness, and the foundation upon which it must be raised.

Therefore, secondly, habitual gratitude consists in having a due sense of all God's favours, and in esteeming them proportionably to their several degrees of value.

The blessings of which we partake must be so fixed in our memory, and so affect us with admiration and love, that upon all proper occasions we be disposed to return our praises and acknowledgments.

The

The blessings of God are all highly to be esteemed; but some are more excellent than others; those which relate to our souls are of greater importance than those which are extended only to our bodies, and to our worldly circumstances. Too many persons may be found, who are not altogether ungrateful, but very imperfectly and injudiciously grateful to God, esteeming health and strength and plenty and success above the hopes of eternal life, and the means of obtaining it. They rejoice more that they are men than that they are Christians, and look upon God as their benefactor, rather because he gives them the sun, and the rain, and fruitful seasons, than because he hath given them an immortal soul, and sent his son to redeem them, and offers his holy Spirit to sanctify them.

One bad consequence of this low way of thinking, is that when they lose any of those things, upon which they have set their affections, and in which they make all their happiness to consist, they entertain injurious notions of God's wisdom and goodness, and account themselves unkindly overlooked, or cruelly used by Providence. Therefore, thirdly, habitual gratitude is accompanied with contentedness in our condition, though in many respects it may seem hard and inconvenient.

The grateful person hath often sedately and judiciously examined the gifts of God, and having a reasonable hope that he shall never lose those which are most valuable, he is not disturbed if a smaller proportion of those which are of an inferior nature be conferred upon him. If riches fall not to his share, or a strong constitution, or the favour of the world, he hath received understanding and immortality, he is a child of God, a member of the Church of Christ, and an heir of the kingdom of heaven. He knows therefore and he acknowledges that his Creator hath been most liberal and merciful to him. He believes that perfect goodness gives him every thing that is necessary, and withholds

from

from him only those things which might be prejudicial to his true interest. The temporal advantages which he enjoys not, are often bestowed upon the most unworthy; therefore he concludes, that their value is comparatively small. They have been abused by many to their destruction, therefore he accounts himself happy, that he is not exposed to those temptations. More health might have made him intemperate; more wealth might have made him insolent and debauched; more kindness from the world might have endeared the world too much to him. If he be infirm, he knows that the weakness of the body often conduceth to the health of the soul; if his possessions be small, he knows that wisdom and (*a*) peace love to dwell under homely roofs, and that Poverty is often the mother of industry and knowledge; if he be little esteemed by men, it is a motive to him to seek other and better friends, and to secure the favour of God, and of those good beings, with whom he hopes to dwell and to converse hereafter.

Fourthly; habitual gratitude consists in chearfully receiving those temporal blessings which God offers to us, those things which are plainly contrived and intended for our use and benefit. An excessive fondness of the world is, as we before observed, not reconcileable with gratitude. There seems to be also another extreme, an extreme scarcely consistent with thankfulness; namely, too great a contempt, or fear, or abhorrence of the world, and of those temporal conveniences which are serviceable to us in our passage through it. We are indeed exhorted, not to love the world; but by the world, which we must not love, is meant the corrupted world, with its follies, vanities, errors and vices; not the world which God created, and every part of which he pronounced to be good. The objects which surround

us

(*a*) —— non humiles domos
Falsidit.

us are made to serve us, to nourish and to refresh us; and our senses are fitted to receive agreeable impressions from them; and by these and other arguments drawn from the beautiful and useful frame of the universe and of all its parts, the goodness and the wisdom of the Maker are proved. It is therefore a gloomy and a morose sort of religion, and a superstitious devotion, which suspects these favours of providence to be no better than snares to our virtue, and enemies to our salvation. We read of many persons, whose religious notions made them (*b*) fly the face of mankind, drove them from friends and relations and families to deserts and dens, where they passed their solitary days in silence and hunger, in want and cold and nakedness: this they accounted, and this they taught others to account, the height of devotion, and the perfection of piety. Their intentions were probably good, but their judgment was weak; and their zeal seems to have been of that kind which stands in need of the Physician, more than of the Divine.

But this is an error to which we are generally little disposed, and there is more danger of an intemperate abuse, than of a scrupulous and superstitious rejection of the comforts and conveniences of life; for which reason, whatsoever is said against an injudicious, mistaken, and excessive self-denial, should be said with sober care and caution, so that nothing may express the least approbation of that affection for things below, which inflames our passions, and weakens our reason, and produces a cold indifference for things spiritual and eternal.

Fifthly; habitual gratitude towards all persons to whom we are obliged, requires a constant desire and endeavour of making a recompence and of requiting one kindness with another. Such returns are due from

V O L. I.

Q

us,

(*b*) See a law made against some of them, in *Cod. L. x. Tit. xxxi. 26.*

us, not only to men, but to God himself. It is true indeed that we cannot be beneficial to God; we can remove no inconveniences from him who is exposed to none, and we can add no happiness to him who possesseth all perfections. But God, by a most wondrous condescension, placeth us as it were almost upon the level with himself, as to giving and receiving: he represents himself as honoured, served, pleased, and delighted with our thankfulness: he hath substituted our fellow-creatures in his room, to accept our beneficence; and he declares that what good soever is done to them, is also done to him, and that thereby he becomes our debtor. Therefore habitual gratitude to God will excite us to contribute all that lieth in our power towards the prosperity of all men, to promote the welfare of their souls and bodies by instruction, by reproof, by commendation and encouragement, by acts of consolation and of charity, and by setting a good example.

Lastly; habitual gratitude is a strong and lively persuasion that the utmost returns which we can make to God, fall infinitely short of his loving kindness towards us. All that we can do is at the most to offer up to him what, strictly speaking, is his own. We can dedicate nothing to him and his service, unless our souls which he hath made and redeemed, our possessions which he gave us, and our good actions which without his assistance we could never have accomplished. Nothing is entirely our own, and produced without his concurrence, except our sins; and they indeed are too numerous, and fully our best performances. The consideration of them, and of the goodness and long-suffering of God, should excite in us a sorrow that we have not been more dutiful servants, and a confession of our own unworthiness. This is humility, which will always accompany true gratitude; and where this is wanting, no duty towards God can be duly discharged.

Such

Such is the nature, and such are the effects, of habitual gratitude, which is the most important and valuable part of thanksgiving, and without which all verbal acknowledgments are formal and insincere. These ought indeed to be joined, and these will be joined, to gratitude; they are the natural offspring of a well-disposed heart, which must express its sense of benefits by praise and adoration of the great Cause from which they flow. It is therefore our duty to give thanks to God, and to give thanks to him always, according to the direction of the Apostle; by which is meant, that we must do it upon all proper occasions, and that we must not suffer any considerable portion of our time to pass away not thus employed. We ought to praise him publicly in the congregation of the righteous, in the assemblies of our fellow Christians, in our own families also, and in our more private retirement. When we wake in the morning, our first thoughts are due to him, who hath raised us from the death of sleep to a kind of new being, and sends us out to our accustomed occupations, who took care of us whilst we could do nothing for ourselves, and had resigned up our senses, and lay lost in silent forgetfulness. When the evening calls us to rest, the dangers which we have escaped, the business which we have finished, the experience which we have acquired, the improvement which we have made, require a return of acknowledgment and praise. When we receive our daily bread, we ought not to forget at whose charge we are maintained, and who it is that gives us a power to procure it, and to receive refreshment and pleasure from it.

The second part of the text directs us to give thanks to God for all things, that is, for all the good things which he bestows upon us. These we shall find to be very numerous and extensive, and to comprehend almost every thing that befalls us and relates to us, except our transgressions. That we may form to ourselves

a clearer notion of them, it is best to divide them into several classes. The gifts of God then are those which we receive as we are men, or as we are Christians, or as we are members of society; after which may be considered those which belong more particularly to our own persons.

As we are men, we have received from God a rational and immortal soul made in his image, and having some bright characters of his divine nature impressed upon it, such as freedom, self-motion, power, activity; we receive dominion over the inferior creation, a capacity of discerning between good and evil, and of making a proper choice; a body wisely and wonderfully formed, in which the soul is lodged; senses and innumerable objects to exercise and entertain them, the earth to feed us, the light of heaven to shine upon us, a regular return of day and night, of seasons and years. These blessings of Providence are not to be overlooked because they are common, but deserve our grateful acknowledgments.

As Christians, we have received a clear discovery of our duty, and of a future state, a promise of divine assistance in time of need, through the whole course of our lives, of forgiveness upon our amendment, and of eternal happiness upon our perseverance, not in faultless obedience, but in sincere endeavours to improve in knowledge and virtue, and to perform the reasonable service which is required from us. The advantages of Christianity I have here contracted into few words; but they are such as no heart can duly conceive, no tongue can fully utter. The writers of the New Testament seem to labour for expressions, and to have found themselves unable to convey to us in proper language the sentiments of a heart overflowing with joy and gratitude, when they speak of the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ. Whosoever rightly understands and duly considers this divine love, will in some degree be affected

like

like them; will be sensible that he can be no good Christian who returns not frequent thanks to God that he is a Christian; and will wish that he were like one of those active Creatures, mentioned in the Revelation, who rest not day and night, and are occupied in giving glory and honour, and blessing and praise to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.

The benefits of which we are or may be partakers by the Gospel, are represented by the sacred writers as the best of God's gifts, the most inestimable blessings, and consequently as the principal objects of Christian gratitude: and therefore, as our Saviour hath taught us, when we pray to God, to pray in his name; so the Apostle informs us that when we return praise to God, we should likewise give thanks to him in the name of Jesus Christ.

To return thanks to God in the name of Christ, is in effect to declare our faith and confidence in Christ, as in our mediator and redeemer, our high priest and intercessor; it is to express our humility, and to own that we could reasonably expect no good but through him; it is to acknowledge that of all the favours which God confers upon us, those which we receive as Christians are the most to be esteemed, and should ever have the uppermost place in our thoughts.

As members of society, we have received the singular advantage of birth and education in a country, where Christianity is better taught, and better understood, than in many other Christian nations; where the form of government, in the main, is mild and moderate; where there is, amongst the sober and the better sort, a spirit of charity, and a love and respect for things which are praise-worthy; and where, though it must be confessed that there is much folly, and much wickedness, (as in what nation is there not?) yet examples of piety, of probity, of prudence, of knowledge, and of liberality,

are

are not unfrequent. So that if we see many, whose errors and vices we ought to deplore and avoid ; we see others, whose good qualities we ought to honour and imitate.

Hence ariseth a debt of gratitude both to God, and to our country. Gratitude is due to God, whose good providence hath caused us to receive our being, where, if we had the earth to chuse out of, and were wise enough to know our own interest, we should desire to be placed, and who hath hitherto favourably protected and preserved this nation. Gratitude is due to our country, from which we receive so many advantages, and whose prosperity we ought with all our power to promote. We cannot more effectually contribute to its welfare, than by promoting virtue and religion, and by exerting our utmost endeavours to discourage and suppress vice in ourselves, and in all those over whom we have any influence and authority : for, whatsoever some lewd and profane persons have pretended to the contrary, vice is no more beneficial to the body politic of the nation, than it is to the body of the sinner, but hath a natural tendency and a fatal power to undermine and destroy the health and strength of the most flourishing kingdoms. Private vices, say these men, are public benefits. They might as well say, that if all the inhabitants had the plague, the nation would be healthy ; and if they were all beggars, the nation would be rich.

Public and national advantages and blessings require public acknowledgments and thanksgivings. Such acts of devotion are highly proper, as they are acts of gratitude, and as they conduce to keep up a sense of our weakness and dependence, and right notions of God, as of the supreme Governor of the world. To allow God to be the Creator, but not the Ruler of all, and to ascribe events to Nature, to Chance, to Fate, to Fortune, and to human Power ; this is worse than ignorance, it is

is irreligion. The Second Causes which produce health or sickness, plenty or poverty, peace or war, as the elements, earth, air, fire, and water, the friendship or the enmity of other nations with whom we have to do, the operation of spiritual agents, good or bad, who are invisible to us; these are all the servants, the ministers, and the instruments of the Most High, executing his will, and carrying on the plan of his eternal Providence. It is with strict truth, as well as with poetical elegance, that the Psalmist represents heaven and earth, sun and moon, fire and hail, snow and vapour, wind and storm, obeying his decrees, and fulfilling his word.

Prosperity and adversity proceed from him, and are connected with moral purposes; they are encouragements, or recompences, or trials, or warnings, or corrections, or punishments, all intended for wise and good ends.

The advantages of which we partake, as men, as Christians, as members of society, remind us that we ought to give thanks to God, not only for all things, but for all men. We are interested in the welfare of mankind, more particularly in the prosperity of our fellow Christians, our countrymen, our friends and relations. We are indebted to society for most of the conveniences of life, and for the means of improving our understanding, and acquiring wisdom and virtue: therefore we are bound in gratitude to bless and praise God for the benefits which he imparts to others. Charity and humanity will also teach us to rejoice at the favours which any being receives from his bountiful Benefactor, and to join with all the good and grateful part of the creation in celebrating our common parent and protector.

The favours of providence, which in a more particular manner relate to our own persons, are best known to each of us; and it is the duty of every one to acquaint himself with them, and to return his praises for them,
for

for the deliverances from danger which have been afforded to him, for the good offices which he hath received from others, for that portion of understanding, judgment, sagacity, memory, skill, knowledge, health, strength, and conveniences, which he possesses.

I have now, I think, made general and particular mention of the things for which returns of gratitude are due to Almighty God, except adversity, concerning which a doubt may justly be made whether it be a proper cause of thanksgiving.

When we consider that the evils of life are sometimes very afflicting and grievous, and that thanksgiving implies in it joy and satisfaction, it seems hard to reconcile grief and pleasure, and to require of men that they should think those circumstances to be blessings, which human nature and innocent inclinations teach them to shun and to alter when it is in their power. In extreme calamities, a decent resignation, an humble patience, a calm and composed submission to the will of God, seems to be the utmost effort of Christian fortitude and faith. But resignation, patience, and submission, have in them no exultation and cheerfulness.

On the other hand, it is expressly affirmed in Scripture, that temporal and transitory evils often produce great and lasting advantages; that God chastens and corrects those in whom he most delights; that to such persons all things work together for good; and that virtue thus tried and exercised shall be recompensed with the highest honours in the kingdom of heaven; the consequence of which doctrines seems to be, that adversity, as it is a help to reform and improve the soul, an indication of God's favour, and an earnest of future happiness, should be received by a Christian, not only with submission, but with thanksgiving.

Thus much howsoever is undoubtedly true, that a good man in the lowest state will have continual reason to praise God for many inestimable benefits which no calamities

calamities can lessen ; they cannot deprive him of an immortal foul, of the benefits of Christ's death, of the kind influences of the holy Spirit, and of an inheritance in heaven.

A good man will always have reason to bless God, if not for his afflictions, yet for those gracious declarations which God hath made, that he deals thus with his beloved children, that he will never forsake them, or suffer them to be tried beyond their strength, and that they shall soon enter into a state of uninterrupted peace.

He will have cause to be thankful, if not for his afflictions, yet for the good effects arising from them ; and gratefully to consider, that he is removed from temptations which have been the ruin of many in more flourishing circumstances, that he hath no violent affections for the vanities and follies of this world, that as his treasure is not here, his heart also is not here, and he is ready to depart when his Lord shall call him.

We are assured, that all things shall work together for good to those who love and serve God. Such persons therefore, whatsoever their condition and their circumstances be, can never want causes of gratitude towards Him, who even out of trouble can produce peace, and whose very corrections are acts of kindness and mercy.

S E R M O N XIX.

JOHN xxi. 21, 22.

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

THIS chapter contains a very interesting account of some of the last words and actions of our Saviour upon earth, after his resurrection and before his ascension.

He had already, as St. John says, besides some other appearances to this or that person, shewed himself twice to the body of his disciples, and afterwards he shewed himself again to them, at the sea of Tiberias.

Seven of them, of whom St. Peter was one, went to catch fish in the evening, and tarried out all night. In the morning Jesus stood on the shore, and they knew him not. He asked them, Children, have ye any food ? They answered him, No. He calls them children, and speaks with affection and authority, as a father and a master, giving them cause to suspect that he was no ordinary person, though unknown, and to make them more ready to obey his orders. For he said to them, Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not well able to draw it along for the multitude of fishes ; and yet

yet the net was not broken, when they brought it to shore.

Upon this, St. John said to the rest, This is the Lord. He had good reason to think so, both on account of the miraculous draught, and because Christ had wrought the very same miracle once (*a*) before in behalf of him, and of some of the disciples now present.

Peter therefore, more impatient than the rest to see his master, immediately cast himself into the sea, to go to him; and the other disciples followed in the ship. When they came to shore, they found that Jesus had miraculously provided a dinner for them there, of fish and bread; and he called them to him, and sat down to dinner with them.

That they should have toiled in vain during Christ's absence, and have had such wonderful success at his command, this was an intimation to them, that weak and insufficient as they were of themselves, yet when they should be appointed to be fishers of men, they with Christ's assistance should be most successful preachers of the Gospel.

And as it is probable that they betook themselves at this time to their old occupation of fishing, through mere poverty, and to supply their present want of necessaries, Christ by this miraculous draught enabled them to maintain themselves without farther labour, at Jerusalem, till the Holy Ghost should descend upon them, and fit them for their ministry.

Christ, after his resurrection, had shewed himself to Peter twice before this, and Peter knew that Christ had forgiven him his denial of him; and indeed, at the time when Christ foretold him his fall, he also foretold him his repentance and his future perseverance. Therefore Peter was not afraid of hastening into his presence, and conversing familiarly with him. But he had two rebukes to undergo still, as it appears from the sequel.

When

(*a*) Luke v. 1, &c.

When they were at dinner, none of the disciples, says St. John, durst ask Christ, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. They durst not ask him, because they had sufficient evidence from his deeds, and from his words, and because they feared lest he should sharply rebuke them for their unbelief, if they expressed any doubt of it. Probably there was an alteration in his person and countenance, and he had a more majestic aspect now than before his death.

When they had dined, Christ addressed himself thus to Peter; Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? More than these; that is, say (*b*) some Expositors, more than these nets, these fishing boats, and these worldly occupations. I think that can hardly be the meaning; it is too cold and flat, and Peter might love Jesus more than these things, and yet not love him much. More than these; that is, more than these my disciples who are here present. Christ's words may be thus interpreted and explained;

Thou didst say to me, on the night when I was betrayed, Although all thy disciples should forsake thee, yet will I never forsake thee; I will live, and I will die with thee; which was in effect to pretend that thou didst love me more than they: and now thou hast hastened before them all to come through the sea to me. I ask thee therefore, Dost thou indeed love me, more than these my disciples love me?

Peter answered, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He would not presume to say, I love thee more than these; he remembered his own former weakness; but he affirmed that he did sincerely love Christ; who replied, Feed my lambs.

He asked him a second time, Lovest thou me? without adding the former words, more than these. Peter returned the same answer; and Christ replied again, Feed my sheep.

He repeated the same question a third time. Peter was grieved at the threefold repetition, which looked as if Christ distrusted his sincerity, or foresaw his falling from his duty once more ; and he said fervently, Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee. And Christ again repeated, Feed my sheep.

This was a rebuke for his threefold denial of his master, and Peter could not fail to understand it so. But though he was disquieted and afflicted at it, yet he saw plainly that it was not the angry upbraiding of an offended Master, who intended to take a final leave of his old servant, and to employ him no more ; but that it was a most gentle and an oblique reprimand, mixed with much tenderness and kindness, and a sure indication that his fall was forgiven him, and that he was reinstated in full favour and trust, since Christ not only thus inquired into the sincerity of his love, but laid upon him a threefold command to feed his flock.

In the conduct of Christ, as it is represented to us in the Gospel, we cannot but observe his great condescension, compassion, and lenity, towards penitent sinners. He never uses an angry or a harsh expression on such occasions, but declares both himself and his heavenly Father ever ready to give a kind reception to all such persons, when they return to their duty.

Amazingly absurd is the argument which the Church of Rome builds upon Christ's command to Peter to feed his flock, when they infer from it the Pope's unlimited dominion over the Christian world in spirituals and temporals, his supremacy, and his infallibility. St. Peter upon a certain occasion said to Christ, Lord, here are two swords. Some Romish writers have inferred from these words, that the Pope hath two swords committed to him, or a temporal and a spiritual weapon, with which he can destroy both soul and body of those who refuse to acknowledge his dominion. Again, because a voice said to Peter in a vision, Arise, kill and eat,

eat, the same men have concluded that the Pope hath a right to extirpate and consume all that resist his pleasure, be they particular persons, or whole nations; be they private men, or kings and magistrates.

Such high powers and privileges the Pope, it seems, enjoys as Christ's Vicegerent, as Bishop of Rome, and as successor, to St. Peter; to St. Peter, who had neither jurisdiction given him over the other Apostles, nor ever exercised such dominion, nor indeed ever was Bishop of Rome. These claims and interpretations of the word of God are so childish and so abominable, as scarcely to deserve a confutation; but the controversies between the Roman Church and the Protestant Churches have necessitated the latter to expose these and many other infamous devices of the same stamp. Indeed, when we consider the character and conduct of many of these Bishops of Rome, as it is represented by writers of their own communion, we find that they have acted just as if Christ had not said to them, Feed my sheep; but, Fleece my sheep, and devour my sheep; and we must of necessity account them the true vicegerents of him, who is called, The God of this world, who was a liar and a murderer from the beginning.

Feed my sheep, says Christ to Peter. This is an office which was common to Peter with the other Apostles, and is an office of labour and diligence, and is also an office of dignity. In a spiritual sense it may be considered as a Princely office, for Princes of old were called Shepherds or Pastors of the People; such they are, or such they ought to be; and our Saviour takes this name, and calls himself the good Shepherd, by way of eminence, who not only feeds and protects his sheep, but lays down his life for the sheep.

The Apostles, as we find, had an expectation that their Master would erect a temporal kingdom, and that they under him should enjoy a share of temporal power and prosperity. But he frequently took occasion to inform

form them that he had no such views and designs ; that his kingdom was not of this world, and that they had no better usage to expect from wicked men than he himself had experienced. And now upon this occasion, he proceeds to foretell to Peter how he should end his days, and what he should suffer from tyrannical persecutors for his Master's sake.

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest ; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee where thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God.

Christ took many occasions to confirm his prophetic office and character, by convincing his friends and his foes that future events were known to him ; and he now told Peter what should befall him in this world, a prediction of which St. John, who recorded this conversation, lived to see the accomplishment.

Christ's words to Peter may be thus understood ; Thou didst once promise that thou wouldest lay down thy life for my sake ; and then thy courage failed thee. But what thou didst then declare, thou shalt perform hereafter. In thy old days thou shalt be used by wicked men as I have been ; thou shalt be treated as a malefactor, be seized, and bound, and led away, and die my true disciple and faithful martyr.

This was to St. Peter a full assurance that he should never more desert his Master, and in that respect it must have been matter of support and consolation to him. To many of us Christians it is much to be feared that such a prediction of martyrdom would rather be matter of consternation and trouble ; and indeed such sufferings are always unacceptable to human nature ; and our Saviour himself intimates as much when he says, Another shall carry thee whither thou wouldest not, that is, to be put to a violent death, which no man would chuse, if he could

could avoid it with a safe conscience. But Peter, besides natural courage, of which he had a great share, had also the powerful aid of the holy Spirit, and a full conviction of the truth of the Gospel, and a clear assurance of passing from death to life, and of dwelling forever in heaven with his Lord and Master, who had himself triumphantly overcome death and the grave. This surely was sufficient to support him; and it would be sufficient to support any person, and to make him willing to leave this world, and to die in any manner, for such a cause, and with such a certain prospect of glory and immortality.

When Christ had spoken these things, he said to Peter, Follow me.

Follow me: these words are capable of two senses. Follow me, in the figurative sense, is Walk in my steps and after my example, as my disciple, the preacher of my Gospel, the shepherd of my flock, and my faithful Martyr. Follow me, in the literal sense, means, Come along with me. In this sense Peter understood it; for Christ when he spake thus, arose and left the company, and Peter supposed that his Master had something more to say to him in private. So he arose and followed him. Turning back he saw John, who, unwilling to be separated from Christ so soon, followed them both. Upon this his inquisitive and forward temper led him to ask Christ an improper question; Lord, said he, What shall this man do? That is; Thou hast told me what is to befall me in my old age: tell us what shall befall this my friend and fellow disciple. Jesus replied, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.

Christ at different times had discoursed to his disciples about his coming again, and the destruction of the Jewish nation, and the end of the world, and the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment, and said that he should come before that generation were passed away.

away. Therefore it seems at first, and for some time, to have been a prevalent opinion amongst his followers, that the end of all things was at hand ; and these sayings of Christ were not fully cleared up till after the destruction of Jerusalem, and then it appeared that Christ had spoken of two advents ; the first and nearer at hand, to punish the Jewish nation ; the second and more remote, to judge mankind.

Jesus said to Peter, concerning John, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee ? Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die. Yet Jesus said not to him, He shall not die ; but, If I will that he tarry till I come.

It was no wonder that the Brethren concluded that John should not die, but live till his Master's coming. Yet, says St. John, Christ did not say of me that I should not die, but only, If I will that he tarry. That is very true ; and yet Christ's words had the appearance of a prediction that his beloved disciple should live till that time ; and accordingly, it did so come to pass, and he survived the first of Christ's two advents, and the destruction of the Jews.

If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee ? Follow thou me.

Here St. John closes his narrative of his manifestation of Christ : he tells us not in what manner he departed from them, and what else he said to them at that time. It is certain that Christ before and after his resurrection said many things and did many things which the Evangelists have passed over in silence. Thus when Jesus, after he was risen, conversed with two of his disciples in their way to Emmaus, beginning at Moses and the Prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things belonging to himself ; but his discourse upon this important and most interesting subject is not recorded.

If an extract were made of his words and actions from the four Gospels, and every thing omitted that is twice related in them, it would be contained in a very small volume. So likewise, as to his disciples, we know but little of their ministry, and of the things which besell them, where they preached, and how they died, except what is related by St. Luke in the A&cts, and he confines himself principally to the ministry of St. Paul.

The short memoirs of these transactions set many impostors to work, in early times, to forge Gospels, and Epistles, and Narratives of the history of Christ from his infancy to his death, and of the preaching and travels of the Apostles. But as the designs of these men for the most part were bad, so their abilities were no better, and their works never could obtain credit in the Christian world.

We should be very much pleased to have larger and fuller accounts of our Lord, and of his Apostles, and of the first establishment of Christianity. A desire of knowledge, which exerts itself strongly in all studious persons, a curious and inquisitive temper, which under due bounds is by no means blameable, and a zeal for our religion and for every thing that relates to it, plead our excuse for suffering such a wish to arise in our minds. But we must not indulge it too far, and lament our ignorance of these things, lest we also fall under the just rebuke which our Saviour, in the text, gave to his Apostle, What is that to thee ? Follow thou me.

If we had lived in those times, we should perhaps have been desirous to put many questions, to our Lord and to his Apostles, of the learned and religious kind, which seem to us doubtful and difficult. And supposing we had done this, it is more than probable that our Lord would not have answered them ; for we find him constantly refusing to resolve questions of no immediate concern to the inquirers. And, as to the Apostles, it is

is probable that they could not have answered them, and that their knowledge went no farther than it was necessary for the execution of their office and the work of their ministry. Sufficient it is for us, sufficient for all moral and religious purposes, that the holy Scriptures, by the divine providence, are preserved and transmitted down to us, and that they contain all that is absolutely needful for us, both as to faith, and as to practice. For as St. John tells us, Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through his name.

The practical inference which the subject and the text suggest to us, is, that every one should principally attend to his own proper business, to his own plain duty, and not concern himself about things which do not concern him.

As to the present life, and to temporal affairs, every one knows that it is incumbent upon him to procure and to preserve the means conducing to his support, suitably to his rank in civil society, and enabling him to be useful to his family, and to the public, and to pass his days with credit and comfort. Men therefore are usually bred up to some profession, calling, and occupation, to some labour of body or mind. They have some proposed end in view, and they are taught to apply the methods which answer that purpose; and if they acquire the character of being skilful and honest in their occupation, they can hardly fail of success. But if they neglect their own profession, which is too often the case; if they meddle with branches of business which they understand not; if they employ themselves in things which concern them not; if they amuse themselves with fantastical projects, or with vain diversions; if they suffer their expences to outrun their income; in

short, if they mind any thing and every thing except what they ought to mind ; they bid fair to reap as they have sowed, and to bring disgrace and disasters upon themselves. To them therefore the words of the text are applicable, in the worldly sense, What are these things to thee ? Follow thy own calling.

Act in character. This is a short and a good rule. He who acts in character is above contempt, though in a low station : he who acts out of character is despisable, though in a high station.

But this is not the principal meaning of the text, which relates properly to things spiritual, moral, and religious ; and here our Saviour's admonition to Peter is applicable to us all ; Follow thou me.

Besides the duties common to us all, as we are men, and as we are Christians, every one hath his own peculiar duty, according to his station, age, connections, capacity, faculties, abilities and opportunities.

Thus they who are subject to others must serve them with industry and fidelity, and obey their superiors, parents, masters and teachers. They who have the care of others must direct, instruct and assist them. They who are eminent in wealth and power must be eminent examples of the moral and the Christian graces, and be the patrons and the guardians of industry, probity, erudition, and virtue. They who are distressed and afflicted must practise the humble and silent duties of patience and resignation to the will of God, which though less shewy are not less valuable in his sight than the active and resplendent virtues which adorn prosperity. They who have knowledge and learning must apply these excellent talents to the good of society, and the glory of the Giver. They who are of low rank and confined abilities must know and practise those things of which no Christian can be ignorant, except by his own wilfulness, laziness, and negligence. Every one is capable of discerning and feeling that he ought to live soberly,
righteously

righteously and piously, and prepare himself for the day in which God will judge mankind. It requires no strong parts, no lively imagination, no deep study, to know this.

But we would fain know more than this. Man is curious and inquisitive, and desirous of novelty: the eye is never satisfied with seeing, says Solomon, nor the ear with hearing, nor the mind with seeking and discovering. This desire, innocent enough in itself, and even commendable, yet must be directed by reason, and confined to its proper bounds, else it insensibly becomes a bad habit. Curiosity ill applied is at least a waste of time, which might be so much better employed. When it is exercised in observing the conduct and enquiring into the character of others, it often grows pragmatical, impertinent, and censorious, full of spite and malevolence towards them, magnifying their faults, depreciating their good qualities, repining at their successes, and rejoicing at their disappointments.

As there is a needless and impertinent curiosity relating to persons, so there is with respect to doctrines of no importance to religion and morality. Whatsoever opinions concern the perfections and the government of God, and the worship due to him, and the social virtues, and have an influence and a tendency either to mend or to spoil the tempers of men, either to promote or to obstruct the practice of piety, these are objects of sober and serious inquiry, that we may reject every pernicious principle, and hold fast every sound doctrine. But as to mere speculations and subtle refinements, which amuse the imagination without improving the heart, the fewer of them enter into our religious system, so much the better. Yet these have perpetually been matter of eager contention and uncharitable animosity; and Ecclesiastical History too fully confirms this melancholy observation. A fondness of overbearing others, and of forcing opinions upon them which yet can never

be

be forced, a zeal for things not certain, or not useful, or even not intelligible, a false shame of departing from false notions once obstinately maintained, together with pride, ambition, and self-interest lurking at the bottom, these have produced those sects and parties, by which the Christian world hath been divided, and the Christian religion dishonoured.

Let us adhere to our Christian duty, as it is set forth in the Gospel, and bend all our endeavours to live suitably to it; and we shall experience that as our Lord's yoke is easy, and his burden is light, so his doctrine is pure, and his precepts are rational.

S E R M O N XX.

LUKE xi. 1.

And it came to pass that as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father, &c.

IN the history of our Saviour's life, it may be observed that no reasonable request was ever made to him, which he did not grant; and no prudent question, which he did not answer and resolve. Of all the requests which are recorded in the New Testament, this in the Text may be accounted one of the most just and judicious: Lord, teach us to pray. The imperfection of the best, and the ignorance of the wisest is such, that, if left to themselves, they would have doubts concerning the things to be asked, and the effects to be expected from their petitions. Therefore this Disciple is greatly to be commended, who neglected not the opportunity of obtaining instruction in so important a point from the mouth of Divine Wisdom itself.

We learn from the Gospel of St. Matthew, that our Saviour, before he delivered this form of prayer, discoursed to his disciples concerning the duty of private prayer, and exhorted them to avoid some faults relating to

to it. The Jewish hypocrites said their prayers in the streets and places of concourse, to be seen of men, to get the character of devout persons, and to promote their own worldly interests. The Gentiles multiplied petitions for things temporal, without any devotion, without a due reverence and submission to the divine will. These indecent follies he strictly forbids : he reminds them, that God knoweth the things of which they have need, before they ask him ; that they ought not to lay their wants before him in a superfluous abundance of words, nor hope to extort his favour by such absurd methods. Then he proceeds to give them a form of prayer.

It hath been observed by Commentators that this form is taken out of the Jewish Liturgies, that our Lord collected it thence, and put it together, and added nothing of his own, except these words, As we forgive them that trespass against us ; that therefore he was far from affecting novelty, and rejecting any thing that was good, because it was in common use.

If these Jewish Forms of prayer are indeed as old as they are said to be, which is doubtful, another observation might be also made, namely that our Lord, when he had recited this prayer to his disciples, knowing that there was only one expression in it which might seem new to them, makes a particular remark upon it, saying immediately ; For 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 our Lord gave this prayer to his Disciples, it was not his intention that they should use no other than this in their private devotions, much less, that they should neglect the public worship of God, and the stated prayers of the Church, to which, as it appears from the New Testament, both he and his disciples conformed. But the Jewish doctors had used to draw up a form of
private

private prayer for themselves and for their disciples ; and John the Baptist, as St. Luke occasionally informs us, had given one to his followers ; and conformably to this custom of Teachers, our Lord, at the request of his disciples, gave them this, to add to their petitions ; for it is not to be supposed that when they prayed to God, they always confined themselves to the Lord's prayer ; and indeed our Saviour afterwards gave his disciples new directions concerning prayer, bidding them ask in his name.

But since our Lord ordered his disciples to make use of this form of words, as these expressions imply ; So therefore pray ye ; and, When ye pray, say ; and since it is to be concluded that they complied with his precept, and repeated this prayer at certain times, the silence of the Scriptures being no proof to the contrary ; and since the Church hath made use of it from very ancient times ; and since this prayer is most excellent, as every Christian must acknowledge ; upon these accounts, and for the sake of Him who gave it, it becomes us to insert it in our more solemn addresses, and, and also to account it a pattern and model for all our prayers, to ask for such things as are contained in it, and to make no petitions which are not consistent with it.

Some persons, who have been fond of extemporary prayers, have carried their aversion from stated forms so far as to slight even the Lord's prayer, and to shun the use of it. They have objected to us, the repetition of it in our Liturgy ; a repetition which, to say the plain truth, is too frequent. But that was not the fault of the Compilers of the Liturgy ; it is to be ascribed to our joining together different Services, which were originally intended to be used at different times, or hours.

The Lord's Prayer begins with an address to God, as to our heavenly Father ; and with three petitions, or rather pious wishes, that his name may be hallowed,
that

that his kingdom may come, and that his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

God is called Father, as he is our Creator, and thereby the Father of all things in the universe, particularly of all intellectual beings, and of all men. Their Father he is, both because he made them, and because they in some measure resemble him. He is also Father, as he is the preserver of all, upholding and supporting them by his power and providence. He is also our Father in a more excellent sense, by vocation and adoption, having called us to him by Jesus Christ, through faith in whom we become children of God, and are his family on earth, as the Angels are his family in heaven.

By calling God, Father, we are reminded of his paternal readiness to hear our reasonable requests, to grant us the things which are good, though we may not have a right apprehension of them, and to withhold from us the things which are hurtful, if by mistake we should wish for them. Not only, if we ask him bread, he will not give us a scorpion; but if we ignorantly ask him a scorpion, he will give us bread.

By calling him Father, we are reminded of that reverence for him, that fear of offending him, that desire of pleasing him, that zeal for his honour, that endeavour to resemble him, and that submission to his dispensations, which, as his children, we ought to entertain.

By calling him Our Father, that is, our common Parent, we learn what affection we ought to bear to our brethren, that is, to all men, who, as well as we, are his children by creation or adoption.

It is added, Who art in heaven; an appellation of God frequently used by the Jews. Not as if God were there only, or so particularly there, as not to be equally every where in essence, in power, and in knowledge; but because his presence there is more gloriously manifested.

fested. By the same expression is also signified in scripture his perfect knowledge of every thing, his excellent majesty, his supreme irresistible power, and his dominion over all.

Thus these first words, which are a preface to the prayer, are proper to produce in us worthy notions of God, and to raise our hope and reliance, our veneration and love.

By the name of God, which we wish may be hallowed, is meant the divine Majesty, God himself, as he is known to us by his perfections. We may be said to hallow the name of God, that is, to sanctify or to glorify God, when we entertain in our hearts a right opinion of him, particularly of his moral perfections, as they are called, that is, of his perfect goodness, and justice, and purity, and mercy, and have a lively and lasting sense of them upon our minds, which produces a suitable behaviour towards him.

We sanctify him, when we declare this our belief, and acknowledge these perfections of God by speaking of him upon all proper occasions in such a manner as becomes us, and by offering up prayers and praises to him. We sanctify him, when our actions correspond with such thoughts and such expressions, and we obediently keep his commandments.

The kingdom of God may be taken in three different senses :

First, his absolute and general dominion over the universe, which was created for his pleasure, which is preserved by his providence, and which depends upon him for its continuance.

This cannot be the kingdom of God mentioned in the Lord's prayer, the coming of which we should desire; for it hath been present, from the beginning, in all times and in all places, and cannot be enlarged or diminished by the behaviour of any of his creatures. We cannot therefore pray or wish for its coming: we can indeed

deed and we ought to rejoice that it is always present, that the Lord reigneth, and that his kingdom is over all, and that we are not exposed to the cruel tyranny of Chance or Fate, or of imperfect and wicked beings, but that all things are governed by an almighty and most gracious God.

Secondly, The kingdom of God means his government over rational creatures, to whom he gives laws, and who obey him, not by constraint, but freely and by choice. This kingdom may be resisted, and is daily resisted, by evil Spirits, and by wicked men. And as this kingdom may be opposed, so it may be increased by the conversion of the disobedient from sin to righteousness.

As our Lord came into the world to destroy the works of the Devil, and to promote virtue and obedience to God, the religion of Christ and the state of the Gospel is in the Scripture frequently called the kingdom of God; and this is what is chiefly meant by it in the Lord's Prayer. By praying therefore that God's kingdom may come, we express a desire that the Gospel of Christ may spread and prevail over the world, may be every where embraced and practised.

Thirdly, The kingdom of God in a more eminent and proper sense means that state to come, when Sin and Death shall be abolished, and the Saints shall reign with God in glory and happiness for ever; that kingdom which they shall inherit who are subjects to the present kingdom of Christ, and obey his laws. The kingdom of God in the New Testament usually means both these kingdoms, for they are in some manner one and the same kingdom, and an entrance and continuance in the first leads us to an inheritance in the latter.

By praying then that God's kingdom may come, we pray also and wish for that happy time when we shall have no more to do with this vain and wicked world, when the glorious kingdom of God shall come, new

heavens

heavens and a new earth, the seat of everlasting peace and righteousness.

By the will of God is not meant what he purposes and resolves to do; for that he will do in heaven and on earth, whether his creatures approve of it or no. But the will of God, in this place, means his desire of being obeyed by rational and free beings, in whose power he leaves it to comply or not. This will of God is done in heaven by the holy Angels, who are his ministers to do his pleasure; and who perform their duty to him readily and cheerfully. When we pray therefore that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven, we wish that all men, imitating the blessed spirits above, may sincerely and carefully serve their Creator.

It is to be observed that in the Lord's Prayer we in the first place wish that the name of God may be hallowed, that his kingdom may come, and that his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; in all which there is nothing that relates directly, immediately, and particularly, to our own persons. Hereby we are taught each of us to know and acknowledge ourselves to be what we are, a small and inconsiderable part of the creation; to place things in their true order, and to regulate our desires according to the dictates of reason. The honour and glory of almighty God, who is the Creator, Father, and Preserver of all, is to be preferred to every thing else; therefore it is to be first sought and desired by us: the obedient behaviour of all his creatures, by which his honour is promoted and their happiness is secured and increased, stands next; and our own interest, though it be included in the good of the whole, of which we are a part, is not yet distinctly mentioned. But after we have prayed that God may be honoured by the obedience of all his creatures, we are permitted to offer up some petitions relating more immediately to ourselves, though not to ourselves alone; and they are, that God would give us our daily bread,
that

that he would forgive us our trespasses, that he would not lead us into temptation, and that he would deliver us from evil.

By bread is meant, not what disorderly fancy, and foolish custom, and pride, and luxury, and vanity, may have made in a manner necessary to many of us; but those things which are really necessary for the support of human nature, those good things of this life, which God created for our use, and to be received with thanksgiving, those things which our heavenly Father knoweth to be needful for us, and which he hath promised to them who seek first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof. This is the bread which we are permitted to ask of God, and we must ask that he would give it us this day, or day by day, that is, not all at once such a quantity of things necessary as may last us our whole life, not treasures laid up for many years, but a constant and moderate provision dealt out to us in proportion to our exigences, and sufficient to supply our necessities during this life.

This is a petition which it behoves us to put up constantly to God, how flourishing soever our circumstances may be, remembering the fickle state of worldly things, and the folly of placing our confidence in any creature, and the insufficiency of abundance, and power, and friends, and health, and diligence, and prudence, and the brightest abilities, without God's blessing, which is promised to those, who, whilst they are honestly industrious in their callings, rely entirely upon his paternal care and support.

The general sense then of the petition is plain; but the words, daily bread, are not so clear, and might perhaps be better rendered, to-morrow's bread: Give us this day bread for the (*a*) morrow. This may, at first sight,

(*a*) Daily bread, *πιτίσιον*. *Η πιτίσιον* is the morrow; as in Euripides—*πιτίσια νερπάδες δεῖ*, is *lux postera*, Med. 352. Jerom

light, seem to contradict the precept of our Saviour, wherein he bids us Take no care for the morrow. But, first, the care which he condemns, is an anxious care, accompanied with a distrust of Providence; secondly, petitions, of their own nature, look forwards, and are for something to come; and thirdly, we only ask for bread from this day to the morrow, that is, bread for four and twenty hours, which is in reality only one day's bread.

By praying that God would forgive us our trespasses, we are reminded that we all of us offend him, more or less, and in many things fall short of our duty; that yet we are sinners by our own fault, and must not charge our transgressions upon a fatal necessity, or a natural impossibility of doing better; that therefore our sins justly deserve punishment, unless God be pleased mercifully to remit that punishment; that he is placable and ready to be appeased upon our repentance; that we should daily desire his forgiveness; that our devotions should be founded on humility; and that when we pray to God for spiritual or temporal blessings, we ought at the same time to have a due sense of our own unworthiness, and meekly to acknowledge it.

Our Lord hath also taught us, not to expect forgiveness, unless we forgive those who trespass against us; and this he hath repeated several times, lest we should deceive ourselves in a point so important. He obliges us to affirm before God, who knoweth our hearts, that we are in charity with all men, as often as we ask mercy from him; so that, if we are not in this temper, we are reduced to the hard necessity and condition, either of

not

Jerom on *Matt. vi. 11.* says; *In Evangelio quod appellatur secundum Hebreos, pro i*p*ro*s*ub*f*stantiali pane, reperi mackar, quod dicitur crafstnum: ut sit sensus, panem nostrum crafstnum, id est, futurum da nobis hodie.*

Other ancient Versions use words which answer to *crafstnus*, or *futurus*.

not offering up our prayers to God, or of indirectly asking him to punish us.

We must forgive those who trespass against us. And if we really forgive them; we must be free from designs and desires of revenging ourselves upon them; we must wish that they may repent and return to a better mind; we must be ready to do them such good offices as humanity and charity require, howsoever they be disposed towards us; and we must shew them still more favour, if they humbly own their fault, and amend, and seek to be reconciled.

Great is the encouragement which our Lord hath given us to practise this patient and compassionate virtue. If ye forgive men, says he, their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. This promise however is not to be so extensively understood, as if this act of obedience alone could secure to us the favour of God, though we should neglect the rest of our duty. Thus much indeed may be justly hoped and fairly concluded, that he who hath received considerable injuries, and from his heart forgives them, will probably, by the good disposition of his own mind, and by the blessing and assistance of God, perform whatsoever is necessary to his improvement and salvation.

The next petition is, that God would not lead us into temptation; in which if we attend to the bare sound, and reflect not upon the sense of it, we may fall into unworthy notions of God's providence.

It is often said upon this subject, that temptations are of two sorts; first, trials of our obedience, intended for our benefit; secondly, enticements to sin, which seduce us from our duty. But this seems not to set the matter in a true light; the distinction is scarcely just. All temptations are of the same sort: they are difficulties which arise in certain circumstances and situations, when reason and duty require one thing, and inclination and passion

passion suggest another. As to the (*b*) event indeed, sometimes the man overcomes the temptation, and sometimes the temptation overcomes the man.

Concerning this expression, Lead us not into temptation, it is to be observed that to be led into temptation, and to enter into temptation, in the language of the Scriptures, signify to be overcome by it. When therefore we pray to God that he would not lead us into temptation, we desire that he would not place us in circumstances, wherein we shall be overcome by the temptation.

But as this may seem to make God the author and the cause of our sins, it must be always remembered that he cannot lead us into temptation, by putting evil inclinations in us, or by inciting or enticing us to sin, or by laying us under a necessity of committing it, or by giving evil spirits any power over our will. Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But in the language of the Scripture, whatsoever God permits to be done, or to come to pass, that he is sometimes said to do. He may then, according to this way of speech, be said to lead us into temptation, when, because we have abused his long suffering and his kind offers of assistance, or because we rashly seek danger through presumption and self-conceit, or because our hearts are dead to things spiritual, he leaves us to ourselves, and withdraws that assistance which he would have continued to us, if we had asked him for it in a due manner, and done our part in working out our Salvation. When such is our case, and we have forced God to forsake us, we shall as surely be overcome by temptation, as if God himself had led us into it, and subjected us to its influence. Therefore, when we pray that God would

V O L. I.

S

not

(*b*) To be tempted, sometimes means, to be exposed to temptation; and sometimes it means, to be overcome by temptation. See Whitby and Grotius on Galat. vi. 1.

not lead us into temptation, we beseech him that he would not suffer us, for the punishment of our sins, to be deprived of his aid, and to fall into circumstances which will prove destructive to us.

We pray that God would not lead us into temptation: we pray also that he would deliver us from evil, that is, from the evil of sin, which is the consequence of yielding to temptation. Or, deliver us from evil, may mean, deliver us from the evil One, from Satan. As the holy Spirit of God is ever willing to succour those who desire to be led by him, and to do the will of God; and as the Angels are sent to minister to the righteous, and delight in the employment; so the Scripture represents the evil One as no less industrious to tempt, and to entice men to sin. However, all that Satan can do is only to tempt: he hath no power over our persons, or our wills, nor can his allurements hurt, unless we by our own choice yield to them; so that the treachery of our own corrupt hearts is more dangerous than he, or any enemy from without.

The Lord's Prayer is closed with an acknowledgment to God, that his is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and ever:

This doxology, or praise given to God, is not to be found in St. Luke's Gospel; and it seems not to have been originally in the Lord's Prayer, as given us by St. Matthew. It is left out in our Common Prayer-book, in some places of the Morning and Evening Services. It was used in the primitive Church, and in ancient times, in their Liturgy, when the Lord's Prayer was repeated, and at the conclusion of it, and thence it came to be annexed to it afterwards. However, as it is entirely agreeable to the holy Scriptures, both in words and in sense, we need not scruple to make use of it. It may be thus applied to the foregoing words:

We

We pray, O God, that thy kingdom may come, that thy name may be hallowed, and that thy will be done on earth; for thine is the kingdom, to thee belongeth dominion; and it is the indispensable duty of all men to honour thee, and their happiness consists in obeying thy holy laws. We pray to thee for daily bread, for the necessaries of life, for temporal blessings to be derived from thee the fountain of good, for the remission of sins through thy mercy, and for preservation from them for the time to come, through thy mighty protection; for thine is the power thus to supply our wants, and to keep us from all evil, and to pardon offences. For all these things we pray to thee; for if we do thus our duty to thee by hallowing thy name, and owning thy kingdom, and acting according to thy will, and if thou vouchsafe to pardon and protect us, thine will be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

S E R M O N XXI.

P H I L I P P. iv. 11.

I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

IF content ariseth from pleasure, and discontent from pain ; and if the mind be exposed to receive impressions of pleasure and pain from the things which surround it ; it seems to follow, that content cannot be taught or learned, and that it depends not so much upon us, as upon the circumstances in which we are placed. But if there be pleasures which the mind can secure to itself, and if God hath made us capable of acquiring blessings which outward objects can neither give nor take away, the art of being contented may be learned, and this happy temper may be acquired.

There are many reasons for which we ought to be contented, and there are certain means, by the use of which we may learn to acquiesce in our condition, which I shall lay before you, after a few observations upon the nature of contentment.

1. There is no occasion to say much in its praise, and to persuade men that it deserves to be sought, and that they will find their account in it. Every one is desirous of it, and agrees in setting a just value upon it.

2. Some there are, who possess all the necessaries of life, and want no external helps to happiness, and yet are

are not satisfied, because their desires are extravagant and boundless. It would be a vain attempt to endeavour to teach such persons contentment, who have so many things to learn, and so many to unlearn, before they can hear reason upon this head.

3. It is not necessary that he who is contented in his state, should prefer that state to any other, or should never use any endeavours to mend his condition. A person may be contented, who has not some of the conveniences of life, and who is seeking to acquire them : but then he will not be uneasy without them, or afflicted and dejected if he should meet with disappointments in his pursuits. If he can obtain them, they will be welcome to him ; if he cannot, he will not be much disturbed about it.

4. Contentment, even in a prosperous situation, is a commendable quality, since it depends much upon goodness of heart, and a right temper of mind, and without them is not attainable in any condition : yet it must be confessed, that when there is an affluence of all accommodations, it is no extraordinary accomplishment to be satisfied ; so that this virtue is better tried, and appears to more advantage, when we are deprived of the things which are generally valued, and might be innocently enjoyed. This is the contentment on which we propose to discourse. St. Paul says in the text, that he had learned to be contented in all states. And what state was his ? The history of the Acts of the Apostles, and his own Epistles, will inform us, that it was a state, which to the greater part of men would be very unacceptable and very irksome.

5. Contentment, as it is a virtue, may be said to belong chiefly to a condition which is not the easiest, nor yet the hardest and most wretched. In sore calamities and extreme misery, there is another virtue very nearly related to contentment, which seems to take place ; namely, a patient resignation to the will of God, which hath

hath in it every thing that is to be found in contentment, except cheerfulness.

6. Lastly, if every thing happens to us at present according to our desires, if God hath liberally poured down upon us temporal blessings, if we have friends, and health, and honour, and riches, and youth, yet we should study to acquire that most useful and excellent art of being contented in every state, and of preserving an even temper of mind under any change of circumstances: for we know not how soon we may have occasion to practise this virtue, and we may be almost certain that such occasions will arise in the course of life, and in a state where nothing is of a fixed and permanent nature. Friends may die, and friendships may be dissolved; health may be soon and suddenly and irretrievably lost; promises may be broken, and kindnesses repaid with ingratitude; riches may make themselves wings, and take their flight; the favour of the world is uncertain, reputation is not always secured by innocence and desert; our best days steal silently and insensibly away, and others less agreeable succeed them.

I proceed now to offer some reasons for which we should be contented in our state, though it be exposed to inconveniences.

I. If we are uneasy (*a*), impatient angry, vexed, envious, querulous, and dejected, because, we have not this

(*a*) Agamemnon is introduced by Homer, as tearing off his hair:

Πολλὰς ἐκ κεφαλῆς προθελύμνες ἔλκετο χαίτας.

Upon which Bias made a jest, which is admired by Cicero. This foolish Prince, says Bias, pulls up his hair by the roots, as if baldness were a cure for trouble. *Perinde stultissimum regem in luctu capillum sibi elevare, quasi calvitio mæror levaretur.*

Yet it must be owned, that these and the like extravagant actions give some ease to those persons whose passions are impetuous, and whose grief might kill them, if it had not such vent. It is a great weakness and meanness to be thus disordered; and philosophy, as well as religion condemns it. But the Greek Poet, upon whom the ridicule seems to fall, deserves no blame for having represented men, in this respect, such as they often are.

Homer, Il. K. 15. Σ. 27. X. 77. Cicero, Tusc. Disp. iii. 26.

this or that which we think suitable for us, we act most absurdly, we add to our misery, we afflict ourselves to no purpose, we are our own enemies. If all sin be folly, if every bad disposition be irrational, discontent is so in a more eminent manner.

A greater stress should not be laid upon this argument than it will bear ; and therefore we must acknowledge that, considered by itself, and not seconded by other motives, it will hardly prove strong enough to calm a dissatisfied mind. And yet it hath its use, which is this ; Since discontent is confessedly a very troublesome evil, which makes our condition worse than it would else be, the consideration of this should dispose us to use our utmost endeavours to overcome it, and patiently to listen to those arguments which may convince us of the wisdom and profitableness of the contrary temper.

II. Another motive to contentedness may be drawn from observations made upon the state of mankind, upon the evils and calamities with which this world at all times abounds. We cannot entertain a more foolish hope, than to expect to be distinguished by a constant course of happiness from that croud of sufferers which surrounds us. We complain of our own hard lot, we repine at this or that inconvenience ; whilst there are thousands, whose state is so far worse than ours, that they would think themselves happy if they might exchange their condition for that which we think so insupportable. We imagine, it may be, that we have many causes of discontent : we should look abroad a little, and see how it fares with the rest of mankind ; and when we have done this, if we return home again, and enter into ourselves, and consider our condition, we shall find that perhaps it is not so bad as it might have been, and that there is nothing uncommon in it.

This

This is an argument which Heathen (*b*) Authors have very frequently used, and which they seem to have accounted one of the best. But it may be thought liable to a few objections.

First, it may be said that evils are not the less felt by us because we know that others also suffer them; and that the consideration of the calamities abounding in all times and places, of which every one must expect a share, is rather a motive to us to be willing to leave the world, than to be contented in it.

The objection is not material. To say that our evils are not alleviated from the consideration that they are common to mankind, is to cavil, and to contradict matter of fact, and the testimony of multitudes. And to the observation that reflections upon the troubles of life will rather incline us to dislike the world than to be contented in it, to that it may be replied; A moderate contempt of the world and contentment are not far asunder: repining and discontent arise from a violent affection for things here below; and a coldness towards them enables us to bear the diminution, the absence, or the loss of them, the more calmly.

There

(*b*) It perpetually occurs in their consolatory writings. In poetical language it runs thus:

— Abeant questus,
Discede timor. Vitæ est avidus,
Quisquis non vult, mundo secum
Pereunte, mori,
Seneca, Thyest. 881.
Dulce mœrenti populus dolentum,
Dulce lamentis refonare gentes.
Lenius luctus lacrymæque mordent,
Turba quas fletu simili frequentat.—
Ferre quam fortè patiuntur omnes,
Nemo recusat, &c.

Troad. 1009.

Levat enim dolorem communis quasi legis et humanæ conditionis recordatio. *Cicero.*

There remains another and a stronger objection, namely, that it is a (*c*) spiteful and malicious comfort which is drawn from the sufferings of others, and a proof that we take pleasure in them, and would see none happier than ourselves.

The proper answer to it seems to be this: Evils of any sort are then most irksome to us, when they come unexpected, and surprise us unprepared to bear them. We then think our condition particularly hard, and ourselves singled out, as it were, by Providence, to suffer more than others; and we persuade ourselves that any one would be as uneasy as we are. But observations upon the course of things will teach us to arm ourselves against disappointments, and not expect a settled prosperity; they will inform us of greater afflictions than in all probability we have known, and of many persons who have shewed an evenness of temper, and a calmness of mind, under circumstances as undesirable as ours, and who have made them light by bearing them decently. Such reflections surely may be made, without any malignity, any satisfaction arising directly from the misfortunes or miseries of others. When we read or hear of great and good persons, adorned with useful and amiable accomplishments, overlooked and neglected by the world, exposed to poverty, losses, slights, censures, or other inconveniences, proceeding with patient serenity and mild composure, neither envying the fortunate, nor fawning upon the worthless, nor bemoaning themselves, nor repining, nor complaining; in contemplating these characters, we find instruction and relief,

and

(*c*) *Semper, ah semper dolor est MALIGNUS;*
Gaudet in multos sua fata mitti,
Seque non solum placuisse poenæ.

Seneca, Troad. 1013.

*Non, mehercule, tam male de moribus tuis sentio, ut putem posse te
 levius pati casum tuum, si tibi ingentem numerum lugentium produxero.
 Malevoli solatii genus est, turba miserorum. Quosdam tamen referam—
 ut scias suisse multos, qui lenierunt aspera, ferendo placide. Confol. ad
 Marciam, 12.*

and pleasure too, a pleasure accompanied with no malevolence, but with the sincerest esteem for such persons. There is indeed such greatness and dignity in suffering Virtue, that it can hardly excite our pity, which seems to give place to admiration and applause. Our Saviour, speaking of good men tried with adversity and maintaining their patience and integrity, represents them rather as objects of reverence than of compassion, annexes blessedness to their condition, and pronounces them happy upon the whole.

III. Another motive to allay our discontent may be suggested to us from considering the bad disposition of so many persons, who having those things of which we are deprived, yet are by no means contented. They want something which they have not, or they are afraid of losing that which they have. We think them no better than fools. But have we not reason to fear that, if we were in their situation, we should be just such fools as they? A person who is resigned and contented in an inconvenient state, may reasonably enough presume that a better state would not spoil him; but the same discontent, which makes his present condition so irksome to him, would probably follow and accompany him even in the midst of plenty and prosperity.

IV. Another cause for contentment may be drawn from such a consideration of divine Providence, as the light of reason will suggest. God is our common Father, the best and greatest of beings: he is not an unconcerned spectator of causes and effects; he is not ignorant of our condition; he is not envious and cruel; he takes no pleasure in our disappointments and sorrows; he places us in a state which he knows to be convenient for us, though we perhaps cannot at present discern it to be so. Let us therefore humbly, and, if we can, cheerfully commit ourselves to his care, and be contented to act the part allotted to us. To will what God wills, to like what he orders, is a duty which was dis-
cerned

cerned by several persons even in the Pagan world, and recommended by some of them in an excellent manner

V. Another reason for contentment is taken from a consideration of the advantages and of the good things which fall to our share. Every dissatisfied person is ungrateful. What he has not he knows too well, and calls to mind too often; and of what he has he seems to be quite ignorant. Several blessings which deserve daily returns of thanksgiving are lost upon him; blessings which relate to his mind, or body, or possessions, or friends, or family.

VI. It should also be considered that there are many advantages which often arise out of those very inconveniences which we dislike, and that there are many evils and bad consequences which frequently attend a more flourishing condition.

We may instance in poverty, that is in a middle state between indigence and wealth. A person in that state hath perhaps few friends, but they are usually sincere; he hath few enemies, and those usually inconsiderable. Envy and Calumny commonly spare him and overlook him, as one beneath their notice: his wants call him to labour, to industry, to temperance; and these are the best means of preserving the health of his body and of his mind. Thus might we survey and examine many of the hardships and misfortunes of which men complain, and point out something profitable which often accompanies them, and lessens their weight.

But wealth and power and prosperity, though harmless in themselves, are to many persons very pernicious; to a weak mind and a bad temper they prove fatal blessings and dangerous companions. They come like proud and magnificent guests, and bring with them a long train of troublesome attendants, of follies, and cares, and disorders; they teach men to forget their great concern, to contract an immoderate fondness for the amusements and allurements of the world; and by raising their passions and

and weakening their reason, they make them unable to bear even common and trifling disappointments.

VII. I have shewed that we ought to accept of the state in which Providence hath thought fit to place us; and the reasons hitherto used have been those which our own abilities enable us to discover. But there are yet stronger motives to contentment, which revelation more particularly suggests to us. Contentment is best learned in the school of Christ: there St. Paul learned it; I have learned, says he, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.

Another reason then for contentment may be drawn from considering God's love and care for us, as set forth in the Gospel. He is there represented as the Father of mercies, and the God of all consolation; we are there taught that he loved us before we loved him, and so loved the world, that he gave his only Son to mankind, and with and by him remission of sins and assurance of happiness; that he, who conferred upon us so inestimable a benefit, will certainly refuse us nothing expedient for us; that he who gave us his Son, will freely give us all things, that he is our Father, who loves us better than any parent ever loved any child; that we may cast our cares upon him, because he careth for us, and will never forsake those who serve him; that when evil of any kind befalls us, God permits and designs it for our profit, either to wean us from this world, or to try our love to him, and to exercise our virtue, or to correct us for some failings, or because too much prosperity might be dangerous and fatal to us; that all things shall work together for our good; and that we shall receive from him an hundred fold now, in this present time, that is, many solid advantages, which are beyond comparison more valuable

valuable than those upon which the world sets so great an esteem.

VIII. Another motive to contentment ariseth from reflections upon our own defects and unworthiness. If, upon a review of our lives, our conscience bears witness against us that we have been guilty of many transgressions, and this is the case of many a discontented person, all dissatisfaction under our present condition must be most unreasonable and ungrateful. How can we think it hard that God should not grant us all our desires, when we have not given him what he requires from us? Instead of yielding to sullen discontent, we should be very thankful that we have opportunities in our hand of reconciling ourselves to him by amendment. Why should a living man complain? Life, considered only in itself, is perhaps of no high value; but to one who hath misspent his past days, and been negligent in his duty, every hour of it is an inestimable treasure, because rightly employed it may conduce to his eternal welfare. Whosoever hath still his peace to make with God, and time still allowed him to do it, should esteem himself most happy, and think of the case of those sinners whose fun is set, from whose eyes the things belonging to their peace are now hid, and who are gone to receive the recompence of their evil deeds. (d) How gladly would they return, and take up with a life which he thinks destitute of all comfort!

IX. The last motive to contentment which I shall mention, arises from the consideration of the reward which is set before us.

It is a most certain and evident truth, that if any person firmly believed a future state of happiness, and could entertain an humble and modest hope that he should have some share in it, he would more easily rest satisfied with his condition for the few days of his pilgrimage here

(d) *Quam vellent æthere in alto
Nunc et pauperiem, et duros tolerare labores!*

here below. The expectation of undisturbed peace and rest from all trouble, the hope of living for ever with God and with good beings, and of making a continual progress in wisdom and knowledge, in virtue and in every amiable disposition, would compose the mind, and raise it above care and disquiet. Temporal inconveniences would then seem little and inconsiderable, and the common objects of mens hopes and fears, of their desires and uneasiness, would appear as a shadow, which in a moment is and is not. Whilst the inhabitants of this world are busied in various employments with eager diligence and assiduity, as if they had no views reaching beyond this life, or as if they were to dwell here for ever, whilst some of them heap up riches, others seek applause and respect, others labour to advance themselves, others are wholly taken up with pleasure and amusements, others grieve because they are disappointed, and their labours are unrewarded, and the world frowns upon them ; the swift and silent flight of days carries them all to the hour when these things cease, or when they have no further use. The children of God, like the children of this world, have their appointed time to employ ; like them they pass their days in a place where there is no settled habitation, no certain possession ; like them they meet with vicissitudes of ease and pain, of prosperity and adversity ; like them they are carried away by the revolutions of days and years to their last end : but to Christians this last end is the dawning to an everlasting day, the entrance into peace and happiness, and the beginning of a life which alone (*c*) deserves the name of life.

These are motives which reason and revelation offer, to make us contented in our several states. If they have no good effect, the fault is rather in us than in them ; and

(*c*) ——το ζην μει κατθανειν,
To κατθανειν δε ζην.
Euripides.

and indeed it is easier to convince the understanding, than to reform the heart and compose the passions: The true method therefore to acquire contentment is to be good, or, if we have offended, to repent and amend: else we may seek it late and early, but we shall not find it. It doth not use to make its abode in wicked minds. It is probable that such persons will not possess it even when they are in a state of prosperity, because guilt is commonly an uneasy thing; but it is most certain that they will not enjoy it, when evil of any sort overtakes them; for that is the time when their conscience will give them the most disturbance.

As a careful observance of our duty in general is the best method of acquiring contentment, so there are particular acts of religion which have a more immediate connection with it: such is supplication to God, that he would raise our minds above the world, and scatter those clouds of sadness that overshadow them, and lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and strengthen us against all events, to which humble and earnest addresses favourable promises of support are made in the Scriptures; such is humility, and a sense of our defects; and such is gratitude for benefits received.

To these we should by all means add industry in our affairs and callings. If you observe the dissatisfied part of mankind, you shall find no small number of them to be indolent and unoccupied. Idleness breeds in them discontent; and discontent increases their aversion from business; and then every thing displeases them. But industry is innocent, pleasant, and profitable; drives out despondence and melancholy, by diverting the thoughts, and fixing them on other objects, and by ever presenting to the mind something new, and something useful.

To industry should also be joined a sober and sparing use of those things which are not absolutely requisite to our being, or to our well-being; a decent moderation in food

food, in raiment, in furniture; in equipage, in diversions and amusements. For here again, if you consider the discontented tribe, you shall find that one great cause of their uneasiness arises from their coveting, not the necessaries, nor yet the conveniences, but the superfluities of life; it arises from those artificial and imaginary wants, which are not of God's producing, which the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, have contrived together to create, which human nature knows not, and which Reason and Scripture allow not. All such extravagant cravings bring forth as many moral evils and pernicious effects. Of this wicked and wide-spread disease the remedy is always at hand, and that remedy is Temperance.

And here the present season, and the exhortations of the Church admonish me to recommend to you temperance, and abstinence, abstinence exercised with discretion; and not to dismiss you without some hints upon this subject.

There is, as we may not improperly call it, a perpetual fast, to which we are obliged, as rational creatures, and as Christians; namely, a fast from all intemperate affections, turbulent passions, and irregular practices. But there is also an abstinence at particular times from the lawful pleasures of life; and the fitness of such a conduct may easily be proved upon the principles of human reason and common sense. I explain myself by a few instances: your own thoughts may suggest more.

A person in health and in good circumstances hath food of various kinds at command. But such is the instability of human affairs, that he may be reduced to a morsel of bread. It is expedient therefore for him, at certain times, to take up with such spare and plain diet, as sufficeth to remove pain, and to satisfy the cravings of the body. He will be better able to shift for himself

upon

upon any turn of fortune. I need not add that such abstinence will conduce to preserve his health: No one, I presume, will deny it.

Such a person, it may be, hath various diversions and entertainments at command, and may repair to them as often as he thinks fit. But many accidents may deprive him at a stroke of all these beloved amusements, which are the epidemical disease and infatuation of the present age. Let him learn then how to live without them; by shunning them more frequently whilst they are in his reach.

Such a person may usually have a variety of company abroad and at home. But various events may reduce him to solitude. Let him then learn before-hand to bear solitude at certain times, to converse with useful books; with his God, and with his own soul, and think himself in good company.

Whosoever practises such abstinence upon the principles above-mentioned, may be said to keep a moral and philosophical fast; but if what he thus saves in his expences, he gives to the needy and deserving, then, and not till then, he converts his rational into a truly religious and Christian fast.

S E R M O N XXII.

M A T T H. v. 44.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies.

CONCERNING the precept of forgiving and loving our enemies, we may observe that there have been persons in all times who have entertained wrong notions of it. Some by their rigid interpretations have made it require more than was intended by our Saviour, more than is practicable in the nature of things; others have accommodated it to the weakness and wickedness of men in such a manner as to explain the greater part of it quite away. We may also observe, it is indeed an observation which will force itself upon us, that few of our Lord's precepts have been less obeyed than this, and that most men find it a duty not at all suitable to their inclinations; for which reluctance they have none to blame besides themselves, and the bad habits they have contracted.

Since then this duty hath been frequently misrepresented, and seldom accurately obeyed, if we would treat of it fully and distinctly;

First, we ought to rescue it from the attempts of those who add to it, and of those who detract from it.

Secondly, we should recommend the practice of it, by viewing that nothing is more reasonable, and that the motives

tives and obligations to such a behaviour are plain and strong and numerous.

I shall at present confine myself to the first thing proposed, reserving the latter for another opportunity, and endeavour to shew;

I. What the precept of loving our enemies may be justly supposed not to require.

II. In what manner this duty ought to be performed.

I. Though we have received a general command to pray for our enemies, to bless them, to love them, and to assist and relieve them, yet it follows not thence,

First, that Christian nations may not wage war with their enemies, from whom they have received considerable injuries:

Secondly, that men may not in the defence of their own lives take away the lives of those who unjustly assault them:

Thirdly, that magistrates ought not to punish malefactors suitably to their offences:

Fourthly, that Christians may not secure or recover their right and property, by the methods of justice and equity which the Government appoints.

The lawfulness of these things hath been denied by some, in confuting whom it is not needful to spend many words. It sufficeth to observe, that the law of nature permits men to act thus, that the Gospel forbids it not, that the well-being and the very being of society absolutely requires it; that if we must love our enemies, we must love ourselves and families at least as much, and our country far more; that therefore we ought to prefer the interest of justice, righteousness and equity, to the views and attempts of unreasonable and wicked men; lastly, that true love to friends or to foes cannot be shewed in suffering them to break with impunity the laws of God and men, but rather in using severer methods with

T 2 them

them when the public good demands it, and gentler courses are ineffectual. Lenity in such cases would be great unkindness even to the offending persons, who would be permitted by a cruel indulgence to add sin to sin, and to increase their guilt and their future punishment.

Our Saviour says, Swear not at all—Resist not evil—If a man smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other ; if he take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also—give to him that asketh—lend to him that would borrow—when thou makest a feast, call the poor—judge not—condemn not—labour not for the meat that perisheth—. These and other precepts of the like kind, delivered in a concise and sententious way, are not to be interpreted literally and with extreme rigour. The Gospel supposes us to be rational creatures, and to have some knowledge of natural religion. It contains many precepts and counsels, commands and prohibitions, expressed in general unrestrained terms, which must admit various exceptions and limitations, according to different circumstances. The nature of things, and common sense, must direct us in the application of general laws to particular occasions. Cases of difficulty may arise, when a person may be in doubt how he ought to act ; and if he thinks that he is not able to determine for himself, he may consult books of established reputation, or ask advice of those of whose wisdom and probity he has a good opinion. But such intricate cases are not frequent ; and an upright mind, joined to moderate abilities, will seldom fail of passing a right judgment in matters of morality. Men sometimes transgres the laws of Christianity through ignorance and mistake ; but much oftener, and commonly, because they will not act suitably to their knowledge, because they take pains to deceive themselves, and to stifle the reproofs of their conscience. So again, men sometimes interpret precepts of the

the Gospel too severely, and prefer the letter and the sound of the words to the true sense and intent of them, through fanaticism and superstition, and sometimes through mere weakness and stupidity ; but, in all probability, often through hypocrisy, or conceitedness, or a stubborn spirit of contradiction, and a false shame of owning their error, or of disobliging a fact to which they have joined themselves.

II. I proceed to shew, secondly, what the precept of loving our enemies requires from us.

By our enemies, whom we are commanded to love, are to be understood those who without any considerable provocation are our enemies ; for to shew love to enemies is certainly the highest degree of social virtue, and supposes that we endeavour to observe all other duties towards mankind, and consequently that we have not injured those who hate us. It is a vain thing to exhort those persons to love their enemies, who by pride and moroseness, by lying and flandering, by ingratitude, by over-reaching, by any scandalous and provoking behaviour, make to themselves adversaries : they are not prepared to receive, or even to understand, this precept ; there are many previous duties which they must learn to perform. The Gospel requires of us, first that we should do to others as we expect that they should do to us, and exercise all acts of humility, equity, and charity towards all men ; and then, as the completion of all, that we should love even those perverse and unreasonable persons whose good will we cannot obtain by the most obliging and inoffensive behaviour, whose hatred and malice is altogether inexcusable.

The love which we are commanded to have for God, and for our neighbour, is not a blind passion, but an affection first raised and then guided by reason, and distinguished in its degrees according to its object. We must love God, and our relations, and our friends and benefactors,

benefactors, and our fellow-citizens, and strangers, and our enemies. Our love towards these several objects will of course be different, and ought in reason so to be; and the lowest degree of it is usually as much as is due to our enemies.

But because in this case men may easily impose upon themselves, and under pretence of reserving for their adversaries the lowest degree of their love, may afford them no small degree of hatred, they should carefully and particularly consider in what sentiments and in what behaviour love towards enemies is manifested:

We must love our enemies ; that is, we must have a favourable disposition of mind towards them, which will always incline us to be just and charitable in our dealings with them. This temper is to operate in the following manner.

Our anger must be short in its continuance, and harmless in its effects. Be ye angry and sin not ; let not the sun go down upon your wrath. Ill usage which we have not deserved is very provoking, and indignation will naturally and unavoidably arise upon such occasions. But when our anger is thus excited, we must immediately call our reason to our assistance, whose office is to bring us back by degrees to our usual evenness of temper. We must not indulge a secret displeasure by meditating continually upon the injuries which we have suffered, lest it should take full possession of us, and be turned into a confirmed hatred and malice. We must not act according to the first suggestions and impulses of passion, which will vent itself, if we be not cautious, in contumelious language. We must abstain from this, what provocation soever we have received ; Bless those who curse and revile and persecute you ; bless and curse not : render not railing for railing, but contrarywise blessing. Thus civility and decency in our discourse is required from us even to our rudest persecutors.

We

We must not revenge ourselves of our enemies. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath ; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. We, who are offended, are of all persons the most improper judges of the punishment due to the offender. There are few who set not a value upon themselves, and upon every thing that belongs to them, which an impartial examiner would think excessive. We should therefore reject, as a dangerous temptation, any opportunity of punishing our enemies, or redressing ourselves, by our own power and authority, and leave it to God, who is the God of Vengeance, or to the Magistrate, who is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doth evil. And it were to be wished that Christians would leave their cause oftener in the hand of God, and seldom in the hand of the Magistrate, and not seek the revenge which they frequently pursue upon slight provocations. Though they are allowed to defend and right themselves by those methods which the laws of their country have allowed, they are obliged as Christians to use this power discreetly and moderately, not to give way to fury and malice, nor break the sacred law of lenity and mercy, the great and the peculiar commandment of their Lord. For, as our Saviour says upon another occasion, What is a man profited, if he get the better of his adversary, and lose his good temper, his inclinations to charity and compassion, the peace of his mind, and the favour of his God ? His gain is his loss, and his victory hath undone him. Every one, who pretends even to the name of a Christian, ought to be contented if he can obtain his own ; and if that be impossible, as often it is, he should never desire to vex and oppress those who have wronged him, when he can propose no advantage by it, except the inhuman pleasure of making them miserable.

We must forgive our enemies. Our Lord hath commanded us to declare to God that we forgive those who trespass

trespass against us. To forgive them implies somewhat more than to abstain from revenge; it is, to wish them no evil, but whatsoever may conduce to their true happiness; and to behave ourselves towards them on all occasions, where Christian charity and common humanity are required, as though they never had offended us.

We must pray for our enemies. Pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you. To shew the sincerity of our charity, we are obliged to express it where all dissimulation must be of dreadful consequence, in our prayers to God for their amendment and welfare.

We must do good offices to our enemies, when it lies in our power, and is consistent with our duty to society. Do good to them that hate you, that ye may be the children of your Father in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.

Such is the nature and the extent of this duty, according to the rules of the Gospel.

I shall now conclude with an examination of two or three objections which may be made to the foregoing doctrine.

I. It may be said; We are masters of our actions, but not of our affections. It is in our power to behave ourselves kindly and charitably to our enemies, but it is often impossible to love them. An object of love must have something that we like, that we approve, that we would imitate and possess. If we have an enemy, an implacable enemy, an enemy in whom upon the most careful survey we cannot find one good quality, we shall never be able to incline our hearts to love him.

To this it may be replied; If we think our enemy void of all good qualities, it is much to be feared that we are misled by passion and prejudice, and form a wrong

wrong judgment of him. Our enemy in all probability is not singularly bad ; he hath his faults, and he hath some commendable dispositions.

But suppose that he is very wicked. There is even in the worst person a power of amending, a capacity of changing for the better. This should be sufficient to secure him from our hatred, and to make him the object of our charity, of our prayers, and good wishes.

Besides ; the love which is required from us to our enemies is not a fond affection for them, it is not a respect and esteem for them, unless upon other accounts they should deserve it ; but it is a compassionate and charitable disposition towards them. Such a disposition we may entertain towards all offenders, nor doth it exclude a rational self-regard, or an abhorrence of iniquity, or a prudent zeal for virtue and for religion.

2. It may be objected, that to relieve the wants of our enemy can hardly ever be our duty. It is indeed our duty to assist the needy as far as we are able ; but the poor we have always with us, and so numerous are they, that we cannot do good offices to many of them ; though we may have a willing mind, yet our circumstances may be such, that our assistance must be extended only to a few. Prudence therefore should direct us in chusing the objects of our charity ; and if we can find several who in our judgment deserve relief better than our enemy, we may prefer them to him.

Let us consider this objection a little.

Our enemy is unworthy to be the object of our liberality, because he is our enemy. This is a partial way of judging ; as if a man's personal enmity to us were a complication of all vices. Though he hath failed in his duty to us, he may have some good qualities, his family may have more ; and we may refuse him assistance, whilst we afford it to others who deserve it less than he, if we form a judgment of him from his behaviour towards us.

Our

Our enemy stands in need of our good offices. Then surely he is so unhappy that he may justly claim compassion ; he is reduced to the hard necessity of receiving kindness from an injured person. We have then an opportunity of chastising him in a decent manner, by affording him an assistance which must raise in him some remorse and confusion.

Our enemy stands in need of our help. Then may we possibly make him a friend, at least no longer an enemy ; for there are few who can brutally persist in returning evil for good.

The Gospel gives us a general direction, as we have opportunity, to do good to all, even to our enemies. How we should act in particular cases, must be left to our own discretion.

If therefore it happens that our enemy is reduced to great want, and that we can be serviceable to him, we must take in all circumstances, and consider whether it becomes us to assist him, and how far. In this enquiry we must always remember that our inclinations and prejudices are against him, and that therefore the safest and the justest way of acting will be to shew him rather more favour than we think him to deserve.

Of all the particular duties included in the love of our enemy, this seems the easiest to be performed (*a*). When a man is in distress, they whom he hath offended, if they have any humanity, will find their anger and their resentment to die away. His misfortunes, his incapacity of doing them any harm, the meanness of insulting the miserable, the thought that men are all liable to the same common calamities, and that what (*b*) happens to one may happen to every one, the pleasure of forcing an adversary to own that he was in fault, and to esteem and

(*a*) *Quos injuriæ invitos faciunt, gratiosos miserias reddunt,* VAL,
MAXIMUS, V. iii. 3.

(*b*) *Cuivis potest accidere, quod cuiquam potest,*

and honour us; these and many other things plead so strongly in his behalf, that to use him well can scarcely be called an act of self-denial, and a victory over the passions.

3. It hath been maintained by some persons that it is lawful in some cases to pray to God against our enemies. The sum of what they have said amounts to this; that the duty of doing good to our enemies relates to our personal enemies with whom we are joined in society; but that when it is not a private disagreement, but a quarrel of a public nature between different nations upon a civil or religious account, or when our foes are disturbers of the common peace, foes to God, to virtue, to religion, not capable of being reclaimed by gentle methods, or in all appearance incorrigible; that in those cases we may pray to God to protect us, and to punish or destroy them; and this upon two accounts, first because it is lawful to defend ourselves against them, and secondly because several passages of Scripture countenance and warrant such prayers.

Now since we are most prone to err on the uncharitable side, and since it agrees better with the spirit of Christianity to pray for our enemies than to pray against them, to bless than to curse, I shall endeavour to shew that the forementioned doctrine is not to be admitted, at least not without many restrictions and limitations.

First then, the lawfulness of praying against our enemies is plainly founded upon this supposition, that success, victory, peace and temporal prosperity, are always desirable; and that calamities, persecutions, oppression, and ill-usage, are always hurtful. But the Gospel informs us, that the only things which are absolutely and invariably profitable for us are those which conduce to our eternal welfare; that the only things unchangeably pernicious are those which lead us to future destruction; that

that present prosperity or adversity, though the one be natural good, and the other natural evil, considered in itself and with relation to its immediate effects, yet upon the whole are good or evil to us, according to the use which we make of them ; that temporal prosperity, if it makes us fond of unlawful pleasures, careless of our salvation, despisers of virtue, and forgetful of God, is the greatest curse which could fall upon us ; that adversity, if it raises in us a religious sorrow for our sins, an indifference for the vanities of this world, and an earnest desire of life eternal, is no inconsiderable blessing ; that we, who are imperfect and ignorant creatures, cannot judge whether of the two states will suit us best ; that God certainly knows how we shall behave ourselves in either, and that he will place us in the condition which is most expedient for us, if we sincerely desire that not our will but his be done. This is the morality of the New Testament, and it is agreeable to the dictates of unprejudiced reason. Hence it follows that we ought not to ask, or to expect of God any thing relating to the present life, without this restriction, mentioned or understood, if it be expedient for us. Concerning our enemies, public or private, we should pray that they may repent and return to a better mind, and that God would protect and defend us against them in such a way and as far as to his infinite wisdom shall seem most expedient. To desire God to punish and destroy them, is to constitute ourselves judges of the station and circumstances in which we and they ought to be placed, that is, to assume a sagacity and a wisdom which belong not to human nature.

Nor is it a just conclusion, that we may pray against our enemies, because we may fight against them. We have a natural right to defend ourselves against those who unjustly assault us, and the Christian system hath not taken away this right, though in some cases it may limit and restrain it ; but we have received a command

mand to pray for our enemies, without any exceptions.

We find indeed in the Scriptures instances of imprecations and curses uttered against enemies; but a few observations will shew that we cannot thence prove the lawfulness of praying against any man.

First, The holy men recorded in Scripture were men (*c*). Before we presume to imitate them, we should examine their behaviour by the rules contained in the New Testament. If it be not conformable to those rules, it will afford us neither direction nor excuse. The Scriptures set before us one, and only one example, which is in all things to be imitated, as far as human infirmity permits, the example of Christ, who always returned good for evil, and who prayed for his enemies.

Secondly, We ought to regard the precepts of the Gospel more than the practice of those who lived before Christ.

Thirdly, They who are acquainted with the languages in which the Scriptures are written, know that many expressions, which seem to be curses and wishes of evil, may be no more than declarations of future events, and predictions rather than imprecations.

Lastly, If prophets sometimes received orders to pronounce (*d*) curses against the enemies of God and of God's

(*c*) Grotius says:

Virorum laudatorum facta non laudanda quoties adferuntur in sacris litteris, solet aliquid addi, unde intelligamus id non probari. *Ad Reg. III. xii. 19.*

This is true often, but not always. Whosoever shall try to defend all the actions of good men recorded in the Old Testament, which are neither commended nor censured there, will find that he hath undertaken too hard a task.

(*d*) The bitterest imprecations in the Scriptures are contained in the hundred and ninth Psalm, and they have been commonly supposed to be the words of David, but it seems more probable that they are not the curses which David pronounced against his enemies, but the curses which his enemies pronounced against him, and which he repeats in their own words; and then says, in the twenty-seventh verse, *Though they curse, yet bless thou, &c.* Be that as it will, they are no patterns for Christians to imitate.

God's people, it follows not that they, who have no such extraordinary commission to plead, may do the same.

If therefore we are injured, we should pray to God that he would enable us to follow the example of our Saviour, and to bear with patience and true fortitude the insults which we receive from perverse and unreasonable men; that he would pardon those who not giving themselves leave to know and to consider what they do, are enemies to us and to themselves; and since forgiveness depends upon repentance, that he would grant them a true and timely sense of their transgressions; that he would deliver us from their oppressive malice, if it be a proper request; if not, that the evils which we now suffer may turn to our advantage in a future state.

Such will be the sentiments and the wishes of a mind which hath learned obedience to the Gospel, and the government of itself; and whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil.

S E R M O N XXIII.

R o m. xii. 20.

If thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink ; for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.

IN these words a duty is proposed, to do good to our enemies; If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: an inducement also is proposed to act thus, or else a declaration of the consequence of such behaviour; For in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

The duty of loving our enemies I have stated and explained in a former discourse. At present therefore I design to shew the reasonableness of this duty, and to set before you several motives to the observance of it, and in particular to consider that seeming motive which is contained in these words; for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.

i. Compassion is so opposite to hatred, and so nearly allied to love, that if we can pity our enemies, a brotherly affection towards them will easily be added. Let us see then whether their case when duly considered be adapted to move compassion. Every person who hates and injures others is as great a foe to himself as he is to them.

them. He suffers the just and heavy punishment which an envious, malicious and implacable mind inflicts upon itself. Anger, hatred, and desires of revenge, prey upon the heart which harbours them, and whether they be satisfied, or disappointed in their aim, will allow it no rest. These are the hard masters to whom our enemies are probably in subjection, and to these are perhaps added fear and remorse, which have their intervals of reigning. We may therefore justly suppose, that if the hearts of our enemies lay open to our view, we should behold a melancholy and disagreeable scene, a wild mixture of confusion and disquiet, of impatience, and anxiety, and sorrow, and shame. Such a sight would command our compassion, and though we were full of resentment against them, we should be forced to acknowledge that if they were wicked, they were also miserable.

But let us suppose that our enemies are of so bad a disposition, and so hardened in the ways of vice, that they can contrive and execute mischief without any reproach of conscience, without the loss of inward peace and self-approbation, that they are also successful in all their perverse undertakings; we must not forget to observe that by injuring us they offend God, and consequently are extremely unhappy. God, who so strictly forbids iniquity, will never pardon them these trespasses against us, unless they repent of them and correct their behaviour.

Thus if we consider our adversaries as the sport and the prey of turbulent passions, or as the objects of divine displeasure, as persons suffering in this world the evils which malice ordinarily produces, or in danger of undergoing in the next world the punishment which God denounces against such offenders; humanity, if we are not strangers to it, will overcome our resentment, and the religion which we profess will tell us that we should contribute what we can towards their reformation, upon which

which their Salvation depends; and the most probable method to effect it is to use them kindly, to shew them that we have their welfare at heart, and thus to convince them that we deserve their esteem.

2. If we have a tolerable command of our passions, we bear with patience the mischief which is done to us accidentally by persons who designed us no harm, or who have not sense to know what they do. We should set our enemies in the same light, and view them as ignorant and mistaken men. This indeed is the case, and a true representation of their condition. We are quite unknown to them: it is not us whom they hate, but a person that their own imagination hath conceived, and that is no where to be found. If they were acquainted with us, with our real character, they would be sorry for what they have done. It is true indeed that they should have taken more care in forming their judgments, and that since their mistakes might have been avoided by a right use of reason, their ignorance renders them not innocent and unblameable: but still it behoves us to make allowances for their error, and to forgive them, because they know not what they do. There is nothing more common than to judge wrong.

3. It is our duty to be as like to God as we can; it is also our perfection and our happiness. We are exhorted to love our enemies from this consideration, that we may be the children of our Father in heaven, who maketh the sun to rise and the rain to descend on the evil and on the good, who would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth, who is kind to the unthankful, who commendeth his love to us, in that whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

The Scripture sets before us for our imitation the example of our Saviour, who was exposed to the highest injuries and provocations, and returned only acts of kindness and mercy. And this he did for our sakes, for

our advantage; but the good which we do to others is as much our profit as theirs, and perhaps more.

4. The reasonableness of a charitable disposition towards our enemies appears from the consideration that the hatred and malice of mortal creatures is often confined to narrow bounds, and cannot execute the mischief which it intends.

The wrongs which we think grievous to be endured, and which we are unwilling to forgive, are frequently incon siderable. Our enemies have perhaps treated us with haughtiness and contempt, have affronted us with reviling language, have told untruths of us, and misrepresented us, have done things in some degree prejudicial to our interests. These are the insults which we so highly resent, and which we repay with settled aversion, instead of despising them as trifles beneath our notice.

But let us suppose the injuries to which we are exposed to be of a more grievous nature, and attended with many inconveniences; we have, if we are Christians indeed, a refuge to which we can fly, and greater is He who is for us than he who is against us. What our Saviour says upon another occasion, may be applied here: Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you, and your enemies shall not be able to take them from you, and to make you miserable. By serving God we may secure to ourselves a Friend whom they cannot seduce from us, a reputation which they cannot destroy, a treasure which they cannot steal, a reward which they cannot lessen, or rather, which, against their designs and inclinations, they will increase. They cannot hurt us much, and they cannot hurt us long. We shall not spend many days with them: we are going to a place where their ill offices cannot follow us, nor they themselves, unless they amend their ways; where we shall either never see them, or see them adorned with contrary dispositions. Envy, and calumny, and hatred,

and

and revenge enter not there, to disturb the peace of its inhabitants.

5. From the consideration of divine Providence, as directing all events, or presiding over them, we find another motive to forgive our enemies. To be filled with envy, rage, malice, and resentment against them, to be very angry and very uneasy when we cannot revenge ourselves, is in effect to be angry with God, who permits them to insult and oppress us. The prosperity of the wicked hath often been matter of offence to those who, comparatively speaking, were righteous persons, and who sometimes indiscreetly levelled their complaints against God himself, as if he neglected the government of the world. But the clear revelation of the Gospel, by its great rewards and gracious promises, by the express doctrine of life eternal, and of divine assistance and consolation in time of need, removes every difficulty of this kind. We should remember that not only all shall be set right at the last, but that a wise and good Providence permits these and other temporal inconveniences, perhaps for our improvement, perhaps for our correction, and that upon either account we ought to bear them decently.

6. This leads me to mention another motive of the same nature with the last, namely, that if we state the account fairly between ourselves and our enemies, we shall find that we receive or may receive more good than harm from their unkindness; and therefore we should be the more disposed to forgive them, and to consider them as persons highly necessary and useful to us. Whilst we dwell in this world, there are many present advantages arising to us, if we know how to use them, from the perverseness of our enemies. When we are certain that there are persons who watch our behaviour, to take advantage of our negligence and inadvertence, of any faults and follies committed by us, and to censure and expose and hurt us if we give

them an opportunity; this should make us, and this often will make us, diligent, industrious, obliging, careful to preserve our reputation, to contract profitable friendships, and to render the attempts of our opposers vain and ineffectual.

It would be a pleasant thing, as the Psalmist says, if men would dwell together, like brethren, in unity; and yet this happy state might have its inconveniences, and could not be durable; and a man who had no envious eye to watch him and overlook him, who would expect forbearance from all around him, might be tempted to grow remiss and slothful in his duty, and to depend too much upon the good-nature of others. The fear of ill usage, of loss and of disgrace, is often a prevailing incitement to well-doing, when more ingenuous motives would fail, or would have a weak effect; and happy hath it been for many persons that they have had enemies: it hath made them more learned, more judicious, and more virtuous, than they would else have been.

7. But the plainest, perhaps, and the strongest of all the motives to the love of our enemies is contained in the declaration which Christ hath often made, that if we be cruel, malicious and inexorable to those who have offended us, we shall in vain apply to God for mercy and pardon, and that if we forgive those who trespass against us, he will also forgive us our trespasses. They who are not to be moved by arguments of a more refined nature, must feel the force of this; concerning which I shall only observe that the promise must not be so understood as if the single duty of forgiving enemies duly observed would excuse all sorts of transgressions. Our Saviour supposes that we take care to preserve ourselves from vicious habits, and of other offences he declares that they shall be remitted upon this condition, joined to repentance and amendment. It is also reasonable to conclude from these terms of pardon, that he

who

who can forgive considerable injuries, will in all probability, by the good temper of his own mind, and by God's blessing and assistance, perform every thing else that is necessary to his salvation.

8. I have not yet mentioned all the present advantages which we shall find from the observance of this duty.

By keeping our hearts free from anger and malice, and designs of revenge, we shut out so many implacable enemies to our repose. A desire and intent of repaying injuries with injuries is attended with a painful remembrance of the wrongs which we have received, and with a restless impatience till we have shewed our resentment by acts of enmity; and it is usually followed either by uneasiness, when we are disappointed in our designed revenge, and our power is not equal to our will; or else by sorrow, shame, and remorse, when we have punished our enemies according to the dictates of our unreasonable passions. These are troubles with which we shall not be acquainted; troubles which are often more grievous to be borne than all the mischief which our adversaries can accomplish.

By preserving this even temper, we preserve that dignity and superiority, which distinguishes those who act by the rules of reason from those who break them. As much as virtue is above vice, and wisdom above folly; so much are we, if we patiently bear injuries, superior to those who hate and persecute us.

By overlooking and forgiving offences, we take the most probable method to secure ourselves from them for the future. Revenge produces revenge; but kindness and long suffering put a stop to the hatred of an enemy, unless he hath lost all sentiments of ingenuity, and is sunk below a beast. Though therefore by a Christian behaviour we may not be able to make a friend of a foe, a thing scarcely to be hoped, yet we may make him a cold and unactive foe. Pride itself, or shame, or fear

of censure, or some degree of remorse, may so far influence him, as to make his enmity indolent and remiss.

By treating our enemy with civility and humanity, we engage the favour of by-standers, of all impartial and unprejudiced persons, and may expect their approbation and assistance. Men can command what is right, and condemn what is wrong, where their own passions and interests are not engaged; they then perceive the difference between revenge and forbearance, anger and patience, railing and courtesy, detraction and candor.

Another advantage which there is a possibility of obtaining by such a behaviour, is that we may not only persuade our enemies to be quiet, and to do us no harm, but we may win their esteem and affection, and make them faithful and active friends to us.

The question hath been put, whether an enemy who acknowledgeth his fault, and seeks to be reconciled, may be sincere and constant in his professions; and consequently, whether he should be trusted, and received into favour and friendship? This question, I think, may be thus determined.

The Scripture enjoins charity or brotherly love towards all; private friendship it leaves to our own discretion; it admonishes us to have no fellowship with wicked persons, and so far only interposeth. Though we be therefore obliged to forgive even an enemy who continues obstinate, much more one who repents and seeks to be reconciled, yet we are not required to receive him into familiarity and intimate conversation. In this we may act as we judge most expedient; and whether we may safely trust such a person, or no, will best be judged by considering how he behaved himself whilst he was an enemy. If he acted in an open manner, and without disguise professed his dislike of us, he may, when he becomes sensible of his offence, repair it by good offices, and deserve our affection: but if his en-

emy

mity was mixed with ingratitude, dissimulation, and perfidiousness, if he secretly injured us, and openly pretended to be a well-wisher, he ought indeed to be forgiven, but he ought also to be avoided. No professions of repentance and amendment should move us to contract any intimacy with him, or to place any confidence and reliance upon him. It hath been said by those who have considered mankind in the worst light, that we can forgive those who injure us, but that we never forgive those whom we have injured. This saying, when applied to the person above-mentioned, seems to be true. He who hath been a fawning, deceitful, and slandering enemy, can be a friend to no man, much less to him whom he hath offended. He knows that he cannot forgive injuries; judging therefore of others by his own dispositions, he expects not to be forgiven. He knows that he never grants a favour, unless upon the prospect of some advantage; and if he be kindly used by the person whom he hath wronged, he suspects some trick and design; he believes not that such kindness proceeds from virtuous and religious principles, but from fear, or self-interest, from motives like those which harbour in his own breast. If such a person seeks to be intimate with us, and professes his readiness to serve us, his intention is to serve himself at our expence, and whosoever tries the experiment of trusting him, will probably pay dear for his experience.

I shall now conclude with some observations on that seeming motive to the forgiveness of injuries, which is contained in the words of the text.

Dearly beloved, says the Apostle, avenge not yourselves, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good.

Two interpretations are given to the words, Thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. One is this;

By repeated acts of charity thou shalt melt him down at length, even though he be most obstinate and hardened; as the hardest metals are melted by putting live coals on the top of them.

This exposition looks plausible, and conveys a sense and a spirit in it so conformable to the sentiments of humanity and benevolence, that if it be not the meaning, one could almost wish that it were the meaning of the place. If therefore we cannot admit it as true, yet neither will we utterly condemn it, but leave it as a comment, which may be safely adopted, though it should be erroneous.

The other interpretation is thus: Feed thy enemy, and give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt bring down upon his head the just (a) vengeance of God.

This interpretation seems to be favoured by the words before it, in which Christians are exhorted to leave their cause to God, the God of vengeance, and by many places of scripture, where fire and coals of fire denote God's wrath and punishments inflicted by him. Solomon, from whom St. Paul took these words, says in the Book of Proverbs; If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink; for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee. So in the Psalms; Let burning coals fall upon them. So in Esdras; Let not the sinner say that he hath not sinned; for God shall heap coals of fire upon his head, who saith before the Lord God and his glory, he hath not sinned. God, considered as the punisher of sinners, is said to be a consuming fire; when he manifested himself, his glory appeared as a devouring fire; when he is represented

(a) Grotius and Whitby. See also Jerem, v. 14. and Revel. xi. 5. and Le Clerc, Bib. A, and M. t. i. p. 373.

represented in the Psalms as taking vengeance, fire is said to have proceeded from him, and smoke, and burning coals, and lightnings; fire is an emblem of his wrath and vindictive justice; by fire he often punished the ungodly, as the inhabitants of Sodóm, and the rebellious Jews; by fire the world is to be consumed, and the future punishment of evil angels and evil men is represented under the words, everlasting fire.

Besides; fire heaped upon the head, denotes vengeance descending from above, that is, divine vengeance.

Besides; as the natural effect of heaping fire upon a man's head is destruction; so in the figurative sense it should mean punishment.

Thus is this interpretation consistent with other passages in the Scripture, and with the context. There is indeed an objection to it, which is very obvious, and hath a very plausible appearance; namely, that thus St. Paul, whilst he seems to dissuade Christians from revenge, in reality incites them greatly to it, by setting before them a revenge which might satisfy the most malicious and inhuman enemy; for it is in effect as if he had said: When you are ill used, be careful to avoid that foolish and often ineffectual revenge of returning evil for evil; but do all acts of kindness to your enemies, by which means you will make them guilty of the most heinous crimes, and bring down the severest judgments of God upon their heads.

But there is no occasion to think that St. Paul meant any such thing, though we embrace the second interpretation, which may be justified thus:

The duty of a Christian to his enemy, as it is laid down in the New Testament, is to forgive him, and to use him charitably.

As this is the only apparent method of reclaiming an enemy, a Christian who acts thus, certainly uses his utmost

most endeavour to promote the temporal and the eternal welfare of his enemies.

But if wicked men oppress and persecute the good, and are not at all changed and softened by the mild and charitable behaviour of those whom they thus injure, what can we suppose that God the righteous governor and judge will do? We must conclude, that in due time he will reward the patient behaviour of his suffering servants, and will punish the oppressive insolence of the wicked. So says St. Paul to the persecuted Thessalonians; It is a righteous thing, an equitable reasonable thing, with God to recompence tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest with us. So again, in the Revelation of St. John, a dreadful description is made of the fall of Babylon, of a wicked city which should persecute the servants of Christ; after which, says the Apostle, I heard a great voice of much people, saying, Alleluia; salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God; for true and righteous are his judgments;—and he hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.

Since we must think that God will act thus, and since God hath declared that he will act thus, it is our duty to approve these proceedings, proceedings, founded upon reason, upon the laws of order, upon the perfections of God.

Besides; it is to be observed that the divine vengeance denoted by the words, coals of fire, means in the Old Testament rather temporal judgments than punishments to be inflicted in the world to come; and as St. Paul hath thence borrowed the expression, there seems to be no necessity to extend the sense of it to any other chastisements than to those which the divine Providence inflicts or suffers to fall upon sinners in the present world. Now though we ought not to pray or to wish that temporal evils may befall unmerciful and tyrannical persons, but rather leave it to God; yet when such evils overtake

overtake them, we may and we must think that the punishment is right, and that it is not only an act of divine justice, but of divine mercy and goodness also. If it puts it out of their power to injure others any longer, or if it deters others from following their example, it is a great and general benefit; and though it should cut them off in their iniquity, and take them out of the world, still it may be profitable even to them, either as it hinders them from adding to their sins, and consequently to their future misery, or as it is a part of their punishment, and gives room to hope that the more they suffer here, the less they may suffer hereafter.

Just and righteous are the ways and the judgments of God. The injurious and the injured are in his hands. He will reward suffering innocence, and he will correct insolent oppression without passion and prejudice, according to the dictates of perfect wisdom and perfect equity.

S E R M O N XXIV.

R o m. xvi. 19.

I would have you wife to that which is good.

THERE is a wisdom, which is employed in pursuing power and wealth, and whatsoever power and wealth can procure, to gratify the inclinations of a mind set upon worldly objects.

This wisdom consists in a quickness to discover and a dexterity to apply the most probable means, whether they be lawful or unlawful, of acquiring and preserving these things. It consists in a knowledge of men, especially of their weak side, and in the art of managing their infirmities, passions, and vices, so as to make its advantage of them.

In the prosecution of its designs, it puts on all shapes, and employs all sorts of means, even the most dishonest and infamous ; and if these fail, or are not proper for its purpose, it hath recourse to actions which are commendable, and, transforming itself into virtue, it can upon occasion practise justice, humanity, liberality, perform many good offices, and become useful to society. It consists therefore in a mixture of bad qualities, and of considerable accomplishments ; and he who would hope to be eminent in this wisdom, must have, besides a good understanding, industry, resolution, patience, courage, civility, experience, knowledge of things and of men, joined to a supple conscience, and to a mind free

free from religious scruples, and antiquated notions of honour and virtue.

It will not, I presume, be expected that I should use many words to prove that this is not the wisdom which the holy Scriptures so highly recommend, which they represent as an invaluable possession, which they declare to be a gift and a blessing descending from above, and which they advise us to request of Almighty God; for neither can God be the Author of so bad a gift, nor are they who possess it accustomed to ask him for it, or for any thing else, or to have him at all in their thoughts. The Scripture indeed makes mention, but not very honourable mention, of this wisdom: it allows the professors of it to be wise men, wise after their own way, and in their generation, full of that wisdom of this world which is foolishness in the sight of God. The wisdom of this world it may justly be called upon two accounts, either because it steadily pursues the things of this world, and prefers them to all other views, or because it hath been so commonly esteemed by the world, and practised by those who have conducted the most important affairs of it.

There is, secondly, another sort of wisdom, which, like the first, hath in view the good things of this life; but pursues them only for lawful purposes, and by innocent and honest methods. It may be called, The Art of serving ourselves and our friends, without injuring others.

He who excels in this wisdom, understands the world, and the good and bad qualities of men, and his own strength and abilities, undertakes nothing for which he is unfit, makes himself master of the affairs in which he is concerned, observes those with whom he has dealings, knows how to manage their different tempers, and how far they may be trusted, gives no advantage to crafty and designing persons by indiscretion, lets others know no more of his own thoughts and purposes than is convenient, and is reserved without appearing to be

be so ; is judicious in forming his designs, wary and resolute in executing them, loses no opportunity of getting credit, reputation, and authority, and of promoting his interests ; and makes so discreet an use of his power and of his fortunes, as to increase the esteem which men entertain of him, and the confidence which they repose in him ; contracts useful friendships, takes all possible care not to offend and disoblige even the meanest person, and exposes himself to no danger or detriment which he can innocently and honourably avoid.

This sort of wisdom, when it acts in higher stations, and manages public affairs, is of great importance to civil society ; and happy is he who possesses and exercises it so as at the same time to hold fast his integrity and piety ; for many are the temptations to which his condition exposes him.

When this sort of wisdom hath for its object arts and sciences, and any of the various studies and occupations which require a liberal and learned education, and which every wise Government will honour and encourage, it is profitable, as it enables us to be serviceable to our families and friends, and to acquire the decent conveniences of life, together with respect and reputation, and as it excludes idleness and foolish diversions, and keeps the mind occupied in a rational way. It is therefore a skill which we may desire and should endeavour to obtain. Yet this is by no means the wisdom which the Gospel recommends to us ; for the following reasons.

First, Because temporal advantages are not represented there as things of great moment and high value, nor have we leave to ask them of God without many restrictions and limitations.

Secondly, Because a man may be a good Christian, and secure his everlasting interests, without any extraordinary

dinary abilities, any right and title to the name of a wise man, in the worldly sense of the word.

Thirdly, Because this sort of wisdom, though it be no enemy to piety, yet if not carefully kept within due bounds, is apt to encroach and usurp upon it. He who is very wise as to this world, is continually enlarging the circle of his affairs, and the number of his acquaintances and dependents, hath much business upon his hands of other persons, besides his own, is ever forming new designs and projects, and is so intent upon the accomplishment of them, that he finds little leisure and inclination for religious thoughts and the care of his soul. He in whose heart piety possesses the uppermost place, considers most of those things upon which vanity and ambition set a high value as not necessary to his happiness, or equal to his views and desires, thinks the time lost which is spent in the company of persons whose way of thinking, talking, and acting he cannot approve, and esteems every occupation which contributes not to make him better and wiser and more useful, to be rather fit for the amusement of his hours of leisure, than for the serious employment of his life. There have been in all times some persons of great capacity and high station, and of a virtuous and pious temper, who have found the love of truth and the pleasure of contemplating on things serious, spiritual and sacred, to grow upon them, and being fully sensible of the vanity and emptiness of other objects and designs, have, as they drew nearer to their end, retired from the busy world as much as they could discreetly, and have thought that they then might be said to live, when they lived to God, to religion, and to good works.

Yet ought not the wisdom, of which we are now speaking, to be condemned as unworthy of a Christian. We were born for this world, though not for this world only or chiefly; and they who would act a reputable part,

part, and maintain a fair character in it, will find prudence and dexterity necessary accomplishments. As secular wisdom easily and almost insensibly sides down into craft and worldly-mindedness; so there is sometimes an injudicious and fanatical kind of pious fervour, which makes persons simple and children, in the worse sense of the word, which is so taken up with devotion and meditation and religious exercises, that it hath hardly leisure to get either daily bread or common sense.

Our Saviour says to his disciples; Beware of men; and, Be wise as serpents; and St. Paul exhorts Christians, To walk in wisdom towards the Gentiles. By which counsels may be meant that they should stand upon their guard, and use all honest methods, all arts consistent with the honour of God and the duties of religion, to secure their lives, liberties, fortunes, and reputation, to expose and disappoint wicked designs formed against them, to win over an adversary by affability and compliance, and to gain the esteem and affection of those with whom they should dwell. In the answers of our Saviour to his captious enemies, and in the behaviour of St. Paul recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, we have instances of innocent prudence defeating subtle malice. In the Book of Proverbs and in Ecclesiasticus are also contained many precepts relating not only to religious wisdom, but that wisdom which is more immediately and directly exercised about the concerns of this world.

There is, thirdly, another kind of wisdom, which used to be called Philosophy; and which may be said to be such a knowledge of nature in general, in particular of God and of man in every station and circumstance, as reason is capable of discovering.

In search after this wisdom many illustrious men in the heathen world spent their days, and some of them, considering the difficulties under which they lay, must be

must be acknowledged to have made a very commendable progres in it.

It is not to be expected that the (*a*) Scriptures should speak in favour of this sort of wisdom, since they were revealed on purpose to supply the defects of it. And how fully they have answered that end, is apparent to all competent and impartial judges.

For the Philosophers were of so many sects, differed so widely, and wrote such a number of treatises, that a person who could have gathered out of their doctrines what was probable, and reasonable, and good, and have rejected the rest, must have had a learned education, abundant leisure, and so great a (*b*) capacity as not to want their assistance and direction.

Again, Whosoever took a Philosopher for his guide, in matters of opinion and duty, unless he were wise and happy in his choice, was in danger of being made worse instead of better; for there was nothing so wicked which some of these teachers did not practise and approve, nothing so absurd which some of them did not affirm, and nothing so plain and certain, which some of them did not call in question, or deny.

Add to this, that the Philosophers usually wrote for the studious and contemplative, and discoursed in a way which the vulgar could not comprehend.

The Gospel teacheth morality infinitely better than human reason ever explained and enforced it; correcting the many mistakes into which the wisest Pagans fell, and adding discoveries which they were not able to make.

There is therefore, lastly, a wisdom called Wisdom unto Salvation; and this is what the Scriptures usually recommend to us under the name of wisdom, and what St. Paul means in the text; I would have you wise to that which is good.

(*a*) Vid. Clem. Alex. Strom. vi. S. p. 771.

(*b*) Milton, Par. Reg. B, IV.

This wisdom may be said to consist, first, in a knowledge of the truth of our religion. I mean not that all persons are obliged to know every argument which can be offered in behalf of religion, and every answer to the objections which are made to it: but all Christians ought, if it be possible, to be so far acquainted with the principal and common proofs of it, that their faith may be built upon a rational foundation.

Religion divides itself into natural and revealed.

Natural religion supposeth a God, a providence, and a future state. There are many proofs of the being of God; but those which the Scriptures mention, and which are best adapted to all capacities, are the works of God, the greatness, distance, order, motion, regularity, and beauty of all the parts of the world, which could neither make themselves, nor conspire together to one certain end, but must have been formed and must be guided by a Mind most wise and good and powerful. To this may be added the general consent of mankind in all ages to acknowledge a Deity; an Atheist excepted, who sometimes ariseth in the moral world, as a monster is sometimes brought forth in the natural world.

From the being of God appears the certainty of a future state; for since God is, and since he is just, good, wise, and happy; and yet, here below, justice, goodness, and wisdom, have not a due proportion of happiness above folly and vice; this must be a state of trial, which shall end in a state of retribution.

Revealed religion, or Christianity, is also founded upon plain and strong evidence, of which a Christian, who would be wise in the religious sense, should not be ignorant. The proofs of Christianity are the concurrent testimony of Christians ever since the Gospel was first preached, the swift and successful progress of it, which was foretold long before by the Prophets, and which could not have been brought to pass without a divine assistance, a great variety of beneficial miracles performed

ed in behalf of it, the holy lives and patient sufferings of the first Christians, the predictions of Christ and his Apostles which have been accomplished, and the excellence of Christian morality, which is so useful and so amiable, that a man who could in a good measure live up to it, and set it always before him for his rule, would probably, as far as he was observed and known, command the respect and esteem even of a wicked world, much more of reasonable and well-disposed persons. Such a religion, in the main, must be safe and true: for what harm can there be in doing good? what error in loving virtue? and what danger in resembling God?

Revealed religion divides itself into doctrine and precept, into belief and practice, into faith and works. Therefore religious wisdom consists, secondly, in a knowledge of the things which a Christian ought to believe, and of the things which he ought to do.

That part of revelation which relates to doctrine or opinion is briefly summed up in the Creed called The Apostles Creed, a profession of which, according to our Church, entitles a person to be baptized, and consequently to be a Christian. Indeed it becomes a Christian not to rest here, but to believe in general that whatsoever Christ and his Apostles have taught is true, and according to his leisure and abilities to make it the subject of his enquiries.

As to the practical part of the Gospel, what we ought to do, and what to avoid, in the station and circumstances in which we are placed, this ought to employ the thoughts of a Christian during the whole course of his life. It is not a difficult study, it is consistent with lawful affairs and innocent amusements. But it should never be forgotten and long neglected. We should frequently ask ourselves what we can do for

the honour of God and the benefit of mankind, what temptations we ought more particularly to shun, as most dangerous, what disorderly affections we feel which should be subdued, and what good dispositions we have which may be strengthened and improved.

And because to know our duty is nothing, unless we practise it, religious wisdom consists, thirdly, in a lively sense of the possibility, reasonableness, obligation, and advantage of performing the will of God, which will excite us to persevere in the observation of it.

I shall conclude with some remarks on the superiority of religious wisdom to all other kinds of wisdom.

And first it is manifest, and not necessary to be proved, that it surpasseth them in the object of its pursuit, namely, eternal happiness, a blessing more to be desired than human learning and worldly knowledge, and of more importance than the riches, honours, and pleasures of this short life.

In this also it surpasseth them, that it is more easy to be acquired than they are. The first sort of wisdom, of which I spake, which is worldly craft making its way and carrying on its designs with much art and little conscience, is not so obvious, so common, and so soon attained, as some may imagine. Sagacity and the means of improving it are requisite to make a person eminent this way, the first of which must be born with us, and the second depends upon a favourable concurrence of events which lies altogether out of our power. A man may be of such a temper, that he shall stick at nothing, how vile and base soever, which can advance his interest, and yet be able to make no figure in the world, for want of parts; and he may have both a good understanding and a bad mind, and yet never be able to exert either to any purpose, for want of proper opportunities to cultivate the one, and employ the other.

The

The second kind of wisdom which I mentioned, namely, the art of managing affairs with discretion and integrity, and of raising ourselves by ingenious industry, this also requires a particular genius, together with means and opportunities of exercising it ; that is, it requires what many have not and cannot procure.

As to the third sort of wisdom, which consists more in contemplation and study than in action, and is the fruit of a strong memory, a ready invention, a sound judgment, and a close application, this is perhaps less common than either of the former, and there are few who are in an eminent degree masters of it.

But religious wisdom offers itself to all, and may be obtained by any one who sincerely desires it, and uses his endeavours to acquire it, because it is more the work of the heart than of the head, and because God hath absolutely promised his assistance to those who strive to do his will. One of the Prophets, speaking of the Gospel of Christ, calls it an high-way, in which the way-faring men, though fools, shall not err ; and in the book of Proverbs, Wisdom is represented as inviting all sorts of persons to receive her instructions, making no objections to their abilities, and requiring only a teachable temper. They therefore who so represent our duty, that they make it a subtle, an ingenious, and a learned thing to be a Christian, must be mistaken in their notions of Christianity, which with a noble and majestic simplicity affords matter to exercise and enlarge the brightest understanding, and yet condescends to the lowest capacity.

Herein also religious wisdom surpasseth all other wisdom, that it never fails to obtain its end. In this alone it can be truly affirmed ; Seek and ye shall find.

'The

The worldly-minded man, though he be consummately wise in his generation, is liable to perpetual disappointments. It is impossible to be always secured against the folly, the craft, the perfidiousness, the violence, and the changeable humours of men, to foresee future events, to fix the unsteady course of human affairs, which are surprisingly altered by the smallest and seemingly accidental trifles, to resist divine Providence which blasts the designs of the strong and the subtle, and turns their might and their wisdom into weakness and folly. The art of compassing all our vain designs and desires is an art falsely so called, which can be reduced to no certain rules and regular system; and what still shews the folly of it more manifestly, is, that whatsoever the children of this world seek, whether it be human learning and knowledge, or sensual enjoyments, or the favour of men, or wealth, or power, though they may find what they seek, yet they may be far from obtaining the end for which they sought it, namely, happiness and peace of mind, a gift which God reserves for those who obey him, and suffers none besides himself to bestow.

But he whose chief view and purpose is to serve his Maker, and to save his own Soul, and who is as careful to accomplish what he hath undertaken, and as much in earnest about it as others are in forwarding their temporal concerns, is infallibly certain of success; for God is unchangeably the same, and the ways of securing his favour are invariable. This is enough to shew the superiority of true wisdom to every thing else which assumes that name; and yet there is another advantage attending it, which ought not to be forgiv'en; and that is, that whilst worldly wisdom is often deprived of the only reward which it so industriously seeks, piety or true wisdom often finds advantages which it did not principally pursue, namely, the favour of the public, and an unenvied

envied competence of the necessaries of life : for, besides the interposition of divine Providence in behalf of the righteous, Virtue by its own nature hath a tendency to procure love, trust, and esteem, and is the safest and easiest way to acquire and to secure the things of this life, whereof we stand in need.

To conclude ; Religious wisdom is built upon a firm foundation, upon a few principles which are evident, plain, agreeable to reason, confirmed by experience, and, if authorities are of any weight, approved by the best and most competent judges ; principles which men, howsoever differing in other points, have usually consented to acknowledge. They are these :

There is a God, wise, good, and powerful, who governs the world, and to whom we are accountable.

The soul subsists after death, and will be recompensed or punished according to its past behaviour.

A few years bear no proportion to eternity.

Life is short, and death is unavoidable.

Whatsoever our reason and conscience condemn, it is absurdity, folly, and madness to practise.

Whatsoever produceth evil both to the body and to the mind should be shunned, how pleasant soever it may be for the present.

Whatsoever we shall wish we had done, when grief and sickness, loss and disappointment, old age and death come upon us, that we ought to do in evry part of life.

None ever repented, ever afflicted and reproached themselves that they had honoured God, and loved virtue, and done good offices to mankind, and cultivated their understanding, and lived soberly, and kept their passions in subjection to reason. But thousands have been overwhelmed with sorrow and confusion for having done the contrary.

From

From these few obvious and manifest truths the consequence is no less evident, that our principal business and our greatest prudence is to acquire and preserve religious wisdom. Whatsoever wisdom is not consistent with this, and sets itself in opposition to it, is folly and distraction ; and whatsoever wisdom is of a different kind, and is occupied about other pursuits, though it be innocent, though it be laudable, is as far inferior to this, as the earth is beneath the heavens.

S E R M O N XXV,

J A M E S i. 5, 6.

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to men liberally, and upbraideth not ; and it shall be given him : but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.

TH E wisdom of which St. James here speaks, and which the sacred writers so often recommend, is religious wisdom, wisdom unto salvation ; and the end which it pursues is peace of mind in this life, and eternal happiness in the next. To fear the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil, that is understanding ; and whatsoever is not consistent with this, tho' the world may esteem it profound cunning and policy, yet is it neither wisdom nor understanding, but folly and madness in the sight of God, and in the style of the holy Scriptures.

St. James addresseth his Epistle to Christians, who were either then under persecution, or who saw it approaching. He bids them count it all joy, when they fall into these temptations or trials of their virtue, because their reward should be great, and an unfading crown of glory was reserved for them, if they suffered with patience and constancy for the sake of the Gospel : and then he adds ; If any of you lack wisdom, that is

the

the wisdom which shall direct you to act prudently and piously under difficult circumstances, and which shall enable you to pass through such trials with resignation and resolution, let him ask it of God.

However, since the life of a good Christian is one continued warfare against the enemies to his eternal happiness, and since there are trials in every condition, prosperous or adverse, and since none can acquit himself as he ought under these trials, of what kind soever they be, who is not wise in the religious sense, the wisdom of resisting any one sort of temptation, may very well be extended so as to mean pious wisdom in general, or a practical knowledge of our duty and true interest, by which we shall overcome every thing that opposes and endangers our salvation.

This wisdom, as I observed before, may be said to consist, first, in a knowledge of the truth of religion; at least, of the principal and common proofs of it.

It consists, secondly, in a knowledge of the things which a Christian ought to believe and to do.

And because to know our duty avails nothing, unless we practise it, religious wisdom consists, thirdly, in a lively sense of the possibility, reasonableness, obligation and advantage of performing what God requires, which will excite us to persevere in the observation of it.

I shall now examine and explain the several parts of the text, taking them in the same order in which they offer themselves to us.

If any of you lack wisdom,

Let him ask of God,

Who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not,

And it shall be given him;

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.

If any of you lack wisdom.

To want wisdom, if we consider the words by themselves, may mean, either to have none at all, or not to have a sufficient measure of it.

To have none, is the character of those persons who in the language of the Scriptures are called fools, men quite void of goodness, and even of any inclination to it. To such persons St. James doth not address himself, when he says; Brethren, if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God; for they who are completely wicked, and consequently in a state of enmity with God, cannot be supposed capable of praying to him for spiritual blessings with faith, that is, with a just persuasion that they shall receive what they ask; but must first repent of their sins, and enter into a course of obedience, before they can acquire this free access to God, and this firm reliance upon him.

St. James therefore speaks to those who, having received the Gospel, are in a middle state between irreligion and Christian perfection, and advancing towards the latter; who have good dispositions, and an improvable temper, who reverence goodness, and desire to serve God, but have not made that progress in righteousness of which they are capable, and therefore have reason to distrust themselves, and to fear that in time of temptation they may yield and fall away, and earnestly to intreat the Almighty that he would assist and uphold them under such trials.

And here if we consider the many frailties and defects which stick close to the best of men, and the violent assaults of some temptations, and the great faults into which the most religious have sometimes fallen, and from which if they had not raised themselves by repentance, they must for ever have lost the favour of God, we may reasonably conclude that few, if any Christians, during this their state of probation, are so accomplished in this true wisdom, as to need no farther improvement. Every one therefore, how good soever, ought to think himself

the

the person to whom the Apostle directs his advice, the person who wants wisdom, and who is here admonished to ask it of God; for one part of religious wisdom consists without question in entertaining lowly thoughts of ourselves, and it is safest to err, if we can so err, on the humble side. Severe is the rebuke which Christ gives to the church of Laodicea, in the Revelation ; Thou sayest, I am rich, and have need of nothing ; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.

This must have seemed strange advice to those, who ascribed too much to their own reason, and relied too much on their own understanding. It must have seemed strange to many of the learned Pagans, who had no notion of offering such petitions to God, and who used to say that conveniences of life, and health to enjoy them, were indeed favours to be requested of God, but that virtue and wisdom depended entirely upon ourselves. There have perhaps been some philosophical Christians, who for fear of ascribing too little to human liberty, have allowed too little to the divine influence, and have supposed that the revelation which God hath made to us in the Gospel, and the understanding and reason which he hath given us, is the only assistance, which we are to receive, and ought to expect from him. But since wisdom, religious wisdom, consists as much in obedience as in faith and knowledge, to ask wisdom of God cannot well mean less than to desire that he would concur with our endeavours, and enable us by his inward assistance to perform an acceptable service. There is another extreme into which Christians have more usually departed. Many of them have supposed that all men are naturally and irresistibly prone to evil, and only evil, unless the divine grace interposes, which also acts irresistibly upon the few who are predestinated to eternal life. This is in effect

effect and by consequence to charge our sins upon God, and to magnify his power and his dominion at the expence of his impartiality, his mercy, and his goodness, and to frame a system of religion which hath nothing to do with reason, and cannot stand the test of reason. As one error usually leads to another, the next deduction from these irresistible operations of the Spirit, was, that they were accompanied with an inward feeling and experience of them, by which the faithful could plainly distinguish them from the operations of their own mind: and then men instead of judging of their faith by their works, judged of their works by their faith, or by a strong persuasion that they were moved by the Spirit, and that whatsoever the Spirit suggested must be good.

We shall avoid these two extremes, if we believe that the assistance of God, in time of need, is bestowed upon all who endeavour to secure it by making a good use of their natural powers, and of God's revealed will; that his holy Spirit conducts in a secret and effectual manner through all the changes and chances and trials of life to a place of rest and peace, those who are willing to be guided by the Gospel. This is a doctrine which reconciles heavenly grace with human liberty, and tends to produce faith, and hope, and humility, and reliance, and gratitude, and honest endeavours, and every good work.

For our encouragement to ask wisdom of God, St. James assures us, that if we ask, it shall be given us, for that God giveth liberally to all men, and upbraideth not.

That is, God, who is goodness itself, is free, as from all other imperfections, so from those imperfections which make men unwilling to confer benefits, ready to reproach those whom they oblige, or have obliged, injudicious and humoursome in the choice of those to whom they grant their favours.

Men

Men are often slow to give, and glad of any plausible excuse for with-holding their hand; they often accompany their acts of kindness, when they condescend to perform them, with reluctance, haughtiness, and insolence, and upbraid at the same time that they relieve; they set too high a value upon the good offices which they have done; they expect most unreasonable submissions and compliances, and upon any failure this way, they make loud complaints of the baseness and ingratitude of the obliged person; they often bestow their favours, not according to the wants or to the deserts of those whom they assist, but either with a view to some return, or as mere unthinking capricious fancy directs. They will give to those who humour them, and flatter them, or to those in whom they observe a likeness of taste and disposition, a bent to the same amusements, or perhaps to the same vices. They will give to the bold and importunate, against their inclination, purely to purchase repose at any rate; and with slights and forbidding coldness they will receive the person, who hath every thing that ought to recommend him to their esteem. There are persons in the world, who possessing several good qualities, yet have the weakness of entertaining unaccountable likings and dislikings, and the injudiciousness of chusing and preferring those who least deserve their favours, that is, of taking the childrens bread, and casting it to the dogs. So that upon these accounts, if there were no other reason, it is, as our Saviour says, more blessed, a happier thing to give than to receive, and more more desirable to owe our daily-bread (after God) to our own hands, which never reproach us for what they bestow upon us, than to owe it to the courtsy of others. A state of absolute dependence, even at the best, and when attended with many advantages, is a kind of splendid slavery, in which the chains fit not the less heavy for being gilded. And this is one motive to honest industry, which opens a fair prospect to

to acquire a competency and to escape many a burdensome obligation.

A state of dependence upon God is liable to none of these inconveniences. If we lay open our wants to men, perhaps they will not believe us, or will charge them to our own fault; but the things of which we stand in need, are known to God before we ask him. If we are petitioners to men, they perhaps will dislike us, though they cannot give any reason for it; but God is no respecter of persons, and invites us all to come to him for help, and is a Father to us, in the best sense of the word, a Father who acts the part of a father. Earthly parents too often have their prejudices and partialities, making absurd distinctions between their children, and shewing most affection where perhaps they ought to shew the least; but the favour of God to us is ever proportionable to our behaviour towards him. To manifest his power and his wisdom, he hath made a variety of rational creatures of different endowments, and to shew his goodness, he hath made them all capable of happiness, and gives them the necessary means to obtain it.

If we receive courtesies from the hands of men, they will perhaps expect returns from us which we cannot and ought not to make; God only demands of us gratitude, the easiest recompence, and an obedience which turns to our profit both here and hereafter.

Such encouragement we have to ask wisdom of God. One condition indeed there is, from which we cannot be excused, and that is a belief that we shall obtain our requests.—Let him ask of God, and it shall be given him; but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.

It ought to be observed that in the Gospel, a firm persuasion of God's good will towards us is perpetually represented as absolutely necessary to make us capable of obtaining any favours from him. In the case of miracles, faith, that is a belief that the miracle should be performed, was often required both of the person who wrought

the

the miracle, and of the person on whom it was wrought.

When any came to our Saviour to be cured by him, and declared their belief of his power, he always healed them, and usually added these words ; As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee ; Thy faith hath made thee whole ; According to your faith be it unto you ; Thy faith hath saved thee. When he met with an uncommon degree of faith, he both instantly rewarded it and highly commended it ; and where he found a great and habitual want of it, he severely censured this defect, as far worse than a mere weakness, as a sure indication of a bad mind. He declared that he could do little or nothing for dissident people, and that they disqualified themselves for receiving his favours : He required of his disciples an absolute trust and reliance on their heavenly Father, and also on him, as on their Lord and Master, and Mediator, by whom they should have access to the Father, and in whose name, through faith, they should obtain their petitions, and never be disappointed. To give proofs and instances of this, would be to repeat to you no small part of the New Testament.

In prayer also, the same condition is required, and without it we must not expect to obtain our petitions. All things, says our Lord, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive : What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them : and St. James, in the text ; Let a man ask, and it shall be given him, if he ask in faith, nothing wavering.

Upon which it is natural to make these two inquiries ; Why doth God so strictly require this faith ? and, Why is it so acceptable to him, that he rewards it with conferring upon us all that we ask ?

God requires of us a belief that we shall obtain our petitions, because he hath given us abundant reason to believe it. The light of nature discovers that he is good : the

the Gospel represents him to us merciful beyond expression and imagination, and Love itself. Most justly therefore may he require of us to believe that he will at least fulfil his promises.

Another reason why God demands such faith is because upon a belief of his paternal care and kindness all religion is founded. If we suspect that he will not grant us the things necessary, we must doubt of his mercy and goodness, and justice, and veracity; and if we doubt of these things, we shall disregard him, it may be, and put him far from our thoughts; at the most, we may fear him, but we can never love him, and honour him, and pay him a willing and a rational service.

A high degree of enthusiasm, which is mere frenzy, and capable of imagining any absurdity to be true, may make a man think himself to be in the favour of God, whilst he daily and deliberately offends him, and hope that he shall receive whatsoever he asks of him, before he hath obtained remission of sins. But, such cases excepted, no wicked person can easily flatter himself, that his requests shall be heard, whilst his life is unreformed, and cannot pray to God with that faith which is here mentioned. God therefore, who would have us to live that we may obtain future happiness, requires of us a confidence in him which must spring from an honest mind, and which no impenitent sinner can be well supposed to entertain.

This observation takes off an objection, which might be made to the text, and to other like places of Scripture. — Let a man ask of God, and it shall be given him. Let him ask. Is that enough? No, certainly it is not. He must use his own endeavours to acquire the desired object of his prayers. If he asks his daily bread, he must labour for it. If he asks forgiveness of sins, he must repent and amend. If he asks that he may not fall into temptation, he must keep himself as remote as he can from all inducements to sin. If he asks spiritual wisdom,

he must take care to be acquainted with his duty, and then to practise suitably to his knowledge. All this is contained in these words, Let him ask in faith, or as deducible from them by obvious consequence. He who sincerely resolves and endeavours to serve God, may with just confidence beg support, and relief, and direction of him, and believe that he shall obtain them: but he who doth nothing on his part that he ought to do, can have no hopes that his prayers shall be successful.

The other question is, Why is this faith so acceptable to God, that he rewards it with granting our petitions?

What excellence can there be in faith? say some irreligious persons. Faith is a belief, either without or with grounds. If we believe without reasonable motives, and due conviction, it is, say they, a childish weakness; and if we believe, because upon examination the thing appears certain, there is nothing so commendable in it, for we cannot help it, and refrain from believing; and therefore we deserve no more praise or recompence on that account, than he who understands arithmetic and geometry, for believing the truths relating to numbers and to figures.

This is mere cavil and sophistry, which falls to pieces upon the slightest discussion. In the holy Scriptures faith is frequently and justly commended, and declared to have the divine approbation and favour. If it be asked, Why so? the answer is, because it produceth many good moral effects; because it is the greatest honour which we can pay to God; and because it is one of the best proofs of a well-disposed mind.

1. A firm faith in God is the guardian of all other virtues, and suffers us not to be seduced by worldly hopes, or deterred by worldly fears, from the performance of our duty; and as it is stronger or weaker, such will be its influence on our practice. It must needs therefore

therefore be of great importance, since our obedience depends upon it.

2. We cannot honour any man more than by placing an entire confidence in him. This is to pay him more true respect, and to shew him more love, than can be expressed by all the commendations and fair speeches which we are able to invent and pour out. The same is true with relation to God. To be persuaded that he will give us all things needful, unless we force him to withdraw his favour from us ; and if we ask and obtain not, to lay the blame where it ought to lie, upon ourselves ; to believe that upon our amendment he is ever ready to receive us ; and carefully to serve him thenceforward, with a firm persuasion that obedience never loses its reward ; this is to profess in our hearts and by our lives that we esteem him to be all-knowing, wise, just, holy, and good, and whatsoever is venerable and lovely.

3. A steady faith is also a victory over many doubts which the world and the flesh usually raise in vicious minds. He whose passions are under no restraint, whose thoughts and desires are fixed upon things unlawful or vain, and who hath no taste for those entertainments which reason and virtue and piety afford, such an one either disbelieves the very principles of religion, or doubts of the truth of them, or gives a faint and cold assent to them, which hath no influence upon his actions, and serves only to reprove him, when he is leaving this world.

God is no object of our senses ; no man hath seen him, or can see him : he dwells in light inaccessible and clouds and darkness are round about him. Faith is able to pierce that darkness and that light, and through it to discover those perfections which excite in us hope and reliance and love and gratitude. But a vicious mind is not used to look so high, or to meditate on things pure and spiritual. Scarcely can it believe that God is ; much less

that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him.

The heavens indeed proclaim his power and glory, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work, and day and night in their turns declare it. But the vicious man hath no eyes to see the Creator in his works, and no capacity to comprehend this silent language of nature.

The recompence also, the principal recompence, which God proposeth to the obedient, is like himself, invisible : it lies in a distant region, which no eye hath seen, no foot hath trodden ; and before we can take possession of it, we must in appearance cease to be, lie down in the dust, and leave that which a worldly-minded man accounts his all, and beyond which he hath no views.

To believe Him, who is thus concealed from us, to think him good and merciful to us, how inconvenient soever our present state may be, and to trust to a distant reward after our dissolution ; to believe this in a manner which shall have a due influence on all our actions, though it be perfectly agreeable to reason, is so hard a task to a mind prone to sin, and enslaved to the present evil world, that it is a considerable victory obtained over our inordinate affections, an effect of sound judgment and sober consideration, and an indication of a good heart joined to a good understanding.

S E R M O N XXVI.

PROVERBS iii. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness.

THIS perhaps is one of the most common subjects of moral and practical divinity, which hath been so often discoursed upon, that it may seem to be worn out with using. But yet a common subject, if it be a copious subject, may be treated in no common manner, and may afford some useful remarks, which escape ordinary and superficial observation. Thus, in the text, though the truth contained in it hath been very often set forth, the objections to that truth, which are many, have not been so frequently considered and confuted.

When Solomon observes that the ways of wisdom, that is, of piety, are ways of pleasantness, he seems to mean that this is not only the excellence, but the peculiar excellence of religion, and consequently that the ways of folly or of vice, all things considered, are not ways of pleasantness. For if what he says of the one were true of the other also, if there were as much pleasure in disobedience, as there is in righteousness, the argument by which he recommends the latter would lose part of its force. We may therefore suppose more to be understood than is expressed in the text; and the sense of it to be, that the good shall infallibly enjoy a satisfaction and a delight, of which the wicked will as certainly be deprived.

Since

Since pleasure, present pleasure, is naturally and earnestly desired by every creature, the motive to religion which Solomon sets before us is adapted to all capacities and to all tempers. Goodness is proposed as the duty, and pleasure is promised as the reward, a reward which the World and Satan are not able to give us, and which God alone can bestow. This seems enough to engage any person to be good who believes it to be true. He who is thoroughly persuaded that he shall be happy for the present by doing his duty, and that if he be wicked, he shall continually suffer for it even in this life, will surely choose the good part, because his reason and his desires will both lead him to it.

Indeed the difficulty is, to excite in men an active and a practical persuasion of these truths; which I shall attempt by endeavouring,

I. To shew that the ways of religion are ways of pleasantness;

II. To shew that the ways of sin are not ways of pleasantness.

III. To answer the objections which wicked men have made, or may make, to these assertions.

I. The ways of religion are ways of pleasantness. The proofs of it are these.

1. There is a pleasure in the duties relating immediately to God; such as love, faith, reliance, resignation, hope, prayer, and thanksgiving. These are all apparently cheerful duties, and when duly performed, must be attended with the highest satisfaction.

For to love God is to reverence his perfections, to desire his favour, to imitate him as far as we can, and to serve him willingly. From such a temper there must arise peace of mind, and a serious and lasting pleasure. Add to this that such love towards God is accompanied with a persuasion that God loves us, which doubtless is the most valuable of all blessings.

To

To have faith in God is to believe what we are taught in the Scripture concerning him, chiefly concerning his promises to his servants, of forgiveness, protection and assistance in this world, and of eternal life in the next.

And what can yield more satisfaction than such a faith dwelling in a virtuous mind?

To rely upon God is to free ourselves from many sorrows and evils, from despondence and despair, from anxious apprehensions of future events, and repining discontent under our present condition, by casting our cares upon our heavenly Father, with a persuasion that he will give us what upon the whole is best for us, and that we shall make him our protector and friend by placing this honourable confidence in him. This is a disposition which though God neither commanded nor rewarded it, yet would be its own recompence; though it were an error, yet it would be a pleasing error, since he who imagines himself happy, is happy as long as the imagination lasts.

Resignation is the art of lessening the evils of life, and of bearing them patiently, from the consideration that they are unavoidable, that the best of men are not secured from them, that they are of a short continuance, that they fall out by the permission or the appointment of God, that they are useful to us even for the present, and in the end will turn to our advantage. And this also is a temper which even they would desire to enjoy, who will not use the means to acquire it.

Hope looks at future advantages, and makes them in some manner present, by persuading us that we shall possess them; hope is the support of the mind in dangers and difficulties, the spring and motive of action, and the parent of cheerfulness. All this it is, when its views reach no farther than the present state; but the hope of a Christian, which extends beyond time and the world, must surpass the other in its effects as much as in its object.

Prayer is founded upon a supposition that something profitable may be obtained by it, and that he to whom we apply is good and merciful; and therefore the prayers even of those whom the sense of guilt and the fear of punishment compel to this duty must produce some ease, proportionable to the degree of faith and hope that accompanies them. But the prayer of the righteous is the conversation of a son with a father, an access without fear or diffidence, an application secure from a denial, a certainty that every thing fit to be granted or desired shall be obtained.

Lastly, Thanksgiving is gratitude, and gratitude is an easy and an agreeable duty. He who is ungrateful to God or to man hath a dark mind, and base inclinations, and can love nothing besides his unlovely self; his delights must be, like himself, sensual and brutish, and arising from things which give less pleasure than pain. But he who is grateful is in some degree recompensed even by the lively sense of the benefits which he receives. Thus there is a pleasure in the acts of religion which have God more immediately for their objects.

2. There is also a pleasure in those occupations in which a virtuous and religious man will be frequently employed.

Almost all persons, they especially who have had a good education, spend some part of their time in acquiring knowledge of one sort or other, in reading and in reflecting. Now where the treasure is, there is the heart also, and such as the temper is, such is the favourite study; and consequently good persons will often meditate upon truths worthy to dwell in an upright mind. The perfections of the Almighty, the knowledge of human nature, the duties of man, as discoverable by reason, the works of God, in which his power, skill, and goodness shine forth, the holy Scriptures which teach wisdom unto salvation, and any study which makes us useful in our generation, improves the understanding,

understanding, and corrupts not the heart, will employ our time, if we act like rational creatures, as far as the necessary affairs of life permit, and our natural and acquired abilities enable us. In these occupations there is much pleasure; they engage the mind in prudent and honourable designs, they deliver it from mean cares and trifling views, they preserve it from indolence and sloth, they compose the passions, they strengthen the judgment, they have the approbation of conscience, and they also divert the imagination. (a) Objects which are great and noble communicate some degree of their own splendor and dignity to the soul which contemplates upon them, teach it to entertain a due value for itself, and to despise things transitory, and at the same time overflow it with a silent and serious joy. We are pleased with the sight of any thing that is grand and splendid in the visible world; we are more pleased when our thoughts are swallowed up in eternity and immensity, in the incomprehensible perfections of the Author of all, the First and the Last, who was, and is, and is to come.

3. There is a pleasure in that behaviour towards others, and that manner of prosecuting our worldly affairs, which ever accompany a religious disposition.

He who loves and fears God will not have inclination or leisure to pursue the things of this life with immoderate earnestness, nor will he set an immoderate value upon them, much less will he acquire them by infamous methods, though it were to gain the whole world; nor will he on the other hand fall into want by laziness or extravagance, but will honestly labour to support himself and those committed to his care, and to do good, and to be useful in his station. In such a way of life much uneasiness is avoided, and much satisfac-

on

(a) Erigimus, elatiores fieri videmur; humana despicimus, cogitantesque supera ac cœlestia, hæc nostra ut exigua et minima contemnimus.
Cicero.

on must arise. Either pleasure is to be found in calm integrity, honest industry, and acts of beneficence, and moderate desires, or there is no such thing as pleasure in this world.

4. There is, lastly, a pleasure in performing our duty to ourselves, as it relates to the body and to the passions.

As to the body, a wise and good person is his own physician, so far I mean as to observe the rules of sobriety, and to avoid all those excesses which bring on pain and sickness, and shorten and embitter human life. True it is, that temperance will not always secure health, and that the body, when its constitution is bad, makes the soul pay dear for her lodging. But in this case, it is no small comfort to know that our distempers are not of our own procuring, and that we cannot charge them upon our vices. Thus we are sure to escape one sore evil; for if sickness be a grievous thing, self-reproach is still more grievous.

As to the passions, he who keeps them in good order, secures to himself peace of mind; for when they are indulged and suffered to grow unruly, they are like spoilt children, the grief and torment of the parent, and prey upon the heart that gave them birth.

II. The second thing to be proved is, that the ways of sin are not ways of pleasantness: and this I shall endeavour briefly to shew by a few general remarks.

1. First, it must be acknowledged, that no man can be happy who acts against his own conscience, and who suspects that a day of judgment will come, when his evil deeds shall be exposed and punished; and consequently the greater part of sinners must be deemed miserable even for the present; for, like the Devils, they also believe and tremble. They know that they offend a just and powerful God, and they fear the sad consequences. They have not indeed these fears always upon them, for then they would not continue their

their evil courses; they put away such thoughts by various arts; but yet from time to time, at a serious hour, when any loss, disappointment, or sickness befalls them, these apprehensions usually awake and torment them; and this torment endured even for an hour hath a bitterness in it which outweighs the pleasures of their whole life. The pleasures of sense we can well enough spare, but the pain of a wounded mind is insupportable; and this pain almost all sinners suffer. They may seem contented in their situation, approvers of their own conduct, and void of care and consideration; but it is frequently a false appearance. Let us believe God rather than men. He who made us, and knows us better than we know ourselves, says that there is no peace for the wicked.

2. There is another sort of sinners, who are few in number; when compared with the former, who feel no remorse of conscience, and who have persuaded themselves that there is no future state, and no Governor of the world. These have indeed shaken off some fears; but then they have lost the greatest comfort of life, which is hope. The days of our mortality are always few, and often evil; and the most prosperous condition is not without some labour and sorrow. The good have their share in these evils; but no calamity can take from them the expectation of happiness in a better world. To this expectation a virtuous mind hath recourse, on this it rests, and by this it is supported. The first Christians had nothing besides this that they could call their own; but this was to them in the stead of every thing else; by this they were enabled to be more than conquerors over enemies whom few sinners dare look in the face.

To this hope the wicked persons, of whom we now speak, are strangers. Their hope is, to die soul and body, to perish entirely and eternally, to become as though they had never been. This is their whole support

port and their only refuge; this must cheer them in their journey through a troublesome world, this must enliven their pleasures in the days of health and prosperity, comfort them in distress, make their bed in sickness, and fortify them against an approaching dissolution. But this it cannot perform. No man can delight in a belief that things go according to the course of I know not what blind and stupid, stubborn and unrelenting Nature; the most wicked man cannot take pleasure in this notion, though his vices may make him hope that it is true, because it seems to him the lesser evil of the two. No man can rejoice in the thoughts of annihilation, though his fears of punishment may make him wish that death may put an end to him, and shelter him from offended justice. The expectation of perishing utterly, and falling into a state of insensibility, presents no agreeable prospect to the soul, which hath a natural desire of immortality. It must damp all the pleasures that this world can bestow, and be a present chastisement to unbelievers. *Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die,* is a gloomy and uncomfortable reflection; it hath been sometimes uttered with a cheerful countenance, but always with an aking heart.

3. Another reason, which I shall barely mention, why the ways of unrighteousness are not the ways of pleasantness, is, that every action contrary to reason and to religion is, if not always, yet certainly for the most part, hurtful even in this life. This noxious quality of sin ariseth from the course of nature, the constitution of things, and the necessary connection of causes and effects; and therefore is one proof of a Deity and a Providence.

III. Let us now consider the objections which wicked men have made or may make to these propositions.

1. Those sinners who enjoy health and prosperity, and can gratify their inclinations, would say without question that their ways are ways of pleasantness; that every

every man best knows whether he be pleased or displeased, contented or dissatisfied, cheerful or uneasy; that, if he declares himself happy, others ought to believe him, at least ought not to contradict him; and that they are impertinent, unmannerly, and absurd people, who would endeavour to persuade him out of his senses.

Now it must be acknowledged that there is a pleasure in sin, else there would be no deceitfulness in it, no difficulty in forsaking it, and no struggles in the change from vice to virtue. It must also be confessed that he who delights in his condition is happy as long as the persuasion or the delusion continues. But if this happiness proves short-lived, and ends in bodily pain, or in the loss of friends, or in want and infamy, or in regret, shame, and confusion, in remorse of mind, and horrible apprehensions, which is frequently the case, the man is unhappy upon the whole, and unhappy at the last in his own judgment.

2. Again, Sinners may object that good men who affirm from their own experience that there is pleasure in righteousness, are grave dissemblers, who conceal the real state of their minds; that a religious person is one, who partly through dread of future punishment, and partly through hope of future rewards, is led to act contrary to his inclinations, to do violence to his passions, and to sacrifice his present ease and satisfaction to these views.

This objection we have already shewed to be unreasonable, by setting forth the many and undeniable advantages which arise from a good life. We will therefore only observe this; The wicked, when they declare that they take a pleasure in humouring their depraved appetites, expect to be believed. They ought then, in return, to believe the sober and serious, who affirm that they also find satisfaction in following the dictates of reason, and the laws of God. They should consider that pleasure is as various as the humour and the taste

of

of men. What is agreeable to one is pain and punishment to another ; and even what we love in one part of our life, we sometimes dislike and loath at another.

3. Sinners may say that good men, when they set forth the pleasures of righteousness or religious wisdom, either deceive, or are deceived ; that if they speak as they think, they seem indeed to be happy, but are happy only in imagination ; that therefore the pleasures of a pious mind, if there be such, arise from a strong fancy, from fanaticism and enthusiasm.

If we should admit even this to be true, which certainly is not true, still it appears that a virtuous person takes a surer way to happiness than a sinner. The happiness of a sinner depends upon health, upon riches, upon the gratitude, friendship, and love of vicious persons, which are all very precarious. The happiness of a religious man, if we suppose it to depend upon the approbation of his own conscience, and the hopes of immortal life, and a persuasion that God loves him and takes care of him, is fixed upon a much firmer foundation. These are a possession which he can secure to himself, and which none can take from him.

4. Another objection which Sinners may make to the doctrine of the text, is, that though it may be plausible in appearance, and speculatively considered, yet the true test of it is experience ; and experience shews these boasted pleasures of religion not to be very common amongst Christians. It will be found upon examination that religious persons are not only liable to the same crosses and calamities with others, but in a great measure to the same passions, disorders, and weaknesses of mind, to cares and sorrows, to discontent and desjection, to a great fondness of life, and to as great a fear of death. Therefore, will sinners say, Tell us not what comfortable effects religion must produce upon the minds of men ; but fairly acknowledge, what is fact, that it conduceth very little to their present contentment,

and

and deserves not the high commendations which are usually bestowed upon it.

To this objection it may be answered;

If it be true, for the most part, that the ways of religion are ways of pleasantness, it is enough. In all such general affirmations, some particular cases are to be excepted. Therefore, though some honest and good persons through disorders of body and mind are in uneasiness and sorrow, still it remains undeniable that goodness produces peace and hope and contentment, since it usually and naturally produceth them; and where it accidentally fails of its effect, a future compensation shall abundantly make up the deficiency.

But moreover, when the Scriptures declare that there is pleasure in righteousness, we should consider what they mean by righteousness, and who the person is to whom they make this promise. It is he who carefully endeavours to observe all God's commandments, and to make a constant progress in virtue. But whoever falls short of this must lose much of the pleasure which religion affords. If his obedience be interrupted by wilful transgressions, fear and self-reproach, shame and sorrow will succeed, in proportion to the sins which he hath committed, and to the time which he hath wasted under their dominion, and will disturb him more or less for the remaining part of his life, and allay the satisfaction which he finds in returning to his duty. This is too often the case; our practice agrees not enough with our belief and with our knowledge; our hearts are divided between earth and heaven; our desires are inconstant and inconsistent; we serve many masters, and consequently we serve none regularly, and with the whole mind; we have religion enough to give us uneasiness, and not enough to give us happiness, enough to make us fear God, and not enough to make us love him. Thence it comes to pass that few are acquainted with

with that joy and peace of mind, which only arise from an uniform obedience and an habitual goodness.

5. Lastly, Sinners may object that some duties of Christianity are harsh and disagreeable, as repentance, and self-denial, and mortification, and that therefore the ways of religion cannot be ways of pleasantness:

A solemn repentance for heinous crimes is not to be reckoned amongst the original duties of religion. Neither the Laws of God, nor the constitution of human nature have made it necessary, but the guilt which men have contracted by habitual transgressions, and from which they can by no other method be absolved. God, who is not willing that any should perish, invites the greatest offenders to return to him. In that return from sin to righteousness there is difficulty; yet even at the same time there is a satisfaction arising from reflections upon the danger which is escaped, and the recompence which is secured by amendment.

There is another kind of repentance, which is the duty of the very best persons, and in which there is nothing disagreeable. It must be a pleasure to one of an ingenuous disposition daily to own his faults and failings to his heavenly Father, and humbly to ask forgiveness.

As of repentance, so of mortification or self-denial there are two sorts. The first consists in mortifying our vices, and refraining from things forbidden by reason and religion, and contrary to our present interest. If in this we find any difficulty, it must be charged entirely upon ourselves.

The second kind of mortification or self-denial consists in loving and using with moderation the good things of this life which in a certain degree are lawful. This is a duty very agreeable to reason, and very suitable both to the body and to the mind. We ought to have practised it though God had not required it, because the things which we possess are precarious; because

cause death will part us from them ; because too great an affection towards them makes us miserable when the separation comes ; because the pleasures of the senses, if not discreetly used, and sometimes avoided, grow insipid, hurt the health, and stipify the understanding ; because he who is a slave to his diversions and to his appetites will unavoidably be ignorant, foolish, and despicable.

Therefore wise men in all ages and places, Pagans as well as Christians, have both recommended and practised this duty, some through religious principles, others through temper and by choice, some to please God, others to please themselves. We call it mortification, or self-denial, and often represent it to our thoughts as a rigid and severe virtue ; but there is nothing austere and uncomfortable in it, except the name that it bears ; and it might justly be called the art of lessening our wants by contracting our desires, and of securing to ourselves as much happiness as should be expected, and can be found here below.

S E R M O N XXVII.

M A R K x. 14.

Suffer the little children to come to me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily, I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

THREE of the Evangelists inform us that young children were brought to Christ by their parents or friends, that he should touch them, that he should put his hands upon them, and that he should pray for them and bless them. In Genesis we read that Jacob laid his hands upon the sons of Joseph, and blessed them; and we may observe, that it was a custom among the Jews to present their children to illustrious persons remarkable for their piety, that they might lay their hands upon them, and recommend them to God's favour by their prayers. Hence it is evident that the parents or friends of these children believed Christ to be one who had a just title to the character which he assumed; for if they had not entertained this opinion of him, they would never have desired his blessing for their children.

And yet the disciples, it is said, rebuked those who brought them. The writers of the Gospels have not told

told us why the disciples were offended at those who paid this respect to Christ ; so that conjectures only and probable reasons may be offered concerning it ; these for instance :

The disciples seem to have been at that particular time conversing with Christ upon an important subject, and full of attention to his doctrine ; and they might be offended at the importunity of these persons who interrupted the discourse.

The disciples might think such actions to be beneath the dignity of their Master. He came into the world to instruct men in the most momentous concerns, to explain and improve the Law, to vindicate it from false interpretations, to reject frivolous and pernicious traditions, to call sinners to repentance, to shew forth his power by working miracles, and healing all manner of diseases. In these things they might think his office to consist in such a degree, that it could not be proper for the great Prophet, the Messias, the Son of God, to condescend to spend his valuable time in laying his hands upon young children. It is said indeed, that Jesus, at the beginning of his ministry, baptized the people ; but then, as St. John observes particularly, he did it not himself but by his disciples :

They might then imagine that these persons were unwelcome to their master, who went about doing good, and was so much taken up with other and higher employments ; they might think it proper to discourage them from resorting to him upon this occasion, lest others should follow their example, and become troublesome to him by their numbers :

Or they might have some dislike of the parents of those children, and think them unworthy of such a favour :

Or they might fancy this to be an useless ceremony, because they had never heard their Master recommend it.

Whatsoever might be the reasons which moved the disciples to reprimand and drive off these petitioners, their Master did by no means approve their behaviour. When Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them; Suffer the little children to come to me, and forbid them not. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.

It was usual with our Saviour, and it is indeed his peculiar manner, to raise moral instruction from every incident and object which came in his way and offered itself to his view. This method of teaching was striking and familiar, and excellently adapted to make a strong impression upon the minds of his hearers, and to fix in their memories his discourses, together with the subjects and circumstances which gave rise to them. Hence also Christians may learn to imitate the example of their Lord in this frame and religious use of the occurrences of life, by which many things seemingly indifferent, and often passed over as such, may be sanctified to good purposes. Thus for example, whilst one views the works of the creation with careless unconcern, or with frivolous curiosity, another sees and adores in them the hand of the great Artificer.

Our Lord then, as he readily condescended, and complied with the honest desire of the parents in blessing their children, so he took occasion also at the same time to acquaint his disciples, and those who were present, with some of the qualifications necessary for those who were present, with some of the qualifications necessary for those who would join themselves to him; a matter of great importance, and highly concerning all those to whom the Gospel should ever be preached. Suffer, says he, the little children to come to me; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

By the kingdom of God is here meant the Church of Christ, into which they who are admitted are entitled, if

if they observe his precepts, to eternal life in the world to come : to enter into the kingdom of God, is to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Our Lord therefore declares, that none are fit to be his followers, unless they possess the dispositions usually observable in young children.

From the text thus far explained, it appears to have been commonly thought by the Jews, that the prayers of pious persons might procure blessings from God upon those for whom they were made. This opinion was entertained by those who brought their children to Christ, and he confirmed them in that opinion by complying so readily with their request. In the New Testament Christians are exhorted to pray for each other, and mention is made of the usefulness and the efficacy of such prayers. St. Paul frequently prays for the brethren to whom he addresses his Epistles, and desires that they also would pray for him : and this practice is well adapted to kindle and cherish that mutual love and charity which is the distinguishing character of Christianity. In the old Testament we find Patriarchs and holy men offering up prayers for their children, for their friends, for their country ; and what regard God shewed to their requests appears in many places of Scripture, and in the examples of Abraham, of Moses, of Job, and of other persons eminent for their piety. In Ezechiel, God, to testify how greatly he was offended at his people, and how firmly resolved to punish them, declares that even though Noah, Daniel, and Job lived amongst them, they should not be able by their intercession to save any besides themselves. So in Jeremiah it is said, upon a like occasion, that though even Moses and Samuel stood before God to make supplication for the people, it should not avail ; and the Prophet is forbidden to pray for them. Thus the greatness of their sin and of the divine displeasure is described in a manner which at the same time shews how ready God is to hear
the

the intercession of the good, and, for their sakes, to shew favour even to those who deserve it not. Under the Mosaic dispensation, though present rewards were promised to obedience, yet the best men were not always distinguished from others by prosperity, nor had they constantly those temporal advantages which command the respect of the world. But that virtue might be reverenced, God by frequently granting the requests which good men offered up to him for others, raised them to a much higher dignity, than power and wealth could ever gain. This therefore is one of the considerable rewards of piety, that the righteous are represented in the Scriptures, not only as the servants, but as the friends of God, as able not only to procure blessings for themselves, but for others also ; and in this appears, what God says to Eli, "Them that honour me, I will honour."

What our Lord says concerning the qualifications required of those who hope to be his disciples, may be misunderstood and wrested to a bad sense. Thus, for example, some may reason upon it ; The doctrine of the text is this in general, that the servants of Christ ought to be like young children. Children are credulous ; they will believe any thing that is told them by their instructors ; Christians ought to have the same dispositions, and to receive with the same submission doctrines relating to religion ; they should believe whatsoever their teachers recommend as necessary to be believed. Children are not capable of judging for themselves ; they ought to be under the direction of their friends ; so ought Christians to resign their judgment to those who have the care of their souls. The powers of reason are weak and unactive in children ; so ought they to be in Christians, as to their spiritual affairs ; they should persuade themselves that it is enough for them to believe, and that the most perfect obedience consists in sacrificing their reason, which hath nothing

to

to do in matters of faith, and only serves to lead into error.

Thus some have reasoned upon the subject, particularly in the Church of Rome, whose favourite doctrine is an implicit submission to the decisions of bold men, who call themselves the Catholic Church, and who pretend to have Infallibility residing amongst them somewhere or other, though where to fix it they know not.

And here let me observe to you, that the Gospel is not calculated for those who either wickedly abuse their reason, or entirely discard it. The political Christian wrests and perverts the Scriptures to his own dishonest purposes; and the Bigot, lying at the mercy of every Impostor, hath in reality no faith at all; for a man can no more believe with another man's faith, than he can satisfy his hunger by seeing another man eat. To both these persons the Gospel shines in vain, as the sun doth to those who are blind, or to those who are shut up in a dark room. But be it observed also, that a modest teachable and tractable temper is equally remote from both these extremes. I should be glad of a guide, if I were travelling in roads with which I was not well acquainted; but if my guide endeavoured to lead me down a precipice, or into the deep waters, I should choose to trust to my own senses, rather than to his.

The meaning of our Saviour's words in the text is not difficult to be found out by those who seek it impartially, and have no indirect ends to serve, and no favourite notion to establish. The doctrine laid down there in general terms, is, that true believers are to be like young children. The question is, In what ought they to resemble them? And the answer to this question is soon discovered, when we consider the qualities which are usually found in young children. They are of two sorts: first, defects and natural imperfections; secondly, amiable and good dispositions.

The

The defects natural to that age are, want of reason, want of judgment, a credulous temper, an easiness to be deluded. It cannot possibly be supposed that our Lord should recommend these defects to men as worthy of their imitation. Hard would be the condition of Christians, if their religion must make them less knowing than they would have been without it, if it obliged them to be like idiots, and to live and die children in the worst sense of the word. The human understanding is indeed confined to narrow bounds, and reason left to itself seldom makes a great progress in divine truths, and God hath revealed to us things which by our own abilities we could not have discovered. But reason, no less than revelation, is a good gift which cometh from above, and is not to be rejected because it cannot search out, and bring to light every truth, or because, like all other things that are good, it may be perverted and abused.

If Religion consists in ignorance and credulity, how shall Christians search the Scriptures, discern between true and false teachers, prove all things, and be ready to give an answer to those who shall ask them a reason of the faith that is in them? These things require a due and diligent exercise of the powers of the mind, and Christians are not only permitted but commanded to cultivate and improve them. Be not children in understanding, says the Apostle; in malice or in wickedness be ye children, but in understanding be men.

Indeed it is too plain to want much proof that the imperfections of children are not Christian accomplishments. Let us consider the amiable qualities and good dispositions which are often observable in children, and which our Lord certainly had in view, when he required of all who would be his followers to resemble young children.

Amongst these we may reckon, in the first place, innocence.

I know

I know there are those who will hardly allow innocence to infants : but I find that Christ and his Apostles have allowed it. It must be acknowledged that the innocence of infants, as it ariseth from an incapacity of transgressing, is a negative quality, which cannot be called, strictly speaking, a good disposition. And yet it is not an imperfection ; it is rather something amiable, and worthy of imitation : a child, in this respect, was in our Saviour's judgment, a proper emblem of a good Christian, whom it behoved to be free from all habits of sin, and in that sense, not to sin at all, that is, not wilfully, sedately, and deliberately.

Another quality observable in Children, which our Lord expected from his followers, was that temper which is opposite to ambition and to an excessive love of this world. The disciples of Christ, like the rest of the Jews, were persuaded that the kingdom of the Messias, was to be temporal. As Christ had chosen them, and admitted them to his service and conversation, they concluded that they should be advanced to the greatest honours in his kingdom. But they were many in number, and could not, as they well supposed, be all equal in dignity. This thought disturbed them ; a desire of pre-eminence possessed their minds, and made them aspire to the best share of their Master's favour, and the most honourable employments under him : they were jealous of each other, and these jealousies sometimes burst out into contention and resentment. They came to Jesus, says St. Matthew, and asked him, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven ? He knowing their thoughts, and the end for which they put this question to him, called a little child, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same

is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. That is, Unless you preserve yourselves free from pride and ambition, and thirst of superiority, you are not fit for my service. My service requires persons who think not highly of themselves, who are not contentious about dignity, who pursue not worldly honour and power, who seek not to set themselves above others, whose great care is, not how high a station they may acquire, but how they may fulfil the duties of the station in which God hath placed them. Of this disposition childhood is a proper emblem. Children are strangers to the desires of wealth and grandeur, and to the arts of acquiring and preserving them: this is a distemper not incident to youth, and seldom felt till the first season of life is past.

The kingdom of Christ was not like other kingdoms: no rewards were promised to his subjects, in this world, none upon which they could certainly depend, those excepted which flow from virtue and a good conscience. His Church was to be in a low and suffering state for a considerable time: none were fit to enter into it, who could not bear disgrace and poverty and sufferings. The highest places there were the most dangerous and laborious; and they who should be chief in that society, were to be the servants of all, to be an example of patience, of self-denial, of humility, of charity; to be entirely occupied in serving others, and not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

Again, In children is usually found an unaffected sincerity, an open simplicity of manners, free from guile and hypocrisy, a heart easily touched with compassion, a readiness to lay aside anger and resentment, and to be reconciled to those who have offended them, and that sort of charity which thinketh no evil of others, and is apt to judge too favourably rather than too severely. These are qualities which are not thought very useful, and are seldom entertained by those who would thrive in the world at any rate: but they are necessary for one who would make the precepts of the Gospel the rule of his

his life ; and we may justly suppose that our Lord intended to require them from his followers, when he exhorted them to imitate young children. They were to pray for their enemies, to forgive and pity them, to return good for evil, to instruct the ignorant, to bear with the weak, to distinguish themselves from all mankind by their condescension and charity, and openly to profess a persecuted religion. This could not be accomplished, unless they were renewed in their minds, and as it were, born again, and free from envy, hatred, dissimulation, and self-interest.

Children are weak and defenceless ; they are also sensible of it, and in any danger fly to their friends, and place an entire confidence in them ; which affords us a lively image of the disposition which a Christian ought to entertain, and of that humility and trust in God, opposite to pride and self-conceit, which he ought to exercise. He will not have a vain opinion of his own abilities ; he will not trust in his own dexterity, prudence, and industry, as if by them he could provide for himself without the blessing of God ; he will not depend upon his own virtue and goodness, as if he were worthy upon that account to receive rewards from God ; he will not rely upon his own constancy and resolution, as if he could acquit himself well under any trials and temptations without the aid of the holy Spirit.

Lastly, In children is commonly found docility, joined to a desire of knowledge : they are usually free from two bad qualities, which where they prevail keep the persons who are infected with them in ignorance ; namely, pride and prejudice.

It is evident that grown persons are on many accounts more capable than children of receiving instruction, and of improving their minds ; they have the advantage of experience, their memory and reasoning are strengthened by exercise ; they are therefore better qualified to perceive the force of an argument, and the evidence of a truth

truth which is explained to them. But if a conceit of their own abilities, with a contempt of those who reason with them, or a fondness for a contrary opinion, hath taken possession of their minds, they will be less able to discern right from wrong than a child ; and the more ingenious and learned they are, the further will they be from forming a just judgment ; for their abilities will only serve to furnish them with subtle cavils, and with objections to the truths which they are not willing to believe, and you may confute them, but not convince them. Young persons, if they have no bias, will much sooner perceive a truth which is set before them, and assent to it, than those of more years, who are stubborn and vain, or prepossessed in favour of a contrary doctrine.

When our Lord said in the text that they only should enter into his kingdom who were only like young children, amongst other amiable qualities discoverable in that age, he certainly intended to recommend to men a willingness and aptness to receive instruction, and a mind free from pride and prejudice. Indeed it seems very probable that he had this particularly in view, if we consider the opposition which he experienced in the discharge of his ministry.

It appears that the most considerable persons of his nation, in learning, rank, and authority, were the great opposers of Christ. They had conceited notions of their national privileges, and wanted a triumphant Messias ; they held many opinions, both speculative and practical, different from the doctrines taught by Christ ; they pretended to great skill in religious learning ; they admired their own penetration and wisdom ; they supposed themselves fully qualified to teach others, and so accomplished as to need no instruction ; they scorned to become disciples of Christ, and to converse with those poor and illiterate persons whom he had chosen for his companions ; they were ambitious and vainglorious,

rious, selfish and covetous ; they observed the ritual law and had the outside of religion, and were full of spiritual pride and arrogant notions of their own sanctity. To such persons the Gospel was preached in vain, exhortations were lost upon them, reproofs exasperated them, and nothing less than a thorough change could qualify them to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Our Lord, having in view these prejudices of the Jews and the present and future effects of them, takes occasion to declare that he required, as a previous condition, the disposition of children in those who would join themselves to him. He demanded a teachable and a tractable temper, and this temper is very different from credulity. To be credulous is to believe without evidence, a thing which our Lord not only never required, but greatly disapproved. The first thing to be considered by an honest and prudent man was, whether Christ were a prophet and a messenger sent from God. Here Christ appealed to their reason and to their senses, whether he did not answer the character of the Messias as it stood in the prophetic writings, whither he did not go about doing good, and working miracles, and whether these were not sufficient proofs of his mission.

These things being clear, the consequence was clear, than men ought to hear him with attention and reverence, to think him wiser than themselves, not to give way to a contentious cavilling humour, but to believe his doctrines, unless he were to teach manifest immoralities, or palpable contradictions.

We are, I presume, free from this fault, of which we find so many of the Jews to have been guilty. We believe in Christ, we assent to his doctrines, we oppose not our judgment to his, we call not his wisdom and veracity in question. But let us not esteem ourselves too much upon this account. Our case is different from the case of those to whom the Gospel was first preached.

They

They were bred up in another persuasion, they had many prejudices to conquer, and often as many temporal advantages to resign, before they could be converted. We contend not with the same difficulties. We are Christians by education; and if we have prejudices, they are usually on the side of revelation. We have the more reason to remember that our belief is of no value, if it be not accompanied with an obedience to the precepts of Him, whom we call our Lord. If we perform not what we think and own to be his will, we shew that we are Christians by chance and custom, or rather that we have no title to that name, and therefore none to the rewards which are promised to those who embrace the Gospel with a careful endeavour to live suitably to its directions.

S E R M O N XXVIII.

M A T T H. V. 3, 4.

Blessed are the poor in spirit ; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn ; for they shall be comforted, &c.

OUR Saviour thus begins and introduces his Discourse upon the mount with several short sentences in praise of certain virtues and pious dispositions. I shall first endeavour to illustrate them in more or fewer words, according as they require, and then make some general remarks upon them.

I. Blessed are the poor in spirit ; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

What we call a literal and a figurative way of speaking, is by Jewish writers called flesh and spirit. To be poor, according to the flesh, or in the literal sense, is to be destitute of the necessaries of life. To be poor in spirit, or poor in a figurative sense, may perhaps mean, to be free from an inordinate love, or vehement desire of riches, to be contented if we have them not, and patiently to bear even the lowest state of indigence ; and if we have wealth, to value it no more than it deserves, that so we may be ready decently and cheerfully to resign up any part of it, or the whole, if he who gave it should require it.

To

To be poor in spirit means also, in Jewish phrase, to be humble and lowly-minded; nor is this interpretation very remote from the former.

A wise indifference and a moderate affection towards the things of the present world, is represented by our Saviour as a blessed temper, and worthy of a future reward. Without such a disposition none could become his disciples, and embrace the low state to which he invited them; and therefore it is more than once required and recommended in this discourse upon the mount.

To those who are thus poor is promised the kingdom of God, an abundance of heavenly riches, such as an admission into the Church, remission of sins, the knowledge of divine truths, the wealth of a contented mind, the gifts of the holy Spirit, and eternal happiness hereafter.

Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.

That is, say some, Blessed are they who are truly penitent, and mourn for their sins, for they shall be comforted with the assurance of pardon, and the hope of future happiness. This interpretation is not improbable; but as the words, they that mourn, are general, a wider sense also may be added to them; Blessed are they who endure afflictions of any kind with an humble submission to the divine Providence: but still more blessed, if their sorrows and the hardships which they undergo are for the sake of duty and religion. God will certainly support them under their distress, and hereafter they shall rest for ever in those mansions where no sorrow enters.

Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.

Here our Saviour alludes to the words of David in the Psalms; Yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; but the meek shall inherit the earth.—Wait on the Lord—and he shall exalt thee to inherit the earth:

Which

Which promises relating plainly to a quiet possession of the land of Canaan, the words of our Lord also may bear a sense not different, and have some view even to temporal benefits. Blessed are they who are of a gentle, harmless, and patient temper, who are not haughty and turbulent, or eager of worldly honours, who can forgive injuries, and can give up part of their right for the sake of peace. They shall inherit the earth; they, by the providence of God; and according to the common course of things, will probably find friends and protectors, escape injuries, and enjoy quietly their possessions, and the fruits of their honest industry. Though they lay not up for themselves great treasures, nor rise to high stations, but in these arts are much inferior to many of the crafty and enterprising children of this world, yet neither are they in equal danger of falling and of being stripped of all. No promise is here made to the meek of wealth and power and worldly honours, nor indeed are these things their ordinary portion, but only of the necessaries of life, without strife, disquiet, or remorse. This will usually be the blessing bestowed upon them; and in case of persecution, if this reward should fail, it will be made up in the next state, in that new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Thus the temporal promises in the Scriptures of the Old Testament may be understood in a sublimer and spiritual manner, and it is suitable to the tenor of the Gospel so to interpret them, and to give this sense to our Saviour's promise.

These words, Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth, are taken, as we said before, from the Psalms, where they relate to a quiet possession of the land of Canaan; and we may farther observe, that after our Lord's death and resurrection the unconverted Jews by their feditious and wicked behaviour ruined themselves and their country; but the Jews who were Chris-

tians, and of a quiet and peaceable disposition, escaped those evils, retired from Jerusalem, as Christ had warned them to do, before the siege; and after the city was destroyed, and the enemies were departed, returned and dwelt there in tranquillity. Then was the promise that the meek should inherit the earth, the land of Canaan, made good: and it is not improbable that our Lord might have this event also in his view, when he declared what great advantages meekness should find even in this world.

Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

That is; Blessed are they who, having a true sense of their own defects and spiritual wants, and of the excellence of religion, desire above all things to be assisted and instructed in the performance of their duty, and to become eminent in piety; and who are as industrious and active in this wise pursuit, as men oppressed with hunger and thirst are glad to satisfy those natural appetites. So rational and so earnest a desire shall never be disappointed; they shall become righteous, and enjoy the present and the future rewards of righteousness.

Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.

They who shew humanity and charity upon all proper occasions, and can forgive injuries, may expect to find that favour and mercy from God which they shew to men. He will provide for them, and forgive them their trespasses. Though this be the sense of the words, They shall obtain mercy, yet there is no necessity absolutely to exclude another sense which may be joined to it, that they shall obtain mercy and forbearance and kindness from men, as well as from God; since this is, for the most part, the result and the recompence of such a behaviour.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

They

They whose hearts are free from impurity, deceitfulness, and hypocrisy, and whose designs and desires are holy and upright, will entertain just notions of God and of religion, and a just persuasion that he approves and loves them, and enjoy his favourable influences; and hereafter they shall have a nearer access to his glorious presence, and that fulness of joy which shall attend it.

Blessed are the peace-makers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Sweet is the disposition, and happy is the occupation, of those who desire the welfare of all men, who study to compose and allay contention and discord, to extinguish wrath, malice, bitter zeal, and persecution, and to promote universal peace, friendship, and forbearance: Such persons imitate the most amiable and glorious perfection of the divine nature, goodness and love; such God acknowledges for his children, and consequently they must be happy, happy in being like God, who is called the God of peace, and happy in the peace of mind, serenity of conscience, and other rewards, which their heavenly Father will confer upon them.

Lastly; Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Greater love can no man shew to God and to Christ, than to bear what is disagreeable and offensive to human nature, to lose what in itself is innocent and convenient, and to forego all the outward comforts of life, rather than offend him; to profess his faith and his hope with courage and constancy in the face of a wicked world, and not to be deterred by scorn, contempt, contumelies, wrongs, insults, injuries, losses, and persecutions, which his behaviour will draw upon him. Such a person is truly a servant of God, and a disciple of Christ, and will receive an ample and a distinguished reward in the kingdom of heaven.

II. I proceed to some general remarks upon the foregoing doctrines.

1. It was our Saviour's custom to raise matter of instruction and of moral reflection from the occasion, the place, the circumstances, or the objects which presented themselves to him. This manner of discoursing was peculiar to him, and whosoever carefully peruses the Gospel will find perpetual instances of it.

He went up into a mountain, says St. Matthew, and recollecting that the law of Moses was given from mount Sinai; he likewise gave his new law from this mountain.

Recollecting that God had commanded the Israelites to pronounce in a solemn manner blessings on the righteous from mount Gerizim, and curses upon the wicked from mount Ebal, he also began his discourses with blessings on the good, to which, as we find in St. Luke, he afterwards added woes to the wicked.

Recollecting also that the book of Psalms, which was a kind of Manual of devotion for the Jews, began with blessings; Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly; he also ushered in his precepts with a blessing on such men.

2. If there be any part of the New Testament which deserves a more serious consideration than the rest, it must needs be our Saviour's discourse upon the mount, delivered in St. Matthew's Gospel, which contains the sum and substance of Christian religion. In it our Lord explains morality, condemns several Jewish opinions, commands some things which the Law of Moses did not require, and forbids some things which it permitted. He enables us to resolve a question which had exercised and embarrassed and divided the wise and the learned, namely what is the *Chief Good* of man, and consequently what is the great end which man should always have in view? The chief good of man, as it may easily be collected from this discourse of our Lord, is eternal happiness

ness in the life to come, and in this present life peace of mind, and the advantages flowing from it. Whatsoever therefore tends to this is good, and what may deprive us of it is evil. To make his hearers more attentive, Christ begins his discourse with some short and remarkable sentences, in commendation of certain neglected virtues, sentences which may be called *Christian Paradoxes*, in which he declares those persons most happy, who according to the estimation of the world are most miserable.

3. The rewards annexed here by our Saviour to several virtues, though variously expressed, mean the same thing, namely, present or future happiness, or both: but they are varied for the sake of elegance, and to raise the attention, and to fix themselves upon the mind of the hearer or reader; and therefore there is a likeness or an opposition between the thing recommended and the reward promised to it. There is a likeness between the duty and the recompence, as when to those who are of a quiet temper is promised the quiet possession of the necessaries of life; to those who are merciful, mercy and pardon; to those who are pure and holy in heart, the knowledge of the pure and holy God, and the enjoyment of his favour and assistance; to those who promote peace and love amongst men, the approbation of the God of peace and love, and the honour of being his children. There is an opposition between them, as when to the poor in spirit are promised true and heavenly riches; to those who mourn, comfort and joy; to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, spiritual food which shall fully satisfy them; to those who are reduced to the lowest state by the iniquity of men, and are deprived of all for the sake of religion, scepters and crowns, and an everlasting kingdom.

4. It has been observed, that though our Saviour here annexes blessedness and eternal life to the practice of single virtues, yet we should understand these promises to

to be founded upon a supposition that such persons take care not to be deficient in the rest of their duty. To think otherways would be to fall into a gross mistake, a mistake which, as we are told, was often to be found amongst the Jews. Their teachers recommended the exact performance of some great commandment, as the means of being excused for transgressing other divine laws; and this great commandment, suitably to their trifling genius, was sometimes the law of the sabbath, or of sacrifices, or of tythes, some ritual institution. Into the same indiscretion, to say no worse of it, some Christians have fallen, when, magnifying single Christian virtues, charity for instance as it means liberality, they have so spoken of alms giving, as if by a constant practice of it men might compound with God for a constant neglect or an habitual violation of some other duties.

But the morality of our Saviour is not such. It is free, as from severe rigour, so from weak indulgence. The Gospel treats us as men, frail and fallible creatures. It does not suppose that we can arrive at sinless perfection, and it continually offers us pardon upon repentance and amendment; but it expects a sincere endeavour to fulfil all righteousness, allowing no habitual neglect or presumptuous contempt of any precept. Who-soever shall break the least of these moral commandments and shall teach men to do so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven, he shall be no disciple of Christ.

And indeed the thing speaks itself; for since a promise of God's favour and future rewards is here made, not to the merciful only, but to the meek, to the pure in heart, to the peace-makers, to the poor in spirit, to the lovers of righteousness, we ought to be not only merciful, but meek, and pure in heart, and in word, desirous of excelling in every thing that our Saviour recommends. To this we may add, that several of these

virtues

virtues are of so extensive a nature, that by easy consequence they may imply the whole of religion. Such are poverty in spirit, hungring and thirsting after righteousness, purity of heart, and a patient enduring of sufferings for the sake of Christ.

5. Our Saviour seems to have had it in his view to contradict the common notions of the Jews, especially of their rulers and teachers, of the Scribes and Pharisees and chief Priests, who at that time were corrupted to a great degree, both in speculation and in practice. To worldly-mindedness they were remarkably addicted; temporal recompences they thought to be the chief motive to obedience; obedience they made to consist principally in the observance of ceremonial duties and traditional precepts; poverty and contempt they esteemed the greatest of evils; purity they placed in bodily purifications; concerning purity of mind they had mean notions, imagining that they were not accountable to God for their evil thoughts and designs, unless they brake out into actions; to universal love and benevolence they were perfect strangers, and had a cordial hatred for all who differed from them in religion; a suffering and oppressed condition they detested as intolerable; a meek and a peaceable temper was scarcely to be found amongst them, but a turbulent spirit of faction and sedition prevailed, and at last completed their ruin, as it will produce the ruin of any other nation.

In opposition to the doctrines and practices of these loose moralists and false guides, our Lord insists upon moderate affections towards the things of this world, and a contempt of them when they interfere with religion, upon a patient expectation of a future and distant reward, upon purity of heart, upon an ardent love of piety and desire of excelling in it, upon a meek and peaceable, a charitable and benevolent temper, and recommends a low and suffering state humbly endured for righteousness sake.

6. Lastly;

6. Lastly; let us observe that our Saviour not only contradicts the opinions of the Jews, but also several notions too common and prevalent amongst many of those who pretend to have his doctrine in high veneration. It seems to be a controversy between him and us wherein true happiness consists. He has here told us what sort of persons he accounts to be blessed: but it is to be feared that many Christians, though not in words, yet silently in the judgment of their hearts, and openly in their conduct, contradict his doctrine upon this point. In general they acknowledge the truth of all that he taught; but, by an illusion which is too common, they entertain sentiments not reconcileable with this acknowledgement. To see whether they do or no, let us once more consider in what our Lord places happiness, to what state of life, and to what disposition of mind, he declares it to belong. Let us imagine to ourselves a Christian to whom all that he has said might be applied; for such a person must in his account be eminently blessed. The Christian then who would exactly answer our Lord's description, desires above all things to excel in goodness; his mind is purified from irregular affections; the things of this world he values no farther than as they supply the wants of nature, or put it in his power to be serviceable to the needy and deserving; though he excuses no faults in himself, he excuses them in others, and is ready to forgive those who trespass against him; he loves his neighbour, that, is every man, as himself; he is not exempted by divine providence from calamities; he is often exercised with afflictions, which he bears with exemplary patience and meek resignation; he lives in times of persecution, but he is not ashamed or afraid of making open profession of his faith, for which he is insulted, calumniated, scorned,

ed, and punished, and at last lays down his life for the sake of Christ.

Here is not only a good, but a happy man, in the opinion of him who was best able to judge of goodness and of happiness; and the truth of this assertion must appear evident and undeniable, if we consider that the Almighty is able and willing to recompense a faithful servant ten-thousand-fold for any thing that he shall do or suffer upon his account, and that such a person even at present, and in the worst situation, has many solid advantages and durable blessings: he has the pleasing consciousness of adhering to virtue, the calm composure and serious pleasure that accompanies such a behaviour, the approbation of all judicious and religious persons, the satisfaction of setting a good example by which he may be useful to the world both living and dead, the favour of God, his assistance to support and strengthen him, and a reasonable hope of eternal peace and joy when his few days of trial are past, and the storm of adversity is over-blown.

And yet there are persons who calling themselves Christians, and yielding an assent, that is, a superficial and confused kind of assent to the Gospel, believe not these things, or act as if they believe them not. They cannot conceive how such a person can be happy: they would indeed honour and admire and praise him; but upon no account would they be placed in his condition. They would willingly be happy in both worlds; and as to the present, ease and pleasure is their principal care and concern. But they mistake the nature of happiness, and the way to it. Whosoever inmoderately loves the world and the things of the world, and hungers and thirsts after them, takes a sure method to be unhappy; the evils of life visit him, his wants increase upon him, his patience and resolution grow weak, he cannot bear a disappointment, every sorrow fits heavy upon his soul, every

every calamity wounds him deeply, and the fear of death taints all his pleasures.

We have seen who is the good and happy man in the estimation of our Lord. I shall not assert that it is our duty to wish that we were in all respects and circumstances like such a person. We are not commanded to desire and to pray for poverty, contempt, afflictions, and persecutions; there are other ways to heaven besides martyrdom, and we know who it was that said, If it be possible, let this cup pass from me. But thus much is certain, that it is better to be amended by affliction, than by too much prosperity to grow regardless of our everlasting concerns; it is better to suffer wrongs and injuries than to commit them; it is better to be the lowest, the poorest, the most neglected and despised, than to have our hearts and our principles corrupted by wealth and power; it is better to lose all for the sake of Christ, than to be disowned by him at the day of judgment.

May the desires of our hearts correspond to these determinations of our reason; and if worldly happiness of any sort would prove our ruin, be it far from us, may we for ever be strangers to it!

S E R M O N XXIX.

I T I M. iv. 8.

Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

TH E words of the text are plain, and the meaning of them is apparently this, that piety is most advantageous, because God hath assured us that they who serve him shall be rewarded for it both in this life and in the next. But this plain assertion seems, so far as it relates to the temporal rewards of piety, somewhat hard to be justified when compared either with fact and common experience, or with abundance of passages in Scripture. To shew the truth of it, we will first consider what God hath promised to piety in the present life, and secondly prove that his promises rightly understood are actually fulfilled.

I. Let us consider what God hath promised to piety in the present life.

St. Paul says in the text concerning godliness, that it has the promise of the life that now is, by which expression he refers either to the promises of temporal rewards, which are contained in the Old Testament, or to those which were afterwards made by our Saviour; he refers, I say, either to the one or to the other, but most probably to both.

If

If we consult the Old Testament, we find many assurances of worldly prosperity to the good, or, which is all one, affirmations that piety ever carries along with it a present reward. From these passages we may observe, that to the righteous a promise is made of success in their designs, of guidance and direction in their ways and undertakings, of supply in their wants and necessities, of protection in dangers, of support in afflictions, of deliverance from trouble, of peace and quiet, of joy and cheerfulness, of honour and reputation, of wealth and prosperity, and of a good name after death. It is reasonable to suppose, that St. Paul had these declarations in view, when he said that godliness has a promise of the life which now is, and that he thought not the promise so confined to the Jewish nation, as not to be extended in some measure to all good men in all times and places.

Let us now see what promises of this kind are contained in the Gospel.

Our Lord promises to his servants the necessaries of life in these words : Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. In his sermon upon the mount he says ; Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth ; the meaning of which seems to be, that they who are of a peaceable and quiet disposition shall enjoy what is needful with great tranquillity and contentedness. He says to his disciples ; There is no man who hath left house, or brethren, or sister, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred fold more now in this time, houses and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions ; and in the world to come eternal life. That is ; he who for my sake is persecuted and deprived of his possessions, is forsaken and hated by all his relations, shall have it abundantly made up to him ; he shall find those Christians

to whom he joins himself more affectionate, and more charitable than the friends would have been whom he has lost, he shall be happier in the approbation of his own mind than he was before, and in the end shall obtain eternal life.

Our Lord proposes, as a reward, to his disciples, peace of mind, and joy and comfort through the influences of the holy Ghost. Let not your heart be troubled. I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter; that he may abide with you for ever. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. These promises belong to all Christians. It is said of the first believers, that they were filled with joy and gladness. St. Paul affirms, that this joy was not destroyed by any afflictions which they endured; we are sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; and he exhorts believers to rejoice evermore. The same Apostle says to the Ephesians: Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour thy Father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long upon the earth. From which place it seems to appear, that he thought this promise to be extended in some measure to all who would obey the precept, and proposed to converted Gentiles no less than to Jews; and it is observable that he gives the sense, but drops and alters the words of the commandment, which run thus—that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and relate only to the Jews; instead of which St. Paul says,—that thou mayest live long upon the earth.

St. Peter declares, that virtue will usually secure us from injuries, and that a pious and peaceable disposition produces temporal happiness. Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? He that will love life, and see good days, Let him refrain

strain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile. Let him eschew evil, and do good ; let him seek peace and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers. Such are the promises in the holy Scriptures concerning the temporal rewards of godliness.

II. We are secondly to consider how these promises are made good to the righteous.

And here we are surrounded with objections which press upon us from all sides, objections from the present state of things, from the history of past ages, and from the Scriptures themselves.

The most careless observation will shew us much misery and trouble falling indifferently upon the good and bad, and from which the most religious life can give no security. We see some suffering hardships, because they are virtuous, and will not sacrifice their conscience to their present interest.

If we look back into the history of past ages, we find that it was ever so, and that the same complaints have been always made.

If we consult the opinion of grave and wise men, we find many of them in all times setting forth the evils of human life in strong terms, and declaring that more trouble than satisfaction is to be expected in our passage through this world.

If we peruse the books of the Old Testament we find there is also the same observations, that man is born to trouble, that all is vanity, and that there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked.

If we examine the history of God's people, amongst those who have gone through affliction, we find patriarchs, as Abraham, exposed to ill usage, and wandering about without any settled home, and Jacob sadly and justly complaining that the days of his pilgrimage had been few and evil ; we find prophets, as Moses, conducting a stubborn and ungrateful people ; Elijah hiding

hiding himself in deserts, weary of his life, and requesting of God to let him die ; Jeremiah overwhelmed with trouble, and cursing the hour in which he was born ; we find virtuous kings, as Josiah, cut off in the flower of his age, and falling in battle, of whom it is said, that like unto him there was no king before him that turned to the Lord with all his heart, neither after him arose there any like him ; we find good men delivered over to the malice of the ungodly, who had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, of bonds and imprisonment, who were stoned, were sawed asunder, were slain with the sword, who wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy ; who wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens, and in caves of the earth.

In the New Testament we have examples of oppressed and persecuted virtue in John the Baptist, in the disciples of our Lord, and in the first Christians. Our Saviour says to his followers : They shall deliver you up to the councils, and scourge you in their synagogues, and ye shall be brought before governors and kings, and ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake : yea the time shall come, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he doth God service. How this prediction was fulfilled, we may learn from St. Paul. I think, says he, that God hath set forth us the Apostles last, as it were appointed to death : for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to Angels, and to men. Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place, and labour working with our hands ; being reviled, we bleſs ; being persecuted, we suffer it ; being defamed, we entreat ; we are made as the filth of the world, and are the off-scowering of all things unto this day.

In

In the discourses of Christ and the writings of the Apostles we are told that such is the lot of the servants of God, that the world will hate them, that they must expect to bear the cross, to pass through tribulation, and suffer persecution of one kind or other, if they will live a godly life.

These things being so, what becomes of the promise that piety shall receive a present reward, and how shall we confirm the truth of it against such a cloud of witnesses, and so much stubborn matter of fact?

This is what we must now endeavour to do, by setting it in a right light.

1. By these declarations in Scripture that godliness has its reward in this life is not meant that every good person shall enjoy perfect happiness here below, which is not only contrary to experience, but seems altogether impossible.

If a man were to give a loose to his imagination and desires, he might represent to himself many things in the possession of which he would find great satisfaction, but which he has no prospect, or a very uncertain prospect, of obtaining. I speak not of the cravings of a disorderly and vicious appetite, but of those wishes which a virtuous man might own without shame.

Such a person would be glad to have his senses and his passions in perfect submission to his reason, that he might be ever ready to do what is right, and to avoid what is evil, without any uneasy struggles between duty and inclination; but man will never acquire this command over himself, whilst he is in a state of trial and surrounded with temptations.

He would be well pleased if he could enlarge the compass of his knowledge, and clear up many difficulties in natural and revealed religion which perplex him, and be able to form a just judgment upon points in which wise, and good, and learned, and inquisitive

men

men have differed very widely; but he finds this to surpass his abilities.

He would, if it were left to his choice, possess an uninterrupted state of health; for no one can take delight in sickness and pain: but this is not to be expected whilst the soul dwells in a body tending of itself to decay and dissolution, and exposed to so many evils from without.

He would cheerfully accept the nature and the perfections of an Angel, could be willing to be changed from mortal to immortal, and like those few recorded in Scripture, ascend up to heaven, and not to leave his body in the grave; for though necessity may teach a wise man to submit decently to death, though religion may enable him to undergo it with a greater degree of resignation and constancy, yet human nature would shun it and must entertain some dislike of it.

Again: Though his desires be moderate, and he sets no value upon those superfluities in which many place their chief happiness, he would prefer a state of independence and a possession of the necessaries of life to extreme poverty; and yet it is possible that the latter may be his portion.

He is taught to pray that God's kingdom may come, and that his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; he would rejoice to see virtue and religion prevail every where and flourish more and more; but he may see much impiety, and immorality, and cold indifference, and fierce contention, and zeal for trifles, and error, and ignorance; and this may raise in him an indignation and a compassion which are not consistent with true happiness.

Lastly, It must be his earnest desire that his friends, his relations, his family, may escape the great corruption which is in the world, and spend their days wisely and religiously; but this most commendable desire may be disappointed, and his daily endeavours to accomplish

it may prove unsuccessful. This of all the calamities to which the good are exposed seems without exception to be the most grievous ; and yet it is a calamity from which the most consummate piety cannot always protect us.

Hence it appears that complete happiness is not to be obtained in this life ; and therefore when we speak of the temporal reward of righteousness, we must not suppose it to comprehend every thing which reason would represent to be good and desireable, and which might be innocently pursued and possessed. We must reckon that person sufficiently happy who passes his days with tolerable ease and satisfaction.

2. Temporal rewards are promised to piety : and if all those who call themselves Christians were influenced by these and other proper motives to live suitably to the religion which they profess, it would manifestly appear that godliness is profitable unto all things ; if any nation would be eminently virtuous, it would be distinguished from others by many temporal advantages ; if any society entertained just and honourable notions of God, if they loved their neighbours as themselves, if they were sober, temperate, frugal and industrious, if they were honest without compulsion, through principles of honour and virtue, if they preferred a good name to pleasures, riches, or power, and the public interest to their private profit, if they would think and act thus, they would escape more than half the evils which plague mankind.

It has been pretended that private vices are beneficial to society ; but the history of the world contradicts this weak and wicked notion, and assures us that all commonwealths have for the most part been prosperous proportionably to their national virtues ; and that the Jews in particular, when they observed the laws of God, and were ruled by pious governors, subdued their enemies, and enjoyed an affluence of all good things.

But

But though much of the benefit which might be reaped from piety is lost to the world by the perverseness of the wicked, and though the righteous by dwelling with them are often sufferers upon their account; yet the promises made to godliness are personal, and therefore we may, in the most disorderly state of things, expect advantages from it, of which none shall be able to deprive us: for,

3. Virtue has a natural tendency to promote happiness, and to remove from us many evils. A good life produces the testimony of a good conscience, hope of a future reward, cheerfulness, resignation to God's will, reliance upon his providence, patience under adverse circumstances, and a power of regulating the passions.

A just, generous, humble, and charitable behaviour usually produces returns of civility and of good offices, secures from enemies, or wins them over, or makes their malice ineffectual and contemptible, raises up faithful friends, establishes a firm and lasting reputation, commands respect and esteem, and makes men prosper in their callings.

Temperance and industry commonly preserve health of body and of mind, enable us to procure, to keep, to enjoy, what is necessary, and to despise what is superfluous.

As these are the natural fruits of goodness, it may very well be said in Scripture that it has a reward here, because it often produces these effects, and will always produce them, unless violently disturbed and hindered by other causes interposing.

We may as truly assert in general that piety produces happiness, as we affirm that seed sown in good ground brings forth fruit in due time, though blasts and intemperate seasons and other accidents may destroy it. In like manner godliness is profitable unto all things and yet the temperate may be afflicted with diseases, the virtuous may be injured and persecuted by the wicked,

by those whom they never offended, they may be forsaken and unkindly used by those whom they have obliged, they may be exposed to slander and calumny, public calamities may befall the nation to which they belong, and they may be involved in those general evils; good men who have been guilty of some great offences may suffer as long as they live, and bear the bad effects of their former transgressions, which was the case of David, and many troubles may fall indifferently upon the righteous and wicked.

4. The promises made to godliness in the New Testament are for the most part duly fulfilled.

As to the future rewards of righteousness, they were certainly the hope and expectation of all good men in all ages of the world. But in the Gospel, where life and immortality are more clearly revealed than in the Old Testament, fewer temporal blessings are set before us as motives to obedience.

Long life is not absolutely promised us, because we are taught that not how long we live, but how well we live, ought to be our chief care, that a life cannot be too short which is spent in a regular obedience to God, nor a death untimely which conducts to perpetual happiness.

Riches are not promised to us, because we are taught that the life of man consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses, and that food and raiment and a contented mind is great wealth.

An exemption from common calamities is not promised to us, because we are taught that afflictions are often divine favours, very useful to us, and means to make us better and wiser.

The promises given to us are peace of mind and joy in the holy Ghost, with a supply of the things absolutely needful for our subsistence. True it is that all who call themselves Christians possess them not; but the question is, whether the fault be not in them, and whether

whether by their imprudent conduct and by many defects they deprive not themselves of God's favour and support. These promises are made to those who are truly religious; and if a person be such, his conscience will speak peace to him at all times, and his hopes and expectation of future happiness will enable him to bear with courage and constancy inconveniences and disappointments under which a worldly and vicious mind would sink and despond. It is possible indeed that he may be deprived even of necessaries, if he lives in times of great distress or of persecution; else it is very uncommon to find one, who through the course of his life has been pious, sober, just, merciful, civil, and industrious, so disappointed in all his undertakings, and so neglected by the world, as to want bread.

5. It is certainly more advantageous to be virtuous than to be wicked even in this life, and in that sense godliness has its reward here.

Virtue is apt to produce and to secure to us all the happiness which we can reasonably expect in a state of trial; vice in its own nature tends to make our condition worse than it would else be; and so far the advantage is on the side of virtue.

Goodness, being joined to the favour of God, carries with it the hope of eternal life, which is a cheerful thing; vice begets the dread of punishment, unless it be constantly attended with unbelief, and with a stupid carelessness about futurity, which is not so common; and here also the advantage is on the side of religion.

The ordinary calamities and troubles waiting on mortality fall upon the good and the bad: but the good bear them best, and feel them least. The wicked have nothing to comfort and sustain them in those evil days. If their conscience be then awakened and the terrors of God set themselves in array against them, the expectation of something worse torments them more than their present

present sufferings, which they know to be only the beginning of sorrows. Or if they are completely and consistently wicked, and persuaded that there is no future state and no God, they have not any remedy to apply to their pain, except these maxims, that what cannot be avoided should be taken patiently, and that the more quietly it is endured, the less grievous is the sense of it; which are indeed truths, but truths affording small comfort to a miserable being.

6. Lastly we may observe that there is more contentment and happiness amongst the good than we usually imagine.

This world is a place where innumerable evils abound, of which every one must expect to receive his share and bear his burden. It was not designed for our home, nor has it accommodations with which an immortal mind can rest thoroughly satisfied. All this is true; but it is true also that there is much good mixed with this evil, and that it is the temper more than the outward circumstances which make us pass our days agreeably or disagreeably. There are therefore persons of all ranks, who upon the whole may be said to be tolerably happy. There are some in eminent stations, who, obedient to God and useful to mankind, have as much temporal prosperity as any wise and good man would wish, and there are more, who living in silence, and escaping public observation, enjoy a calm rarely to be found in an higher condition. Such there are now without question, and such there have been in all past ages, whose lives are not recorded in history, which is usually the register of the vices and follies and calamities of mankind; men who in an innocent sense deceived the world, who quietly spent their days in the service of Virtue, and received from her rewards which are neither felt nor understood by the wicked.

Thus

S E R M O N XXIX. 375

Thus it appears to be, with proper restrictions and limitations, a true saying, that godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N XXX,

E P H E S. iv. 29.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.

A RULE is here given for our conversation, which consists of two parts; of a prohibition, and of a command. Nothing must proceed out of our mouths, that is immoral; here is the prohibition: on the contrary, our discourse ought to be sober, virtuous, and tending to promote piety in those with whom we converse; here is the command.

Common sense will teach us to interpret the prohibition strictly, and the direction with a reasonable latitude. No excuse can be made for corrupt communication, for vicious discourse, and no circumstances can render it tolerable. But discourse which is good, which edifies, tends to improve the hearers both in knowledge and in piety, cannot be the only and the constant employment of the tongue; and therefore he who often and upon all proper occasions useth such discourse, may be supposed to observe all that is intended by the Apostle.

There have been Interpreters who, in explaining the passages of Scripture relating to the government of the tongue,

tongue, are too rigid and scrupulous. It is by no means a judicious and profitable way of expounding and enforcing such precepts to carry them to the utmost strictness that the words will admit. Exhortations of this kind will probably lose their effect, and be received as the declamatory rhetoric of Teachers who neither perform nor even believe what they say.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth ; but that which is good.

This text and the common practice of the world are so far at variance, to treat the subject in such a manner as neither to require too much nor too little ; neither to make the precept appear impracticable by morose interpretations, nor to explain it away by large concessions. Let us try whether we can avoid the one and the other extreme ; remembering this, that when there is any competition between duty and custom, Fashion must give place to Reason, and not Reason to Fashion.

The abuses of speech and the faults committed in conversation are numerous. We will take notice of those which are the most striking and considerable, and conclude with some general remarks upon the subject.

I. Our discourse ought at all times to be free from profaneness, from speaking contemptuously of God and religion, from ridiculing things serious and sacred, from excusing, praising, and encouraging vice and immorality.

As this is a crime of which no one can be guilty, who hath the least remains of honesty and goodness, it seems not necessary to say much about it to a Christian audience. Such persons should consider, but consideration dwelleth not with them, that if they believe a Deity and a providence, they are guilty of one of the most heinous crimes and egregious follies that can be imagined ; and if they be Atheists, even atheism, though

though it were true doctrine, would not justify such licentious discourse, because it is an insult upon mankind, and very pernicious to the worldly interests of civil society. They must expect at least to be despised and abhorred by all sober and virtuous persons, and indeed by all well-bred and civilized persons. If these motives will not weigh with them, they must be left as incurable. I fear not God, nor regard man, says the unjust Judge in the Gospel. These indeed are two bad qualities, which usually go together.

2. Another fault, from which our conversation ought to be free, is immodest language. Let no corrupt communication proceed from you. The word *corrupt* relates chiefly and more particularly to lewd and immodest discourse, concerning which St. Paul says in another place, Let it not be named. This suggests a caution, that decent expressions be used even in the censuring of it. Many writers, not only Pagan but Christian, have reproved lewdness in a way that deserved reproof itself, and was not to be excused by the frivolous pretence of a good intention. If such a thing could be supposed, if there was in it an honest design, there was also a wretched want of discretion. I shall therefore only observe concerning this fault, that in common estimation it passeth for ill manners, and that in Scripture it is constantly represented as a crime to which whosoever addicteth himself is a reprobate, and hath no inheritance in the kingdom of God.

“ Approaches to indecent discourse are dangerous,” says Epictetus. “ Whenever therefore any thing of this sort happens, if there be a proper opportunity, rebuke him who makes advances that way: or at least, by silence, and blushing, and a forbidding look, shew yourself to be displeased at such talk (*a*).”

This

(*a*) Enchir. 55. See Cicero, Epist. ad Famil. ix. 22.

This censure (*b*) *filthy communication* is the more remarkable, as coming from a Stoic Philosopher; since the men of that sect scrupled not to use broad language, and to call things by their names.

3. In conversation, swearing is to be avoided, under which may be included curses and imprecations on ourselves and others. There is no occasion to use many words to shew the folly and heinousness of this offence: every one knows that our Lord hath in a most solemn and positive manner forbidden it, that there is neither pleasure nor profit in it, and that the best apology a man can offer for it is, that he is betrayed into it by passion; which is only to make one fault an excuse for another.

4. In our conversation, lying is to be avoided, that is, an endeavour to deceive others, by making them believe that to be true, which we know or think to be false. This is allowed to be, generally speaking, mean and base, and a scandalous abuse of speech, and is strictly forbidden in Scripture; and yet it is a fault more common than those which we have mentioned. There are indeed many temptations to it, and there are few sins which will not directly lead us into it; for when a man hath said or done what he is afraid or ashamed to own, the next thing is, to deny it. He therefore who preserves a strict regard to truth must be a person of strict probity; and the Gospel, when it condemns lying, requires of consequence an upright behaviour, and a conscience void of offence.

I have considered lying, in the common acceptation of the word, that sort of lying which is generally condemned, without examining how far it may be lawful by words or actions to deceive others, for their own good, on certain occasions which are not frequent. This would lead us too far from our present subject.

5. Our

(*b*) Αἰσχρολογία.

5. Our speech ought also to be free from railing and abusive language. The scriptures allow no excuse for it, and deem no provocation sufficient to extort it from us. If any thing could justify it, it must be that we have been reviled first, and only repay the aggressors with the same language. But we are taught that we must not return railing for railing, but contrary-wise blessing; and that whosoever, without cause, shall say to his brother, (*c*) Thou fool, that is, thou art a profane, a wicked, and an accursed wretch, shall be in danger of hell-fire. The meaning is, that we are accountable to God for our words, and that all reviling language, proceeding from habits of censoriousness, rash judgment, wrath, hatred, malice, and envy, shall, unless repentance prevents it, receive proper punishment hereafter. We are not to suppose that every hasty and indiscreet word shall consign a man over to eternal destruction, for then none could be saved; or that, upon proper occasions, we may not rebuke the guilty, to make them sensible of their folly; or that we may not pass a judgment upon actions notoriously wicked, and give to crimes the names which belong to them. It is the temper of mind, and the end which we propose to ourselves, that usually make our censures and reproofs sinful, or commendable, or harmless.

6. Our conversation should be free from slander and defamation. Evil-speaking is a copious subject, and requires a discourse to itself. I shall only observe concerning it, at present, that it is very mean, weak, and wicked, directly opposite to Christian charity, hurtful often to our neighbour, and always to ourselves, proceeding from many bad causes, and producing as many bad effects. We should therefore banish it from our conversation,

(c) Matt. v. 22. *Moreb.* The word should have been kept in the translation, like the word *Raca*, both being Hebrew words. See Deuter. xxi. 20.

fation, abstaining from it ourselves, and as much as lies in our power, discouraging it in our neighbour.

7. Another defect in conversation consists in a compliance with the faults of others. Our companions offend in their discourse against God and religion, against justice, and charity, and modesty; and we approve their discourses, we are pleased with them, at least we seem not displeased. Sometimes it is a corrupted heart which is the cause of this complaisance, and then we are as bad as those whose impiety diverts us; and sometimes it is only a blameable bashfulness and dissimulation, which is a fault, though of a lesser kind. It is perhaps difficult to know at all times how we should behave ourselves towards such persons; but thus much seems to be required of us.

If we have any authority over them, any weight with them, or any probable hopes of reclaiming them, we should make use of reproof, admonition, and advice.

We cannot do them a better office, and it is not unlikely that they may in time to come acknowledge it to have been an act of kindness, though for the present it should displease. Frequent experience confirms what Solomon says upon this occasion; He that rebuketh a man, shall afterwards find more favour than he who flattereth with the tongue.

If such freedom should not become us, or if no good effect can be expected from it, we may by turning off the discourse to other things, or by our silence, testify our dissatisfaction.

It is certainly fit that we shun, as much as we possibly can, the company of this sort of persons, from whom we must hear things offensive to a Christian, and even to an honest Pagan.

These rules we should think very reasonable, and these rules we should in all probability be disposed to follow, if any one in our hearing reviled our particular friends.

We

We should either defend their character against his censures, or some way or other shew our dislike of his discourse; and if he persisted in such a disobliging behaviour, we should for the time to come avoid his conversation. Surely therefore God, and religion, and justice, and charity, and decency ought to be as dear to us as any of our friends.

8. Another defect in conversation is to confine it to discourses which are vain, trifling, and altogether unprofitable; in many places, the text in particular, recommends speech which affords rational entertainment, or good instruction.

Let us consider then what are the proper subjects of our discourse.

First, (*d*) there are many subjects which relate not directly to virtue and piety, and yet deserve not to be called trifles, subjects taken from our own affairs, from the common occurrences of life, from the various studies and employments which make the honest and innocent occupations of men. These may furnish abundant matter for inoffensive and profitable discourse, and these seem to be usually the most proper subjects for public and mixed conversation.

Secondly, there is moral and religious discourse, which certainly agrees with the spirit of Christianity, but which the world generally dislikes and avoids as dull and unfashionable. It would be an excess of rigour to say that we are bound to confine our discourses always, or for the most part, to sacred subjects. Sometimes they may be unseasonable and unprofitable. Whilst we live in the world, we must converse with the world; and if

(*d*) In primisque provideat, ne sermo vitium aliquod indicet inesse in moribus.—

Habentur autem plerumque sermones, aut de domesticis negotiis, aut de republica, aut de artium studiis atque doctrina. Danda igitur opera est, ut etiam si aberrare ad aliena, cooperit, ad hæc revocetur oratio.—Cicero
De Offic. i. 36.

if so, we must comply with its ways, as far as they are innocent; we must suit our discourse to our company, and behave like them upon all proper and lawful occasions; which if we refuse to do, they will despise us as ill-bred, or suspect us as hypocrites and fanatics.

But there is another extreme, and that is, to avoid constantly and scrupulously the mention of any thing that relates to virtue and goodness, as if we were ashamed of Christianity, to be uneasy when we hear it, and to discourage it upon all occasions.

Though we may for several reasons be sparing of such discourse in common conversation, yet with those whom it is our duty to instruct, it ought not to be omitted. Hear what God says to his people by Moses after he had given them the Law; “ These words which I command thee this day shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest in the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” Christians may judge whether less than this can be required of them.

St. Paul says, Let your communication be good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers; and the same direction is repeated in other places. Now though this precept ought not to be extended to all, nor perhaps to most of the words which we utter, yet certainly it enjoins more than several persons imagine or perform. If, as our Lord observes, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, it must be said, though to some it may seem an hard sentence, that he, out of whose mouth virtuous and religious sentiments never proceed, hath an heart void of all good qualities. He who loves his God and his duty will even undesignedly shew some marks of it in his discourse, whatsoever be the subject of conversation; for true love will not be smothered and concealed; and if he hath discretion

discretion and good sense along with his piety, he will shew his zeal in such an easy, decent, and civil manner, as never to tire and disgust his company, unless his company be such as he would chuse to avoid.

9. Another fault, from which our speech ought to be free, is ill-nature and pride, and that arrogance, positiveness, vain-boasting, and rude contradiction, which flow from these bad dispositions. They prevent the benefit and instruction which we might receive from others, and render us useless to them, shew us to be blind to our own defects, and make us generally disliked or hated. There are indeed few faults more prejudicial to our interest and reputation, and which the world is less disposed to excuse. This common aversion from those who are thus disobliging ariseth perhaps not so often from good principles as from pride, which makes us impatient of contempt. Thus pride taught men, when they conversed together, to conceal the opinion which each had of his own superiority, and so contributed to establish civility.

But the most laudable and the most certain method of avoiding in our discourse every thing that hath the appearance of insolence and conceit, is to root it out of our minds; and when that is done, our speech will of course be free from it. That we may effect this, we should learn to know ourselves, to know our imperfections, some of which are common to us all as we are men, and some of which arise from our own negligence, indiscretion, and corruption. Whosoever is no stranger to his own heart and to his own understanding, must perceive that he is ignorant of many important truths, some of which he is able and some of which he is unable, to discover; that no small part of his knowledge is of small use to himself or to others; that his goodness is still more deficient than his abilities; that he omits many things which he ought to do, and doth many things which he ought to avoid. These reflections will shew

us

us the beauty and the decency of humility, and the folly of overvaluing ourselves and despising others.

10. Another fault in conversation is garrulity, or that talkative humour which engrosses all the discourse to itself. I chuse rather to call this a folly, than to give it an harder name. But a folly it is, and no small impertinence, to take hold of the ears and attention of others, without returning them the civility of listening to what they have to propose.

If we trace this silly behaviour up to its source, we shall find, that it ariseth, not from pride, but from vanity; for Pride and Vanity in some respects, are different. By Vanity I mean Vain-glory. Now pride is often ful-
len and silent; vanity usually sets the tongue running faster than is decent. Pride is ill-natured; vanity is rather good-humoured. Pride despises others; vanity courts their applause, and is desirous of obtaining their favour. Thus vanity hath one advantage over pride, of being the less offensive of the two. We despise vanity, but we hate pride.

11. Another fault to be shunned is flattery, a fault by which we abase ourselves, and do hurt to those whose conceit and self-love we sooth and increase. If to call a man a fool is a rude and a bad thing, it is worse to contribute all we can towards making him one. To commend others, especially young persons and our inferiors, in some cases is proper. In general, that we may so express our approbation, as not to fall into flattery, we should take care, Not to say more in praise of another than we believe to be true; and not to do it with selfish views.

12. Another fault, in some respects like that before-mentioned, is a perfidious insincerity, making great professions of esteem and friendship to persons whom we value not, and never intend to serve. They who are guilty of this disingenuous craft may call it by what fine names they think fit; but Reason, which will not be so

imposed upon, accounts it not only no better, but worse than ordinary lying. For in reality he who lies, only that he may excuse or hide a fault, and screen himself from disgrace and punishment, is not so blameable as he who imposes upon the credulous, makes them expect much kindness from him ; and when the time comes that he should fulfil his word, knows not the name, or the face, of him whose affectionate friend he pretended to be ; and if reminded of his promise, grows angry, and hates the person whom he hath disappointed.

More might be added here by way of advice to all those whom it may concern ; first, to be reserved and cautious of proffering their service beforehand, and ready to afford it in time of need, to promise little, and to perform much ; to be discreet and careful in the choice of those on whom they intend to confer their favours ; never (*e*) to be ashamed of refusing what they will not grant, which is a foolish bashfulness ; but to account it truly base and shameful to raise and then to delude the hopes and expectation of others ; and secondly, to entertain that prudent distrust of mankind, which puts neither an high value nor a rash confidence on commendation and applause, on fair words and a courteous behaviour, on professions of respect, esteem, and kindness ; to remember that there is a wide difference between complaisance and undissembled disinterested affection, between civility and friendship : that the heart and the mouth are a great way asunder, that favour is fickle, and that sincerity itself is not always accompanied with constancy.

13. Lastly, there is a thing called banter and ridicule, which enters much into some conversations, and which whosoever shall condemn, runs the risk of provoking a malicious sort of people. But they and their malice

(e) See Terence *Andr.* iv. 1. Plautus *Epid.* ii. 1. *Trinum.* li. 4.

malice are both to be despised; and he is a fool, and worse than a fool, who had rather make an enemy than lose a jest, who takes a pleasure in putting others out of countenance, and in giving them uneasiness, or in exposing those who are present. St. Paul, amongst other indecencies of speech, hath mentioned *jesting*. We shall misunderstand him, if we imagine that he intended to condemn sprightly and ingenious discourse. But in his time, and in places where wealth and luxury abounded, jesting was a sort of profession or trade, and a very mean one, practised for the sake of a good meal by buffoons and parasites, by men who never opened their mouths but at another man's cost; and this sordid and licentious scurrility is, according to the Apostle, beneath the dignity of a worthy man. So says St. Paul; and any wise Pagan would have said the same.

We will now conclude with some general remarks on the subject.

If any one should think the above-mentioned rules and restrictions rigid and severe, let him consider that most of them, as could easily be proved, have been recommended and required by Gentile writers. To apply therefore the words of our Lord; If our righteousness equals not the righteousness of the Greeks and Romans, in vain is the Gospel revealed to us, and better had it been for us never to have heard of it.

Since conversation takes up a considerable part of our time, some hours at least of life might be spent in reflecting upon the duties which we ought to perform, and the faults which we ought to avoid, if we would speak as becometh those who profess themselves the servants of Christ. And it is the more necessary that we should think of those things, because our speech is of great consequence to ourselves and to society.

By conversation, we may give and receive innocent entertainment, and useful instruction, and promote

the temporal and eternal interest of ourselves and others.

By conversation, we may waste our time in trifles and impertinence, we may injure the reputation, and destroy the peace of our neighbour, we may learn and teach vice, and contract an indifference or hatred for every thing that is commendable.

Therefore are we exhorted in the Scriptures to be very careful of our discourse, and to avoid all corrupt communication.

Men are too much inclined to imagine themselves accountable to God for their actions only. Evil thoughts, and evil words, seem to them things of no consequence, and slight defects. Our Lord hath warned us to avoid this dangerous error. Concerning our thoughts, he hath told us, that we may be guilty in the sight of God of any crime, by attending and desiring to commit it; and concerning our words, he hath declared, that we shall give account of them at the last day.

To speak upon all occasions as much as becomes us, and no more than becomes us, must be acknowledged as difficult as it is comely. It is a perfection which probably we shall never attain; for as the Author of Ecclesiasticus says; Who is he that hath not offended with his tongue? But we should endeavour to attain it, and to approach as near to it as human infirmity will allow.

We should therefore carefully watch over ourselves, and observe what faults we are most inclined to commit in conversation, that we may avoid them for the future.

We should not be over-hasty in our speech. Such inadvertence and indiscretion ends in mischief, and in fruitless regret, which is a fool's repentance.

We should not be too profuse of our speech. It is almost impossible to use a multitude of words without using some that are blameable.

We should cultivate our understanding and acquire useful knowledge, that we may be furnished with materials for conversation. Much folly and impertinence, much slander and defamation, arise from mere ignorance, mere barren poverty of thought; and many persons fall into these faults, not so much perhaps from an ill-natured and malicious disposition, as because they have nothing else to say.

We should not throw ourselves heedlessly into all sorts of company; we should not contract unprofitable acquaintances; above all, we should avoid the society of wicked persons. There is no advantage which we can hope to receive from them, that can compensate the danger to which we are exposed by living familiarly with them, and within the contagion of bad example.

Lastly, we should converse with those who may make us wiser and better. If we can find persons, who to other good qualities have joined sincerity, and who if we do amiss will remind us of it, we should use our utmost endeavour to secure their friendship, and deserve their esteem.

S E R M O N XXXI.

M A T T H. xiii. 13.

Therefore speak I to them in parables, because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

THese words of our Lord seem to contain some difficulty, and not to be altogether consistent with his wisdom and with his goodness, and with the design for which he came into the world. He came to teach men their duty, and to preach the Gospel to the poor and illiterate; and yet, as we are told here, he spake to them in parables, and his discourse was too obscure and too sublime for their capacities; and when his disciples ask him why he chose to address himself in such a manner to the people, he seems to answer that he did not intend to be understood by them.

To remove this difficulty, I shall lay together several observations concerning this way of teaching in parables used by our Saviour, which, when considered and compared, will tend to discover his designs, and to shew that he did nothing in all this which was not consistent with his intention and desire of enlightening the minds and reforming the manners of the people,

A parable.

A parable is a story, either true or feigned, which, when it is applied to certain cases or persons, is found to contain useful advice and instruction. So that a parable consists of two parts, of a fable or story, and of a moral or an application of the story.

It is to be observed that in many of our Saviour's parables no moral or application is made. So in the chapter whence the text is taken, he told the multitudes the parable of the sower and of the seed, some of which fell by the way-side, some upon stony ground, some amongst thorns, and some in good ground. But he explained it not to them, he left them to find out the meaning of it, if they could; though afterwards he interpreted it to his disciples.

It is also to be observed that as in his public discourses he often inserted parables, so he likewise made transitions to other things, raised instruction from the objects at hand, told his hearers what faults they should avoid, exhorted them to repentance, piety, and charity, and gave them the rules for a good life and the great precepts of morality, in a way sufficiently familiar, and suited to their apprehensions.

Add to this, that several of his parables did not contain such doctrines as were necessary to be at that time understood by the people, but related to the future state of the Church, to the calling of the Gentiles, to the rejection of the Jews, to the death of the Messias, and to other points which were not at that time to be clearly made known.

I shall now lay together some reasons for which our Lord made use of parables in his discourses.

Parables are upon many accounts so convenient a way of setting good and bad actions in a proper light, of exhorting and dissuading, of praising and reproving, that hardly any people have been quite strangers to them. Greek and Roman authors have used them sometimes; Eastern nations frequently; the writings of the Jews have

have been observed to abound with them, and in the Old Testament we find them spoken by prophets and princes, and other persons of distinction. Our Lord therefore might make choice of parables, to conform himself to the taste and genius of the age and country in which he lived.

His design also in so doing certainly was to gain the attention of his hearers, and to make a deeper impression upon their minds. Instruction conveyed in this manner will insinuate itself, and produce a good effect, when other methods of teaching would prove unsuccessful. Rules of action, delivered by history and examples, are received with more pleasure, and retained with more ease, than when they are inculcated by plain and direct precepts, which comparatively are somewhat dry and lifeless. By a parable a wise Roman pacified the people, and quieted a sedition. By a parable the prophet Nathan engaged the attention of David, and raised in him the passions of pity and indignation ; and then by the application, Thou art the man, made him sensible of the greatness of his crime, and humbly patient under severe reproof. St. Luke, who, setting aside his sacred character, may justly claim a place amongst good writers, seems to have been particularly affected and pleased with the parables of Christ, and has recorded some which the other Evangelists have omitted, and amongst them the parable of the good Samaritan, of the Prodigal Son, the unjust Steward, of the Rich man and Lazarus, of the Pharisee and Publican.

Our Lord spake some parables to the Jews relating to future things, which they could not perfectly understand at the time when they heard them, and which the event was to explain. Now though such parables afford no immediate instruction to the hearers, yet in process of time they appeared to be very instructive and useful, because they were not only parables but prophecies, which, when

when they were fulfilled, afforded a convincing proof that their Author was a person sent from God.

Our Lord was obscure in some of his parables, because he would not offend his hearers too much, by telling them, plainly and without disguise, truths which they could not then bear and receive, truths which in all probability would rather increase than remove their prejudices.

An ancient Writer of Fables tells us, that the danger of censuring powerful vice, and of uttering displeasing truths, gave rise to fables and parables, by which instruction and correction might be conveyed indirectly and safely.

These observations will help us to explain the words of the text.

A multitude being gathered together, our Lord spake many things to them, but all in parables. Upon which the Disciples, wondering that he should discourse so obscurely to the people, ask him the reason of it. He answered them; Because it is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. That is; What I have said in parables relates to the sublimer truths of the Gospel, and to the admirable dispensations of God. To you I will explain these things, because you are my disciples, you are faithful to me, in you I perceive good dispositions, a teachable temper, and a love of truth. But the multitudes are not fit to have such doctrines delivered to them. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even what he hath.

That is; It is a common saying, He who is rich shall be richer, and he who is poor shall be poorer. This saying may be properly applied to spiritual things. He who diligently labours to acquire religious wisdom, and

to

to conform his inclinations to his duty, will assuredly receive improvement by the due exercise of his faculties, and shall be favoured with additional helps from God. But he who is neither desirous of farther instruction, nor careful to live suitably to that little knowledge which he could not shut out of his mind, and which in a manner had been forced upon him, will be forsaken of God, and will daily grow worse.

Therefore speak I to them in parables, because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. That is; a great part of my audience is composed of persons who shut their eyes against the light, and neglect or abuse the means of knowledge, which have been hitherto in their power; and therefore I speak to them obscurely:

And now I propose to shew that our Lord's behaviour towards the multitude can be charged neither with want of prudence, nor with want of goodness, by proving,

First, that he never refused to instruct those who sincerely desired it :

Secondly, that the bad part of his audience deserved to be left in that ignorance which was intirely owing to their own fault.

I. Our Lord never refused to instruct those who sincerely desired it.

He had wrought many miracles in a public manner, which to honest and unprejudiced persons were a sufficient proof of his divine mission and authority. We will now suppose that amongst the multitudes which followed him, there was one who firmly believed that Christ was a prophet and a teacher of righteousness; we will suppose that this man came to him, hoping to receive instruction, and resolved to make a proper use of it. He hears Christ discourse in parables, and he understands not the meaning of them.

Such

Such an hearer would conclude, that though he did not then comprehend those discourses, or perceive on what account they were delivered so darkly, yet a time might come when he should receive full satisfaction.

Such a person, by once losing his labour, would not be discouraged from seeking other opportunities of hearing Christ; and consequently he would soon have found the reward of his diligence. For, as we observed, our Lord frequently taught without parables, and in expressions suited to all capacities; and sometimes when he used parables, either they were so clear, or he so explained them, that it was easier to understand than to mistake him; and therefore, when his Disciples ask him the meaning of some of his parables, he gently chides them, and seems to wonder at their dulness and flowness of apprehension.

Such a person would have waited for a proper time to address himself to Christ, and would have besought him to interpret his parables. He would probably have received a favourable answer; for we see by many instances in the New Testament, that Christ rejected not those who had a teachable disposition, and who humbly requested information.

Some have observed, that our Lord did in this as other prophets had done before him; that he delivered himself sometimes in an obscure manner, that they who were lovers of knowledge might be incited to come to him, and to desire him to explain what they had heard. We find that he readily answered many questions relating to religion, and that he only rejected inquirers who came with a wicked intention, to accuse him if they could lay hold on any thing that he said; or indiscreet persons, who made improper requests, or sought information concerning points of mere curiosity.

Such an one as we have described, if he was of opinion that sacred knowledge could not be bought at too great

great a price, would have been a follower of Christ, and a disciple, and by that would have been admitted more frequently to his conversation, and have had many opportunities of acquiring religious wisdom. For Christ had other disciples besides the Twelve and the Seventy; nor does it appear that he rejected those who were desirous of joining themselves to him. On the contrary, he seems often to give a general invitation to any who would follow him, and submit to the conditions which he required.

Hence we conclude, that our Lord never discouraged any person from approaching him and consulting him, or concealed any necessary knowledge from those who requested it of him in a proper manner.

II. We are to shew, secondly, that the bad part of his audience deserved to be left in an ignorance which was entirely owing to their own fault.

Our Lord discourses to the people in parables. We will suppose part of his auditors to have been persons who had Moses and the Prophets, and who would not hear them, who sinned presumptuously against the law which they had received, and would not perform what they already knew to be their duty. It is not strange that Christ should refuse to instruct them, since the instruction which they had received before had produced no good effect upon them. It appears reasonable, that from him who thus hath not should be taken away even that which he hath.

Let us suppose them to have been such as the Prophet Isaiah describes, persons whose hearts were waxed gross, and whose ears were dull of hearing, and who had closed their eyes, men so enslaved to their prejudices and vices, that no arguments could satisfy them, and no exhortations could move them. If Christ discoursed darkly to them, it is to be considered, that they hated the light, and hardened themselves against conviction.

Let us suppose, that they had seen some of the works which Christ had wrought, and yet were not the more disposed to acknowledge his authority, and to submit to his directions ; that they had heard him explain their duty to them in a familiar manner, but with a strength and spirit superior to that of all their teachers, and yet had heard him in vain. No parables could be thought too obscure for them, upon whom the plainest doctrines and the testimony of miracles had been thrown away.

Let us suppose them to have been led by no better motive than curiosity, and to have come with no view to correct their faults, or to cultivate their understanding. They hear Christ speaking in parables which they comprehend not, and they depart with the same temper ; they neither apply to him nor to his disciples for further instruction, nor do they return to be present at any more of Christ's discourses. Such negligent hearers are justly sent away in ignorance. They take not such pains to acquire sacred knowledge as they would bestow upon the smallest of their temporal concerns. A few disappointments in these pursuits would not make them abate of their zeal and assiduity ; but in matters of religion they are indolent, and therefore ignorant. Wisdom shuns the careless, and refuses to attend upon those who will not pay her the just respect of seeking her.

Let us suppose them full of their national prejudices, persuaded that God would never shew the same favours to the Gentiles as to the Jews, that he would not give up his chosen people to destruction, that the ceremonial law and the temple should abide continually, that the Messias should be a triumphant Prince, who should make them a free people, and subdue all their enemies. If Christ had declared in plain terms some of those truths which he concealed under parables, and laid open to them some of those mysteries which related to the Messias, and to the fates and the fortunes of the Jewish Church

Church and State, he would only have offended and provoked them, and made himself enemies of the greatest part of his hearers.

Let us suppose them to have been slaves to their temporal interests, to have set their whole heart upon the things of this world, and to have been fully determined to part with nothing for the sake of religion. For such persons as these unintelligible parables were as useful doctrines as the plainest parts of the Gospel. If Christ had told them expressly what he expected from them, and what they must expect, if they entered into his service, they would have departed displeased and offended, sorrowful at the best to find that required from them which they were resolved not to perform.

Upon the whole then it may be affirmed, that though our Lord did at certain times discourse obscurely to the mixed multitude, yet he concealed not any necessary knowledge from persons of good dispositions, and left none in ignorance, except those who loved darkness rather than light, and had no inclination either to understand or to perform their duty.

Let us conclude with a few observations.

1. Our Lord has here represented a great part of the Jews as persons devoted to evil, confirmed in bad habits, unworthy of instruction, and not to be reclaimed by a teacher sent from God. It is probable, that his hearers might think these censures very severe, because there was at that time in the nation no small appearance of religion, to say the least of it; they were free from idolatry, observers of the whole ritual law, and of the public worship of God, many of them fasted often, and prayed often, and spent much time in reading the Scriptures, and in hearing them explained.

And yet their behaviour both then and afterwards towards Christ justified his judgment of them, and proved him in this also to be a true prophet. His doctrine which was pure and reasonable, his miracles most of which

which were as remarkable acts of goodness and charity as of power, his example which might have allured them to imitation, had no good effect upon them; their hearts were hardened, and they continued in their sins and unbelief till destruction overtook them.

2. Our Lord, by veiling his doctrines sometimes under the obscurity of parables, seems to have intended, amongst other things, to teach us that true knowledge is of inestimable value, and that, like things of great price, it is not exposed to the idle and careless, is not to be attained without diligent search, and constant pains, and an upright mind.

It hath been observed of knowledge in general, that it is very hard to be acquired, and that Truth not only hides herself from those who set no value upon her, but that she flies even before those who seek her, and is often pursued in vain. The most ingenious and the most industrious have been far from understanding the works of him, who has made all things in number, weight, and measure. We are strangers even at home, and the soul of man is scarcely known to itself. The great Author of all, though we perceive as much of him as is requisite for religious purposes, is an incomprehensible object, an object which by the most obstinate search we cannot find out to perfection. The various dispensations of Providence, the evil both natural and moral in the rational world, and the miseries to which the brute part of the creation is exposed, are subjects in which there is no small difficulty. But we have no cause to complain on this account of the defect of our understanding, because it is not necessary for us to be accurately skilled in these things, because we shall know more concerning them in a better world, if we secure ourselves a part in it, and because even that imperfect knowledge which we can acquire of it is very valuable, and amply rewards the pains which it cost us.

The holy Scriptures have also their obscurity, which injudicious and irreligious persons will not fail to object. But the Scriptures in matters of general use and concern are plain and express. Yet in some places there are difficulties, which distance of time, and the languages in which they were written, and other circumstances have increased.

Is this obscurity a fault to be charged upon the Sacred writers? Certainly not. It may be said, in some respects, to have its use. It excites men to employ their time, their learning, and abilities, in explaining the holy Scriptures, and in vindicating them from profane cavillers. And they who apply themselves to these inquiries with a mind properly disposed, and with other necessary qualifications, will find their labour well bestowed. Ever since the Reformation and the Revival of Letters, many important discoveries of this kind have been made; and yet the subject is not exhausted, and sagacious and modest industry may still be successfully employed. But those sober and serious persons who are readers of religious treatises should be advised to be careful in making a proper choice, since we are pestered with a variety of books which are mere trash, the effusions of ignorant fanatics, or the patch-work of hungry compilers, who publish neither for the sake of religion, nor for the sake of reputation, but purely for the sake of money.

If the sacred Books had contained nothing besides plain moral precepts, and historical facts related with humble simplicity, this familiarity might have bred contempt. Some mixture of religious obscurity seems not unsuitable to the nature and temper of man, and raises his attention and veneration.

There is a knowledge in which we are all equally concerned, and which therefore may be equally obtained

obtained by all. But even this, like the plainest knowledge in human affairs, requires some application and diligence. Nothing worth knowing can be acquired without search ; nor is it fit that it should. For to what end did God give us abilities, unless that we should exert them ? We are made to think and to act. Bodily labour and exercise are appointed by the wise laws of Providence as the means by which we may not only obtain the things conduced to our support, but be enabled to enjoy them, and preserve our health and strength. The same divine Wisdom has set knowledge at such a distance from the mind, that if we would draw near to it, we must exercise our reason, and improve our understanding, and keep our souls in an active state.

Before we can be skilled in our duty, and find those advantages which the Scriptures promise to those who seek them, some things are to be performed on our part ; we must inquire into God's will with a sincere design to observe it, we must intreat him to bless our endeavours, we must firmly believe that there is more honour and happiness in serving him than in the possession of all that this world can bestow upon us. We shall then experience the truth of our Lord's promise, that he who doeth his will shall know his doctrine, and that to him who hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly ; and we shall find in ourselves that peace of mind, that reliance upon God, that love towards him, and that sense of his favour, which will abundantly recompense our virtuous labours.

But if Religion hath the last and lowest place in our minds, we shall sadly experience the truth of that fatal curse pronounced upon hearts so ill disposed, that from him who thus hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. Religion, if we take no pleasure in it, will afford us no comfort and satisfaction. Doubts

of God's goodness, distrust of his providence, will grow upon us; we shall fear him, and not love him, and our belief of the Gospel will be impaired and weakened every day, or at the last will serve only to reprove and torment us.

SERMON XXXII.

LUKE xvi. 8.

And the Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely.

IN this parable a man is mentioned, who was wealthy, and employed a steward to manage his large revenues. This steward seems to be represented, not as a greedy covetous person, who defrauded his lord to enrich himself, but rather as careless and profuse, as a man of pleasure and taste, who dissipated his master's fortunes, without purloining and hoarding any part of them for his own use.

The Master, being informed of his misconduct, called him, and said to him, How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

Necessity set the man upon thinking how he should provide for himself; and being shrewd and ingenious, and as little furnished with morality as he was with money, he soon found an expedient, and practised it.

He said within himself, What shall I do? for my Lord taketh away from me the stewardship. I cannot dig: to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that when I am out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his Lord's debtors unto him, and said to the first, How

much owest thou to my Lord ? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said to him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou ? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said to him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

The man summoned all his Master's debtors, and seems to have remitted to each of them a considerable part of their debt, by giving them back their note of hand, and taking one for a far less sum. Thus he made them a considerable present, and engaged them by ties of gratitude and generosity to relieve him afterwards, and to contribute to his support.

There is a thing called *Honour*, which sometimes enters even into the dens of Robbers, and sits at the tables of Gamesters ; and men of no justice and integrity may do an act of liberality, and repay one good turn with another, especially to those who are like themselves, to men of honour, and companions in iniquity.

But because there is no depending with security upon gratitude, where there is not a foundation of probity, and the honour of a knave is a precarious thing, the Steward did not trust entirely to this dubious principle, but secured the debtors to himself by more prevailing motives, the motives of self-interest and of fear. He so managed his affairs with them, as to make them in some manner accessories and confederates in the fraud ; and he had it in his power to turn informer and bring them into disgrace, if they used him unkindly.

Thus he played as sure a game as he could, and laid up in store a provision for the days of necessity, which he saw were approaching ; he guarded himself from two evils of which he was sadly afraid ; from working, and from begging.

His Master, accidentally afterwards coming to the knowledge of the whole contrivance and transaction, applauded

applauded him for it. The lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely. He commended the man, not for his dishonesty, to be sure, but for his forecast and subtlety.

A parable like this seemed to require an explication; it was not to be left to the hearers, some of whom might have drawn improper inferences from it: Our Lord did not leave it in obscurity; as he did some other parables delivered to the multitude; he immediately explained it, and pointed out himself the uses and the observations which were to be made from the story: and we will review them, and take them into consideration, following the order in which they stand in the Gospel.

Our Saviour's first remark upon the parable is this; The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light:

A melancholy and mournful observation, founded upon a thorough knowledge of human nature, and verified by constant experience; but a very important and useful observation, a lesson of humility and caution to the good; of reproof and terror to the wicked, whose wisdom serves only to make them the greatest fools; and the greatest sufferers.

The children of this world are they, who mind earthly things, and stedily pursue them, disregarding religion and religious considerations.

The children of light are they, who acknowledge that future happiness is the great end of man, and obedience to God the only way to obtain it; who live under this persuasion, and in some degree act suitably to it; but feel not all the good effects which those principles ought regularly to produce:

The point in which these two sorts of persons are compared, is prudence or wisdom; and the preference is given to the children of this world, as pursuing their worldly interest with more dexterity and stediness than

the

the others usually exert in securing the end and the recompence which they have in view.

This remark of our Saviour is to be understood, like moral reflections, proverbial sayings, and general propositions, to hold true in the main, though not without various exceptions; since there are bad men, who are very fools as to their worldly views and present advantage, and since there are good men, whose religious wisdom is equal at least to the worldly wisdom of men who mind only things temporal.

But for the rest, for the bulk of mankind, it is as our Saviour observes; and human prudence usually surpasseth religious wisdom. The children of this world are wiser in their way than the children of light.

Wisdom is here used in such a sense as to be neither properly a virtue nor a vice, and as a natural rather than a moral quality. It is considered as only a proper method to accomplish any purpose.

A man, as a rational agent, first fixes and proposes to himself an end to be obtained; and then wisdom or judiciousness consists in having a steady regard to that end, in chusing proper means to acquire it, in a diligent and discreet use of those means, in constancy, courage, and patience in the pursuit, and in sacrificing and giving up all that would hurt or disappoint the grand design, and the idol of his heart.

Thus a man may shew much wisdom in securing the objects of his desires, though he may chuse an object which deserves not his affections, and will not recompence his labours; as an artificer may shew remarkable skill and contrivance in a piece of work, which is a mere useless bawble.

Now the children of this world, in the first place, have a steady regard to the end which they pursue, and never lose sight of it, let it be wealth, or power, or honours, or pleasure. It is their constant object and meditation, their earliest and latest thought, which

rises

rises up and lies down with them, goes out and returns home with them. All that they say or do, either hath some reference to it, or at least is not contrary and inconsistent.

But the children of light are seldom so intent as this upon their great concern; sometimes they quite forget and overlook it; sometimes they do things which are absolutely contrary to it; and very often they are busied in affairs that bear no relation to it; so that they are rather good by fits and starts, and at favourable intervals, than with an uniform and consistent stedfastness. Hence it is that repentance is, in a manner, a perpetual duty, from which the best are not exempt; frailties and omissions stick close to mortality, and Forgive us our trespasses, is a request to be daily renewed. But the worldly-wise seldom have cause to repent in their way, and to reproach themselves of losing a considerable advantage by their own indiscretion, and of neglecting a fair and tempting opportunity.

The children of this world are wise in chusing proper means, and finding out the nearest way to compass their ends. They try the most approved expedients; and if they happen to be insufficient they change them before it is too late, and chuse others, and like the diligent spider, whose web is broken, they begin the work again. Christians are seldom equally careful and judicious: they sometimes trust to deceitful hopes, and substitute imperfect expedients to real and substantial goodness; relying too much upon faith, as it means bare believing, upon zeal for a set of opinions, upon frequenting the public worship of God, upon human authority and common custom, upon external ceremonies, upon acts of will-worship, or upon single virtues and some laudable deeds. Hence it is that in the Christian world there is more superstition than morality, and more disputing than practising.

The

The children of this world are diligent in their pursuits; ever vigilant, patient, laborious, active, busy, and indefatigable; whilst religious people have their cold fits, their intervals of remissness, indifference, negligence, formality, and absence of mind. Seldom shall you find a Christian, who is as assiduous in attending upon God, as is the man, who hungers and thirsts after promotion or profit, in paying his court to the Great, or to the small.

The children of this world are constant and résolute, they are not to be dejected by difficulties or dangers, discouraged by refusals, tired by labour, seduced by flattery, prevailed upon by importunity, bribed by trifling rewards, persuaded by eloquence, daunted by threatenings, put out of countenance by ridicule, over-born by clamour, or even influenced by reason, to quit their pursuits. But the good, that is, they who are so in a moderate and a lower degree, are in danger of being deterred, unsettled, drawn aside, and overpowered, by every impediment and discouragement, every stratagem and artifice, every obstacle to righteousness, that works upon their hopes, their fears, their inclinations, and their weak side.

The reason of this difference between the worldly-wise and the religious, and the superiority of the former in pursuing the proposed end, ariseth partly from the following causes:

From the nature of the things which are present, and seize upon the senses, and lay hold on the heart of man, whilst things spiritual and intellectual are invisible and remote, and act accordingly in a fainter manner. Sensible objects appear, as it were, more real, certain, solid, and substantial, because they may be looked upon and handled. This is a powerful illusion, and creates a prejudice which it requires some labour to remove. As soon as man is able to know a little of himself and of the objects about him, he contracts an acquaintance and

and a familiarity with those objects, which daily insinuate themselves into his affections ; whilst Reason makes slower advances, and Truth and Virtue have a more austere appearance, and are not to be received and relished without serious application of mind, and some degree of self-denial. If to this early bent and regard to things visible be unfortunately added a bad education and bad example, religion becomes irksome, and religious wisdom a difficult acquisition. And thus it comes to pass that the children of this world are too often wiser in their generation than the children of light.

Now the design of our Saviour in this moral reflection was to remind us that something may be learned even from those whose choice is absurd, and whose practice is blameable. They stand before us examples to be shunned in some respects, and to be copied in others.

Nature in all her parts, and every creature, preaches some useful doctrine to us, if we know how to meditate properly upon it. We may learn constancy from the sun, moon, and stars, which keep their appointed courses ; honesty and gratitude from the earth, which faithfully preserves what is committed to her care, and repays with interest the labour bestowed upon her ; industry from the animals, who provide against hunger, and bad weather, and change of seasons, and the assaults of their enemies ; obedience and sense of obligation from the domestic creatures, who love their master, and serve him as well as they can. Go to the ant, thou sluggard, says Solomon ; go to the ant, who is at work in the summer, whilst thou art doing nothing. And thou, Israel, says the Prophet, who regardest not thy great Benefactor, learn thy duty from the ox and the ass, who know the hand that feeds them. As instruction may be gathered from the brutes, who are wise and sagacious in their way ; so may it be learned from worldly men, another sort of brutes, whose

whose skill and dexterity is worthy of our imitation, though they employ it to mean or to bad purposes.

A second use intended by our Lord in this reflection might be to excite persons of religious principles to their duty, by exposing their defects, and raising in them an ingenuous shame and confusion of face at their being so much outdone by men so much inferior to them in moral qualities. Disgrace and contempt is the just portion of those who act beneath themselves and against themselves, who neglect to perform what their own reason approves, their own conscience requires, and their own abilities, supported by the divine assistance, might easily accomplish. In care and caution, in zeal and assiduity, they ought to surpass the children of this world, even because the motives by which they are actuated are superior, as much as heaven is above the earth, and eternity beyond time. Happiness without measure and without end is more valuable than the conveniences of a few days, and those deceitful pleasures which fade away even in the enjoyment. Let us not distrust so far any one's understanding, as to go about to prove this.

Thus persons of good dispositions, but of slender improvements, are reminded by our Saviour of their many defects; and a sense of these frailties, of this inconsistent, cold, remiss, and languid behaviour, should excite not only their diligence, but their humility also. It may serve to secure them at least from presumption and spiritual pride, which are great impediments in our way to peace and happiness. Strait is the gate, says our Lord, that leads to life, and few there are who will struggle to get through. It is low also, and he must bend and stoop down, and not carry his head too high, who hopes to enter in at it.

A third use which religious persons are to make of their own defects, is to admire and adore the divine goodness and compassion, as it is revealed in the Gospel.

Nothing

Nothing can surpass, nothing can equal, the rewards which are there proposed to the good steward, to the faithful and diligent servant: the bare hope of them should be sufficient to counterbalance all the evils of life, and all the pleasures of sin. But, alas! what would these promises avail us, if the terms upon which they are propounded were such as men never perform exactly, if they were, though not absolutely impracticable, yet bordering upon impossibilities? This would be only to tempt and to mock us with glories placed within the view, but lying beyond the reach of weak mortality. Therefore God, in condescension to our infirmities, allows of repentance, and limits no time of life when that repentance shall be unavailing. To perfect righteousness the Gospel substitutes repentance, which, like the cities of refuge given to the Israelites, stands open to shelter us from vengeance, and to receive the poor unhappy offender into its humble mansions, where dwells shame and sadness of heart, but accompanied with a faith and a hope which exclude despair.

And for a further encouragement to imperfect creatures, the Gospel hath represented the future state of the good as a wide-extended realm, in which are various abodes, and various ranks, suited to the various qualifications and dispositions of the inhabitants for whom they are allotted. There is indeed no peace for the wicked, no honours for the incorrigible, for the totally negligent and the wilfully obstinate; nothing to be expected, but indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish. But it is to be hoped that there are favourable allowances even for lower degrees of piety and industry, though our goodness hath not equalled that of Apostles, Confessors, and Martyrs, of holy persons, whose trials have been severe, and labours manifold, and victories complete, and examples bright and glorious.

The

The next remark, which our Saviour makes upon the parable, is this; And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you, that is, that ye may be received into everlasting habitations:

Which is as much as to say, Learn from the unjust steward this wisdom at least, the wisdom of consideration and forecast, and of providing for a time of necessity. What he was, that you all are, in one respect; you are in an office of trust. Every man is a steward; he hath abilities, talents, power, knowledge, credit, reputation, and worldly possessions. These things, when we have them, we commonly account and call our own. But it is not so: they are committed, lent, and trusted to us by the great Lord and House-holder, whose servants and stewards we are.

Our worldly possessions are here called, the mammon of unrighteousness, that is, unrighteous and ungodly riches. No man surely can be so weak or perverse as to think that our Saviour exhorts us here to make a good use of wealth ill-gotten; for a man hath no right to make any use at all of it: but riches, in figurative language, and in the style of Scripture, may be called unrighteousness on various accounts; first, because they frequently excite envy and irregular desires in those who long for them: secondly, because they are often obtained by methods not altogether fair and honourable; thirdly, because they often prove temptations to evil, and corrupters of the heart; fourthly, because they are of their own nature unrighteous, that is, false and treacherous, not at all stable and permanent, easily lost, useful only for a few days, productive of cares and troubles, and of a long train of evils, deceiving and disappointing all those who place their trust in them, and who expect to find in them the utmost comfort and satisfaction. In opposition to this, virtue and the rewards of virtue are called by our Saviour true riches,

and

and things which are our own, as being a real possession and an eternal property.

Make to yourselves friends of deceitful and unrighteous riches, that when ye depart hence, ye may be received into everlasting habitations. As the steward in the parable so employed the revenues committed to his care, as to purchase friends and protectors, do you the same in an honest way. Use your possessions in such a manner as to acquire to yourselves friends both in heaven and on earth; promote the honour and the service of God here below, and do good to your fellow creatures; and thus you will secure the prayers and the blessings of those whom you oblige, and the favour and approbation of good Angels in heaven, of the holy Spirit of Jesus Christ, and of the God and Father of all.

As the steward provided houses where he might be received, when he was dismissed from his service; so do you apply yourselves to obtain an habitation in heaven,

As the steward was called to an account by his lord, so will it be with you. Every disease that afflicts you, every day that goes over your heads, and brings you nearer to your last end, every example of mortality that passeth before your eyes, says to you, Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.

Our Saviour therefore points out to us the right use of our possessions, and that is, so to employ them, as to avoid the two extremes of covetousness and of prodigality, which as they are opposite to each other, are also opposite to charity: the first will give nothing, and the second hath nothing to give.

Man is not born for himself alone, but for others also. Our children and families, our relations and friends, and all who stand in need of our help, and deserve it, have a claim to our benevolence. We must serve

serve them according to our abilities; and he who hath wealth is obliged to encourage and assist industrious poverty, helpless misery, useful learning, virtue, and religion, and to promote the public welfare. This is to be a good steward, and to lay up wisely for eternity.

Another reflection made by our Saviour upon the parable, is contained in these words; He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous Mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another's, who shall give you that which is your own?

This world is a state of probation, and a few temporal possessions are now committed to our hands: they are precarious, and they are of small value; but they are as much as human creatures are capable of managing; and by lending them to us, God puts us to the trial, whether we may be fit for better gifts. If a man is unfaithful in these things, which are comparatively speaking, inconsiderable, and which are not his own, how can he expect to receive an eternal and unchangeable inheritance hereafter, to enter into a far more exalted and important station, and to be made ruler over many things in a better world?

The last remark of our Saviour is this; No servant can serve two masters.—Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.

Would you secure to yourselves eternal happiness? you must make religion your first care, and the favour of God the principal and leading object of your views.

Learn this from the children of this world, who have indeed made a bad choice, but pursue it in a proper manner. The world is their Friend and their Counsellor, their Father and their Patron, their Lord and their

their God, whom they serve with wicked sincerity, and with unrighteous perseverance ; and therefore they are wiser, in their way, than those worldly Christians, who would fain divide their duty between God and Mammon.

But neither God nor Mammon will bear a rival. Mammon is imperious and crafty, and will have all or none : give him the one half of yourself, and he will soon seize the other. God also requires the whole heart ; and when he takes possession of it, worldly affections are extinguished, as earthly fires die away when the sun shines upon them in his full strength.

S E R M O N XXXIII.

LUKE x. 30.

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him halfdead.

TH E parable of the good Samaritan sets before us an example of charity, which is far beyond the ordinary pitch of human goodness, as it will appear from several incidents and circumstances in the story, which usually escape the observation of common and careless readers. Every one can discern thus much, that the Hero of the parable was a compassionate and a generous man; but to what a degree he was so, few will apprehend unless the particulars be unfolded to them.

The first design of our Saviour, when he related the story, was to convince a learned Jew, with whom he was discoursing, that true charity required more than he imagined. His other and main intention was to teach all persons the nature and the extent of benevolence and brotherly love.

In this, as in some other of our Lord's occasional discourses, may be observed a wonderful art of persuasion, and a masterly way of gaining a controverted point, by setting

setting examples and facts before prejudiced or doubting persons, and making them draw the conclusion themselves. By this method a man is surprised into concessions which at first he did not intend to make; and is pleased at the same time with his judgment, as if his determination were partly a discovery of his own, and not a doctrine forced upon him by his teacher. There is a pride in man, which makes him uneasy when he feels his inferiority to another, and is foiled and overcome, even in the argumentative way, and he likes as little to be outreasoned or outwitted, as to be subdued by mere bodily strength. This often puts him upon evasions and elusions to supply the want of fair proofs.

Another excellence in this, and perhaps in some other parables, is that in all probability it is not a bare fiction, but a true history, and a matter of fact. This is the opinion of some, amongst whom is Grotius, one of the most learned and judicious Commentators on the holy Scriptures. Now this gives an additional force to the instruction, when we have reason to think that we are not entertained with an imaginary character adorned with fictitious embellishments, but with a faithful portrait drawn from the life, and with the real behaviour of a real person.

A Doctor of the Law asked our Saviour, Master, what shall I do, to inherit eternal life? Our Saviour, in return, asked him, who was a teacher of the Law, what the Law itself had declared concerning it; as willing to hear his opinion, and to acquiesce in it, if it was reasonable. He said to him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

The man replied; Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

Our Saviour consented to this, and commended him; Thou hast answered right.

So far then he had judged well, in not chusing the law of sacrifices, or of the Sabbath, or any ceremonial precepts, as principal duties, but in supposing the love of God and the love of our neighbour to be the two great commandments. Therefore said Christ to him, Thou hast answered right : this do, and thou shalt live.

But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus ; And who is my neighbour ?

Willing to justify himself.

As to the love of God, we may suppose that this Doctor, having never been guilty of idolatry, or apostasy, and having observed the Jewish ritual, might think that he had kept this commandment. But he was conscious to himself, that his justification, as to his performance of the social duties, depended upon the interpretation that should be given to the word *neighbour* ; and that if it meant any thing farther than the expounders of the Law commonly understood by it, he had practised none of those things, and could not pretend to have been such a friend to mankind.

According to the bare and strict letter of the Law, by the word *neighbour* seemed to be meant either an Israelite, or a stranger dwelling in the land : and as, by the Law, the Jews could not converse freely and hold much intercourse with the Gentiles ; so neither could the Gentiles easily live with them, and conform to all that was necessary to qualify themselves for inmates. It is therefore to be supposed, that whilst the people of Israel and Judah were ruled by their own Kings, and were religious and prosperous, few or no strangers took up their habitation in the land of Judæa, unless they were conformists, and proselytes, in some measure at least, to the Jewish religion.

But when our Saviour came, things were much altered with the Jews in this respect. As their nation became a Roman province, they had a Pagan governor, and

and Pagan publicans, soldiers, and merchants amongst them, and a far greater resort of Gentiles, Greek and Roman, than in the more ancient times.

The Jews were not then confined, as they had been formerly, within their own territories; but the captivities and migrations had dispersed multitudes of them in various parts of the world, where they dwelt amongst the Gentiles.

In those days Philosophy had received considerable improvements, and was in great vogue amongst the Gentiles; and the Jews themselves were in some degree acquainted with it. The Pagan Moralists, though very deficient in some other respects, had made excellent remarks on the social duties; and the wiser part of them used to consider man as a citizen of the world, who was obliged to exercise good offices towards all men, even for the sake of one common nature, by which all are brethren; and the Gentiles ridiculed and reproached the Jews for their unsociable temper, their narrow notions of benevolence, and their caring for none besides their own countrymen.

The learned Jews, who had conversed with the Gentiles, and seen their writings, seem to have been sensible that the reproach was not entirely groundless, and ashamed of lying under a bad character on that account. Josephus, their Historian wrote a Book to answer the calumnies thrown upon his nation by a spiteful and a lying Pagan. He takes great pains in it to shew, amongst other things, that the Jews exercised more humanity and charity even to strangers and aliens, and that their Law required more, than was supposed and reported by their malicious adversaries. And in this, Josephus acts the part of a skilful and a subtle advocate for his nation, and in some instances makes the best that he can of an indifferent cause.

It is very probable that the Doctor of the Law, who was conversing with Jesus Christ, was one of those who

thought that the precept of loving a neighbour as one's self extended only to a Jew, or to a Proselyte ; and that as to other Gentiles, a Jew was to shun and disregard them, and to content himself with observing the bare negative duty of doing them no injuries, and of abstaining carefully from all acts of violence or of fraud towards them. He therefore, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus ; And who is my neighbour ?

Our Saviour did not go about to convince him, by arguments drawn up in form, that his notions on this point were mean and contracted ; for the man, if he had parts and learning, would never have been silenced that way, he would always have found a reply, and some subterfuge or other, and would have departed from the friendly conference, fixed in his old opinions, or doubtful, and acknowledging that much might be offered on both sides of the question.

Our Saviour took a shorter and a better way, and made him the decider of the question, by telling him a story of an affair that had lately happened between a Jew and a Samaritan, and desiring his opinion upon it. The disputant, struck with the irresistible beauty of the action, applauded the Samaritan, and so condemned himself and his country-men.

A certain man, says our Lord, went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain Priest that way ; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

The Priest and the Levite should have acted suitably to their education, station, and character, and should have thought it their duty to distinguish themselves above others in piety and humanity on this pressing occasion, especially towards a Jew. The law of Moses required thus

thus much, even upon the lowest and the laxest interpretation, when it is said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self. The Law also said; If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee, lying under his burden, thou shalt surely help him. If such kindness was to be shewed to an enemy, and to an enemy's beast, much more was a Jew obliged to assist a distressed man, who was not his enemy, and who was one of his brethren.

Yet it is to be supposed that the Priest and the Levite, if they had been censured for their behaviour, would have had some apology to make for themselves, some sort of excuses to offer. They might, for example, have pleaded that they were obliged to (*a*) attend upon the service of the temple, and that if the wounded traveller expired in their hands, they should contract a legal impurity, and be polluted, and unfit for their religious functions; or that they had pressing domestic affairs, which called for them in haste; or that they had no money or provisions which they could spare for the man's relief; or that, if they loitered in taking care of him, they might be attacked by the same, or by other ruffians; for the highways of Judæa at that time were grievously infested with robbers, and this evil grew worse and worse afterwards, till the destruction of Jerusalem.

They thought themselves therefore excused and justified, and left the Jew to his hard fate; but probably not without bestowing upon him a blessing which cost them nothing, and putting up a prayer that some other person might come and relieve him.

The

(*a*) Of the Priest, perhaps, this cannot be so well supposed, because he was *going down*, κατιλεῖσθαι, that is, was going from Jerusalem towards Jericho.

The apologies which they made, or might have made, are not mentioned by our Saviour. It would not have been so proper to mention them; for the man, with whom he was discoursing, might have been induced to defend them as sufficient excuses; and then the story would have lost its effect upon him, and our Saviour's design would have been defeated. It was enough for the purpose, that the Priest and the Levite had not acted the friendly part on this occasion. They came, they saw, and they departed.

At last, the Samaritan beheld him. He had more and stronger motives to leave the miserable object, than the Priest or the Levite had; and yet his compassion prevailed over all objections and impediments.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pieces of silver, and gave them to the host, and said to him, Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go and do thou likewise.

The man that shewed mercy on the Jew was a Samaritan. After the ten tribes of Israel had been carried away captives, never to return any more, the king of Assyria sent a colony of Pagans into the land of Israel, and gave them an Israelite priest, to teach them the law of Moses, and the worship of the God of the country. Thus the Samaritans remained for a long time worshippers of their own false Gods, and of the true God in conjunction with them. But after the Jews of Jerusalem had returned from their Babylonian captivity, the Samaritans

built

built a temple to God in Samaria, and left off their idolatry, and became worshippers of the true God alone. They would have joined themselves in communion with the returning Jews, but being rejected, a hatred commenced between these two nations and near neighbours, that was carried to the utmost inveteracy and rage ever afterwards.

In the time then of our Saviour, the Samaritans were Jews by religion, and Gentiles by extraction, though this they denied, and fancied or pretended that they were true Israelites descended from Jacob, and of the tribe of Joseph.

They received the Law of Moses, and observed it. Whether they admitted any other books of the Old Testament, is not clear. They believed the doctrine of the resurrection, and of a future state, and they expected the coming of the Messias.

But the Jews hated them more than they hated the Pagans, declared them to lie under the eternal curse of God both here and hereafter, would hold no communication with them, and would not even receive them as proselytes. The Samaritans were not greatly behind-hand in returning them railing for railing, and evil for evil; and instances of this mutual aversion are to be found in the New Testament, and in other ancient books.

The Samaritans, by erecting a temple and an altar in their own country, as in the place appointed by God himself for it, and in opposition to the temple at Jerusalem, were schismatics; and at first many discontented and schismatical Jews went over to them. As to the place of worship, and the ceremonial part of religion, our Saviour decided the question against the Samaritans, in his discourse with a woman of that country.

But their schism seems to have been a small and a pardonable fault, considering the strong prejudices of education, the hatred with which the Jews pursued them,

the

the very bad character and conduct of the greater part in those days, and the impossibility of holding communion with them.

Our Saviour went and paid them a charitable visit, and found them better disposed to receive him than the Jews were. Many of them believed in him, and many more were called and converted by his Disciples. Amongst the Samaritan converts we may reasonably reckon the man who was cured of the leprosy, and who signalized himself by his gratitude to his benefactor, and returned to give him thanks ; and the charitable Traveller in this parable, who had such an amiable disposition, and was so well fitted to receive the Gospel. One may venture to suppose that our Lord, who was goodness itself, and who loved goodness in others, would have taken a journey to Samaria, even for the sake of this one man.

The Samaritan was travelling from home towards Jerusalem, a place not much frequented by his countrymen, perhaps to appear before the Roman governor, or perhaps to proceed still farther on some necessary affairs. He had the same motives of fear and of self-preservation, as the Priest or the Levite could plead, to make the best of his way, and leave the wounded man, lest the same evil should befall him.

He was in Judæa, that is, in an enemy's country, and surrounded with enemies, in a place where none would have pitied and relieved him, if he had fallen into any distress. He had the more reason to hasten on, and to take particular care of his own safety.

The wounded traveller was indeed an object proper to excite compassion ; but he was a Jew, an enemy to the Samaritan, one who would not have stopped to do him a good office, if he had been in the like condition, who perhaps would have helped to dispatch him, or have bestowed a curse upon him, and one from whom he had little reason to expect even so much as bare thanks.

But

But he, not moved by fear, or self-interest, or resentment, or misguided zeal, came immediately to his relief, he dismounted from his horse, he dressed the man's wounds, bestowing upon him the things that he had provided for his own use on his journey. He set him on his own beast, and with expence, loss of time, danger, labour, and fatigue, he conducted him to an inn, and stayed with him all night. On the morrow he gave the host two pieces of silver, as earnest, for the man's lodging, promising at his return to repay all further charges.

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour to him that fell among thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go and do thou likewise.

Having explained the parable, I proceed to speak of the (*b*) behaviour which it recommends to us.

From this parable then we may observe, that though a good religion hath a natural tendency to make good men, and a right faith to produce a right behaviour, yet so it is, that we often see a contrary effect; that persons, who have more opportunities to understand true religion, are very deficient in the practical, which is the principal part, and flatter themselves, that the purity of their faith and their zeal for externals shall make up for the want of morality. This was notoriously the case of the Jews; and therefore our Saviour sends them to learn their duty to their neighbour from an alien, an heretic, a schismatic, an heterodox Samaritan, who practised it so much better than they.

We

(*b*) An humour hath prevailed amongst our Fanatics to seek after refined, imaginary, mystical, and allegorical interpretations of the Scriptures, to slight the obvious and the true sense, and to find what was never meant. Many such conceits, of which I shall take no notice, have been discovered in this parable, by a sort of second sight, or by a deception of sight, and as men descry castles and dragons in the clouds.

We ought to account every man our neighbour, though a stranger, an enemy, a sinner, or, which is the same thing as a sinner in common estimation, one of a different sect or persuasion. Let him be what he will, he is an human creature, and as such he is intitled to humanity and courtesy in common intercourse, to direction and instruction if he asks it and stands in need of it, and to relief and assistance if he is in distress. There are rules of justice, equity, and mercy to be observed even in war, and one of the great benefits which Christianity hath produced, is that it hath made the nations where it is received, less savage and cruel, generally speaking, than they were before, and better behaved towards captives and prisoners of war.

The ancient Romans, whom we are too apt to admire for their valour and patriotism, were notoriously guilty in their behaviour towards other nations. Their boasted love of their country was at the bottom just such a virtue as that of a band of Robbers, sparing none who fall into their hands, and then very honourably delivering up all the plunder, for the benefit of the community.

As to particular persons, considered as men, they are obliged to be humane and charitable to all; considered as Christians, they are still more obliged to it, from precept, from example, and from gratitude.

It is true that as we stand variously related to others, so we owe them more or fewer services. Our good offices are due, first to parents and kindred, to our own family, to our intimate friends, and to our benefactors: then to our neighbours, to those of our own religion, and of our own country; lastly to strangers, of what place or persuasion soever, and to enemies, to the unkind and unthankful.

These degrees of love, affection, and regard to different persons may suggest to evil tempers an obvious excuse from the performance of some charitable deeds; and

and the excuse is this : If we are to regulate our kindness to others according to these relations which they bear to us, there are so many miserable objects in the world, that a stranger, an alien from the faith, and a personal enemy can never come in for a share, since there will be always needy persons who have a juster title to our favour.

To this it may be replied ; Humanity towards all men without exception, and a temper inclining us to shew them kindness is required from us. The application of this general duty must be left to chance and opportunity, to discretion and prudence, and it is impossible to lay down fixed rules concerning it. Generally speaking, a friend and a neighbour is to be preferred to a stranger and a foreigner. But there is one plain exception, and the Parable suggests it to us. When a man is a stranger amongst strangers, and in the utmost need and distress, he is, on that very account of being a stranger, better entitled to our favour, protection, assistance, and relief, than one, who in other respects, and at other times, should have the preference. Do we want a proof of this truth ? It is obvious : we need only suppose ourselves to be in the same hard situation, and consider what we should think of those who should insult or neglect us in a strange land, and how extremely we should account ourselves obliged to any good Samaritan, who should have compassion on us. The heart is not at a loss to return a proper answer ; and Reason draws the inference, Go, and do thou likewise.

And now, I might safely leave it to your own selves to apply the foregoing discourse to the present occasion. For me to say much about it, would be superfluous ; to say nothing, would be slighting. Let a few words suffice.

This is an act of disinterested charity ; for these children can make you no return——except thanks and good wishes.

It

It is an act of public charity ; since the welfare of the nation, both present and future, is closely connected with it.

It is an act of comprehensive charity, as it tends to relieve the body, to instruct the mind, and to save the soul, of those who are the objects of it.

Poor people, if in their youth they have behaved tolerably well, know, and are known, and can set forth their necessities, and plead their own cause. Poor children are friendless and helpless ; they are in reality poor orphans, for if they have parents, those parents cannot support them. As to their spiritual wants, scarcely are they sensible of them ; and as to their temporal wants, they feel them, but know not how and to whom to represent them.

Name me a charity which hath more motives to recommend it ; and if you cannot (as I am sure you cannot) let your accustomed favour be continued to these humble petitioners,

S E R M O N XXXIV.

M A R K xi. 21; 22.

And Peter calling to remembrance, saith to him; Master, behold the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith to them, Have faith in God.

ST. Mark tells us, that as Jesus was coming from Bethany to Jerusalem, he was hungry. It was in the spring, a little before the Passover, in March or April; and, as St. Mark observes, the time of figs, that is, the time of common figs, was not yet. Jesus saw one fig-tree at a distance, which was of the common and scarcer sort, and which had leaves; but when he came to it, he found no fruit, ripe or unripe: upon which he said, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter; and the fig-tree withered away.

Hence we may observe these things.

I. The Law of Moses contains many hospitable and charitable precepts, shewing a singular regard to the needy and the distressed. Amongst which are these in Leviticus and Deuteronomy;

When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, nor gather every grape. Thou shalt leave

leave them for the poor and stranger. When thou cuttest down thy harvest and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it. It shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

When thou comest into thy neighbour's vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill, at thy pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel. When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thy hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle into thy neighbour's standing corn.

Thus a permission and a privilege was granted to the poor, the stranger, and the traveller, to eat of the fruits of the field and vineyard, though not to carry away. And in so fertile a country as Judea was, there might be fruit-trees by the side of the road, which were no private property. Christ therefore had the right of poverty and necessity, and the express leave of the Law, for acting as he did. This is a sufficient answer to a scandalous (*a*) objection which hath been made, What right had he to the fruit? an objection which betrays as much ignorance as rudeness, and which the Jews would never have made to Christ, because they knew their own law. Therefore, when the Disciples, on a sabbath day, passing through the corn fields, plucked the ears of corn to eat them, the Pharisees did not accuse them of theft or robbery, but only of sabbath-breaking.

Another objection hath been made of the same kind; What right had he to destroy the tree? That is, in other words, What right had he to work miracles? An objection which scarcely deserves an answer. However, it may be answered that the tree, as St. Matthew says, grew by the way-side, and probably had no owner; and that it was a barren tree and of no (*b*) value.

But

(*a*) Woolston.

(*b*) The wood of this tree is useless even to a proverb; *inutile lignum.*

*Ἄνηρ σύκιος, *homo ferculneus.*

But it is worthy of observation, that the wonderful works of Christ were all of the merciful kind, and that he never wrought a miracle of severity upon any person. His compassion he shewed to every one who stood in need of it, and implored his assistance: his indignation he exercised only on one barren tree. Thus he distinguished himself from Moses and from the Prophets who were often the ministers of God's wrath against the wicked.

II. I observe that this action and behaviour of our Lord, in seeking fruit, and in appearing to be offended at the disappointment, and pronouncing a curse upon the barren tree, had a moral import, and was designed to convey instruction, and to represent something worthy of particular notice.

The Jewish Prophets, as the wise men of neighbouring and Eastern nations, had used to convey instruction frequently by parables; and as frequently by signs or actions. Thus one of them caused himself to be smitten and wounded; another carried out his household stuff on his shoulders in the sight of the people. And in this the false prophets imitated the true ones, and one of them made himself iron horns, and pushed with them, to declare to king Ahab that he should overthrow his enemies. In the Acts of the Apostles, the prophet Agabus took St. Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus shall the Jews do to the owner of this girdle. And in the Revelation, the Angel takes up a great stone, and casts it into the sea, saying, Thus shall Babylon be thrown down, and seen no more. Our Saviour, like the ancient prophets, frequently taught by parables, wherein, as in all other respects, he surpassed them all; for his parables had a two-fold use, and were often prophecies also. But he did not often teach by action, because that seemed less solemn, and less suitable to his transcendent dignity. We find only two instances of his conveying instruction in this manner, his causing the fig-tree to perish, and his washing the feet of his disciples.

III. The

III. The Apostles have recorded concerning themselves, that they were simple and ignorant men, and slow of apprehension; which appears in some measure from the transaction of which we are now speaking. For the behaviour of Christ, in seeking fruit, and condemning the tree, had something singular in it, which might have excited their curiosity; and the moral contained in it was, as we shall shew, obvious enough; and yet they seem neither to have taken much notice of the thing, nor to have suspected an hidden sense in it, nor to have asked him what was his intention and view in acting so. But the day after, when they saw that the tree was dead, they all marvelled at it, as if they had never seen him work a miracle before, saying, How soon is the tree withered away! And Peter said to Jesus, Master, behold, the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away. As the Disciples did not apprehend the design of Christ, nor ask him about it, he gave them no information concerning it; but adapting his discourse to their present disposition, and observing their surprise, he took occasion to exhort them to faith, a qualification which they wanted, and for the want of which he had often reproved them. He said to them, Have faith in God: for verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say to this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he faith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he faith.

Many reasons might be assigned, for which Christ required this high degree of faith from his followers: but I shall at present only mention two.

The Apostles were to be employed in preaching the Gospel, and in confirming it by wonderful works. If such persons had discovered a distrust concerning God's assistance, it would have been a disgrace to themselves, and

and to their sacred cause, and have raised suspicions in others that there was something dishonest at the bottom.

The employment to which the Apostles were appointed was as dangerous as it was honourable. They were to encounter all sorts of difficulties and perils. In such circumstances and trials, as a man's faith is, so will his courage be and his resolution. If the first be weak and wavering, the second will have the same defects. Nothing good and great, no bold attempt, no suffering for the sake of truth, is to be expected from a person who is inconstant, irresolute, and dissident.

IV. The moral sense of our Saviour's action is so evident, that it is not easy to mistake it. The Jews were a nation of husbandmen, and the Scriptures abound with allusions to rural occupations, and to the objects which they afford. Good men are frequently compared to fruitful trees, and bad men to barren and withered plants. In the prophecies of Jeremiah, mention is made of two baskets of figs, the one very good, the other very bad. The good figs are said to represent those Jews whom God was resolved to favour and protect; the bad to be a figure of those whom he gave up to utter destruction. Our Saviour also spake a parable of a fig-tree, which though cultivated with all possible care had borne no fruit for three years, and was to have one year more of trial, and then was to be cut down, if it produced nothing; in which he alluded to the time and pains which he had bestowed in preaching to the Jews, and to their obstinacy, and to the punishment which would soon follow it.

And now, to come to our subject; The trees, which at that time had neither fruit nor leaves, and from which Christ did not expect or seek any thing, may be supposed to represent the Gentiles, who as in general they had little piety and goodness, so they did not pretend to any,

nor was religious hypocrisy a prevailing vice amongst them. Their season of amendment was not come, the sun of righteousness had not shined upon them, the Gospel had not been preached to them; from them therefore the less was to be required. But the tree which seemed to be in a flourishing condition, and to promise fruit, and yet had nothing besides leaves, was an exact figure of the Jews. They had a divine revelation to guide them, by which they were distinguished from all nations, they had the public worship of God established amongst them, they were free from idolatry, they had the appearance of sanctity and religion; but it was all outside shew, all hypocrisy and dissimulation, and no solid and substantial goodness; they had nothing besides leaves; and therefore by a just judgment this (*c*) nothing was to be taken away from them. And as the deceitful tree at the rebuke of Christ sickened and drooped and withered and died away; so their national distinction and privilege, their temple, their public legal worship, of which they made so poor an use, were to be no longer continued to them; their city also was to be destroyed, their country made desolate, and themselves either cut off in a miserable manner, or driven and dispersed over the face of the earth.

The inferences and uses which are to be made from the preceding remarks are these;

God is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. Happiness is the end for which every rational creature is made, and the means of obtaining it are afforded to every one; and if this be true, the justice and the equity and the goodness of the Creator cannot fairly be impeached. But yet, as God hath made a variety of creatures more or less excellent, so he also dispenses his gifts

(c) Nil habuit—Et tamen illud
Perdidit infelix totum nil.—

gifts to nations and to particular persons according to his own good pleasure, and no reason is to be required, or perhaps can be assigned for these gifts, besides the will of the donor, who may do what he thinks fit with his own. Something of this kind is implied in the parable of the Labourers in the vineyard. They who laboured only one hour, received a day's wages; and they who had toiled the whole day, received no more. The principal design of this parable seems to have been to declare that the Gentiles, though called late to the knowledge of God and of religion, should have equal favours and privileges with the Jews. But besides this, it also teaches us that God will bestow his gifts, as he thinks proper in his own wisdom. The behaviour of the House-holder seems at first sight exceptionable and blameable, and expressing the character of a capricious and fantastical man; but this objection may be removed by supposing that he acted with an intention to try the temper of those whom he had hired. If they had behaved themselves modestly and humbly, and besought him to consider their case, they would have deserved some favour, and they would have received it from a person who was so generous, and who had overpaid the last comers. But instead of intreating, they murmured and railed at him; upon which he resolved to give them no more than what justice required, and to reserve his liberality for those who deserved it better.

In matters then of mere grace and bounty, various advantages are conferred upon some in a larger measure than upon others, to which the receivers have no claim, and which they have done nothing to merit. Of this kind are external conveniences, as wealth and power and honours; natural blessings, as health and strength of body, and great abilities of mind; religious advantages, as a good disposition, moderate passions, a situation of life remote from many temptations, a sober and liberal edu-

tion, means of obtaining sacred knowledge, and of improving the heart. In like manner, preternatural and miraculous gifts were dispensed when the Gospel was first preached ; the holy Spirit of God imparted them severally to every one, according to his own pleasure, and not always according to the piety and moral qualifications of men. All this to the unthinking and injudicious may have the appearance of prejudice and partiality. But many things concur to make these various dispensations of Providence not so unequal as they may seem, and to justify the ways of the Almighty. For the advantages and blessings, which one person possesses above another, require particular and proportionable returns of gratitude and diligence and discretion. They must not be abused and employed against his honour and service from whom they proceed ; they must not be neglected and suffered to turn to no account ; they must be cultivated and exercised in the best manner ; and all this requires much labour and care and resolution, and is attended with much danger also. To represent this in the language of the Gospel. To one are given ten talents, to another two ; and if they use them discreetly, a reward five times greater is given to the first than to the second : but then the first had five times the labour, and five times the danger of misemploying his trust, and would have incurred five times the punishment, if he had proved a worthless and wicked servant, and an unfaithful steward.

1. Therefore it becomes us to consider carefully ourselves, our situation and circumstances, and to see what peculiar advantages we enjoy, because we are peculiarly answerable to God for them, and because they produce peculiar duties. We have then the advantage of being born in a Christian country, which gives us a superiority over Mahometans and Idolaters ; we belong
to

to a nation in which the Gospel is better understood and taught than in many parts of the Christian world, where we want no opportunities of learning our duty, and of practising it; many of us have the additional advantage of a good education, and of early instruction; and if we enter into ourselves, and examine our condition, we shall perhaps find some blessings relating to the body, the fortunes, or the understanding, which set us above several persons.

2. We ought to be thankful to God for these particular benefits; since unquestionably they are benefits. Knowledge is sweet to the mind, as light is to the eye; and the power of doing good and of shewing kindness, of instructing, or protecting, or relieving, affords a sublime and a rational pleasure; and a right use of superior talents will secure a superior reward in the next life; and upon these and other accounts we ought to receive our present good things from the hands of God with a thankful heart, and with sincere acknowledgments.

3. But then, to this gratitude for the gifts of Providence must be added peculiar care and caution to employ them wisely, to the honour of God, and to the advantage of mankind, a sense of the temptations to which they expose us, and the danger of yielding to these temptations, and of perverting the things which were designed for our good.

Our Saviour, in his parable of the talents, represents a servant who is condemned, not for living in a riotous manner, for injuring his fellow-servants, and for wasting his Lord's money, but for hiding it, and putting it to no use; teaching us, that if mere indolence is an unpardonable fault in one who should be active, it must be far worse to be active in a wicked way, and to use the favours of Providence as incentives to vice, and instruments of mischief. If power, or high stations, or health, or knowledge, or bright abilities, produce such vile effects, or even if they produce nothing good and commendable,

mendable, the case of the possessor is worse than that of those bad men who are inferior to him in many respects, and who have not the same gifts and privileges to misemploy.

The Jews in our Saviour's time, who are so well described under the image of the deceitful and fruitless tree, had many singular advantages above others. They had not only a divine Law, and the admonitions of the Prophets, and a sacred history, and in it many bright examples of goodness, but the opportunity of receiving instruction from the Son of God himself. And surely every one who believes the Gospel would account it a great happiness, if he could converse with Christ and with the Apostles, and apply to them upon all occasions. Our Saviour therefore says to his disciples; Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them. But then he subjoins a caution to be used, and a danger to be shunned; Take heed what ye hear. Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required; and if he knew his Lord's will, and did it not, he shall be beaten with many stripes. And the sad consequence of the disobedient behaviour of the Jews was, Woe unto thee, Jerusalem; it shall be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon, for Sodom and Gomorrah than for thee.

We are accountable for all the benefits, national or personal, which we possess. All the good examples which we have seen, and not imitated; all the opportunities of serving God which we have enjoyed, and neglected; all the instruction and advice which hath been offered to us, and offered in vain; all these will rise up in judgment against us. There are places where the Scriptures are shut up from the common people, and instead of the word of life, books of devotion are put into their hands, which

which are full of fables and absurdities ; of idolatry and superstition. The Scriptures here are open to every one, besides a variety of treatises containing good instruction ; and yet there are too many who never look into them. There are places where Christians are not allowed publicly to serve God in spirit and in truth : we may assemble together as often as we think fit ; but any excuse serves to keep us away.

4. Lastly : If we have a small measure of temporal and personal blessings, we ought not to hate or to envy those who have a greater share of them, nor to repine and be dissatisfied ; but rather to set the conveniences against the inconveniences, and to consider that we are discharged from an heavier burden and a stricter account. I speak principally concerning the outward advantages and the situation in life. For as to the endowments of the mind, most persons in their own estimation have a sufficient share ; and the natural affection which we bear to ourselves guards us usually against any discontent of that kind. And as to piety and morality, every one hath it in his power to be as eminent as he will.

Perhaps, if it were put to our choice, and all things were duly weighed, it would be prudent to prefer a middle condition, as to fortunes and station, as a trust which may be most easily managed, and in which the least risque is run, both for this world, and for the next. A middle condition is what God plainly designed for his chosen people the Jews, giving them laws which had a natural tendency to keep them from the extremes of poverty and riches ; it is what Historians, Poets, Orators, and Philosophers, have described as most eligible ; it is what Wifemen, Prophets and Apostles, have recommended ; it is what we usually approve, in words, though not in deeds. For when opportunities offer to acquire wealth and power, they are seized, though commonly at the expence of honour and honesty.

But

But it is our duty, to set our hearts upon no particular condition, so as to be anxious about it; to leave it to Providence, and submissively accepting our lot and our station, whatsoever it be, to be diligent in performing the offices which it requires. This is our business: the rest belongs to God. The state which would best become us, and in which we could best behave ourselves, is one of those secret things, which He only sees who sees the hearts of men, and knows what change a change of circumstances would produce in them. The only way to obtain the condition which is most proper for us, is to desire it of God, with a resignation to his will; and then either he will give it us, or he hath given it already, and will continue it to us (d).

The rich and the poor, say the Scriptures, meet together; the Lord is the maker and the father of them all; and regards them, not according to their stations, but according to their moral qualities. But as to this world,

it

(d) Our Saviour says of the fig-trees in general: When the branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh. These therefore must have been the most common sort in Judæa. Now these trees could not have fruit before the summer was advanced, nor had they full-grown leaves at the time of the Passover.

The time when Christ sought fruit, was a little before the Passover, which was in March or April.

The summer months in Judæa seem to have been our May, June, and July.

But there was a sort of fig-trees which had two crops, the one early, the other late.

There were fig-trees which had fruit on them ten months in the year.

It must have been one of these sort of trees, from which Christ expected fruit.

There would therefore be no difficulty in the account, if St. Mark had not added; For the Time of figs was not yet.

As Christ was journeying (*Matt. xxi. 19.*) he saw by the way-side μιαν συκὴν, that is, one single fig-tree, which was of the forward kind, and which had leaves (for the time of common figs was not yet come, nor had the common fig-trees any leaves). It might therefore have been expected that it had fruit, because the fruit of that tree comes before the leaves. But he found it to be a barren tree, which had no fruit.

it is not so. The rich have many advantages of which the poor are deprived. To lessen this excessive disparity and this grievous discouragement, it is highly fit that the children of the poor should have an opportunity or a chance of bettering their hard condition. This is in some measure effected by our Charity-schools, in which they who are well-disposed receive such helps as will qualify them for useful and profitable employments. They may soon discern, that the only sure way to thrive is by obedience to their teachers and to their masters, civility, industry, emulation, sobriety, and honesty. And doubtless many there are, and there have been, who by the advantage of this education have raised themselves above want and dependance, and by many ways have repaid their country for the care she took of them.

They who have condemned Charity-schools, have also reproached the Clergy for being their chief advocates. We acknowledge the charge, and are not ashamed of the accusation. Indeed we lie under particular obligations to promote the support and the instruction of youth, because we ourselves owe what we are to the liberality, or to the charity, call it which you please, of our pious ancestors and benefactors. For as these inferior seminaries are designed for the poorest of the people; so our more eminent public Schools, our Universities, and our Colleges, were founded and endowed for a more liberal education, and were principally designed for those who were in a middle state between poverty and wealth. And to these kind assistances the far greater part of us, and of the other two learned professions, are indebted for our situation in life. So that our Saviour's admonition comes home to us; Go and do thou likewise.

S E R M O N XXXV.

L U K E xviii. 14.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other : for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

THUS our Saviour concludes and applies the well-known Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. He gives us the example of one, whose conceit corrupted some of his actions which might else have been commendable ; and of another, who obtained the remission of his sins, because he sought it with meekness and contrition ; setting thus in the strongest light the dangerous nature of pride, and the profitableness of humility.

Every one, who knows any thing of the New Testament, must know that the Pharisees stand condemned there as great sinners, and that our Saviour absolutely required much more goodness from his followers than was to be found in them ; which should be matter of fear to careless and disobedient Christians, and which must alarm them, if they consider what may be said in behalf of these men from the account which is given of them in Scripture, and in other ancient books.

The

The greatest sect of the Jews in the time of our Saviour was that of the Pharisees, and in many respects it seems to have been the best also. The principal fault, in point of doctrine, belonging to it was a zeal for the Traditions of the Elders. The Pharisees pretended that God had given to Moses, besides the written Law, an oral law, a Law delivered by word of mouth, which had been preserved safe and sound by the same wise method, and transmitted down by hear-says from one generation to another. To this fantastical and imaginary Rule of life they paid more regard than to the written word of God, and made the Scriptures give way to it, when these two systems were at variance, and preferred their own wretched Doctors and Rabbins to Moses and the Prophets.

It is remarkable, that in all this, the Papists have been the humble, and the faithful imitators of the Pharisees, and have an Oral Law, and a set of traditions, which they value no less than the Gospel, and would compel all Christians to receive as a Rule of Faith absolutely necessary to salvation.

If we consider the ignorance and the corruption of the Jewish nation, in the time of our Saviour, we must acknowledge that the Pharisees and their disciples were by no means the worst and the most irreligious part of the people.

The Pharisees admitted the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retribution, and a divine assistance added to human endeavours; for which they deserved some praise, when we compare them with the sect of the Sadduces, who rejected these important doctrines; they spent much time in studying the Scriptures, and in teaching the people; they observed the ceremonial Law with great exactness; they kept many fasts; they paid tythes of all, even of the smallest matters, and in doubtful cases; they gave much away in alms, and they made long and frequent prayers. In a word, they did many things

things which required so much labour and care and self-denial, and were so contrary to the humour and taste of the gay and vicious part of mankind, that it is hard to suppose a large *scēt* of men submitting to the performance of such actions, unless they were influenced by religious motives, and desirous to recommend themselves to the favour of God.

If these persons were not proper objects of the divine mercy, Who then, may it be said, can be saved? and what must become of those who take not half the pains to enter into the kingdom of heaven which these poor men seem to have taken to miss the way to it? Let it therefore be observed, that the bad character which is given in the Scriptures to the Pharisees, ought not to be extended to all who were of that *scēt*. It is enough if the majority of them, or if the most eminent in station, power, and authority, were very wicked. There were without question several Pharisees, such as Nicodemus, such as St. Paul, men mistaken in many things, and carried into faults by the prevailing notions of the party, yet men of sincerity, and virtuous dispositions, and desirous of pleasing God.

The rest were inexcusable; and what appearances however of austerity and sanctity they put on, were dissemblers and hypocrites, full of pride, vain-glory, ostentation, and covetousness; and insatiably fond of applause, respect, power, and pre-eminence. They were much addicted to slander and calumny, to censoriousness and contempt of others; they were rash and uncharitable in their judgments; they justly deserved to be called an evil and adulterous generation, even on account of their frequent and scandalous marriages and divorces: they corrupted the word of God by their senseless traditions and perverse interpretations; they shamefully neglected the observation of the moral Law, and the practice of justice, mercy, and truth; they made long prayers, and gave

gave alms for worldly ends, that they might impose upon silly, credulous, superstitious people; and they seem to have fasted often, that they might have a keener stomach to devour widows houses: and, what enhances their iniquity, is that they lived in that happy time when the Son of God was manifested in the flesh; they saw and heard those things which so many prophets and wise men would have rejoiced to see and hear; they beheld his beneficial miracles, and were not ignorant of his holy do&trines; and yet, infatuated by a strange obstinacy, or instigated by interest, avarice, pride, cruelty, envy, malice, and other vile passions, they opposed, derided, and defamed him, and were at last his betrayers and murderers.

If the case of the Pharisee, described in the parable, may raise in us a dread of the Chrlstian religion, as requiring an higher degree of holiness than we can hope to acquire, the example of the Publican is adapted to allay such apprehensions, and to convince us that we serve not a severe and inexorable Master, but one who though we offend him, is ready to receive us, when we return to our duty.

The Publicans were persons employed in collecting the revenues of the Roman Empire, which arose from taxes and tributes.

All the provinces of that empire were obliged to pay certain tributes, and as Judæa was then in subjection to it, many Publicans were then employed in gathering the taxes, of whom some were Gentiles and some Jews.

The Publicans were disliked in most places, particularly in Judæa: those Publicans especially who were Jews gave great offence to their countrymen. It is said, that the Jews would not eat with a Jewish Publican, that they avoided him no less than they shunned the Gentiles, that they would make no marriages with any of his family, that they would not admit him into their synagogues,

synagogues, or receive his testimony as a witness to any fact.

They hated the Publicans thus, because they were uneasy under the government of the Romans, and paid them tribute unwillingly.

They hated the Jewish Publicans, as enemies to their own country, and to their brethren, as contributing to the slavery of God's people, and as men who by their very office were obliged to converse and enter into society with the Gentiles, with profane and unclean persons, whom it was their duty to avoid.

They hated them, because they were indeed generally sharpers, extortioners, men of no honour and honesty, who enriched themselves by fraud, rapine, and oppression. Our Saviour intimates, that they were people of no reputation, when he says, If you love those that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the Publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the Publicans the same? John the Baptist, when they repaired to him, gave them a caution, which probably was necessary, to exact no more than what was appointed them; and though they were favoured and protected by the Government, yet even the Roman Law itself makes dishonourable mention of them.

Such a calling, you may think, should and would have been avoided by Jews who had any good and religious principles. But let us offer what may be alledged in excuse for such persons. Perhaps they had no other way to get their bread, and were entered into it betimes by their parents and friends, and were under contracts to serve the Roman government: and the calling, though it might expose them to some temptations, yet did not necessarily lead them into dishonesty. When they asked John the Baptist, what they should do, to make God propitious to them, he did not tell them, that they must quit

quit their occupation, and betake themselves to another, but only said, Exact no more than that which is appointed you; which implied a concession that the calling was not of its own nature unlawful. And here we may observe the wisdom, not the human, but the divine wisdom of the Baptist, for he was a Prophet, and spake as the Spirit of God directed him. If he had been guided by mere human zeal, which so often inclines to excess, he would perhaps have ordered the Publicans and the Soldiers to quit their profession; but such a general prohibition would have been attended with bad effects; for without receivers of the revenues, and without military men, human society cannot subsist.

Zacchæus, the Publican, said to Christ, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him four-fold. It appears not from these words, that Zacchæus was conscious to himself of having defrauded or oppressed any one: but as he might have done it undesignedly, he says; Lord, I intend to give half of my goods to the poor; and if any man can shew that I ever exacted from him more than was due, I am ready to return him four-fold.

Every occupation, calling, and profession is lawful, which is allowed by the civil Government, exercised by persons of reputation, and laying none under a necessity of violating any duty, any law of God. And yet those callings which expose us to the fewest temptations, and may be followed with the most peace of mind, and with the approbation of the wise and the good, must be owned to be most eligible. The ancient Christians avoided and condemned the exercise of some employments, because they thought them inseparably connected with sinful compliances, with idolatrous practices, with scandalous company, with lewdness, or with other vices. For this care and caution they deserved to be commended,

and

and are proper patterns for our imitation. To enter into particulars upon this subject, is not necessary; and to decide peremptorily upon such cases, is difficult and disobligeing: and therefore it seems best to deliver this reasonable advice and admonition in general terms.

The Publican in the parable is not represented as a righteous man, but as a repenting sinner: he was ashamed of his faults, and confessed them with sorrow and humility, and without question resolved with himself to avoid them for the time to come; and therefore his prayer was accepted of God.

Our Saviour's design in this parable was;

1. To condemn a censorious disposition, a groundless contempt, and bad opinion of others.
 2. To correct those false notions of religion which lead men to overlook its principal duties.
 3. To expose and reprove that part of self-love which makes us proud of our righteousness.
 4. To recommend repentance and humility towards God is the first step to amendment.
 5. Lastly, to caution us against all pride and conceit in general.
1. Our Lord in this parable condemns a censorious disposition.

I am not, says the Pharisee, as *other* men, or, as (*a*) *the rest* of men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican. Whilst he is at prayers, and should be occupied in confessing his own sins, he cannot abstain from condemning another. His vanity immediately leads him to make a comparison between this man and himself, a comparison altogether to his own advantage: he scruples not to rank him amongst the worst of Sinners, though he could not possibly know the disposition of his heart at that time; and thus even his devotion is uncharitable. When he saw the Publi-

can

(a) ὁ ἔπειρος τῶν αἰρέπων.

can come to the temple to pray, he ought to have supposed or hoped that he came with a due sense of his offences, and with honest intentions.

This was a fault to which the Jews in our Saviour's time were remarkably addicted, and therefore he frequently reprehends rashness, partiality, and inhumanity in judging others. Concerning this malevolent temper we may observe, that it consists not in an abhorrence of sin, nor yet in openly blaming open vice and immorality, but in condemning many in general, or particularly such and such persons, when through ignorance of circumstances we are not qualified to pass a judgment upon them; in assuming to ourselves what belongs to God, and pronouncing how he shall deal with them; in concluding that those are great sinners who fall under great calamities, and in representing the same faults more or less favourably, according as we like or dislike those who commit them. Of such censoriousness our Lord observes, that it shall bring down a stricter judgment upon ourselves:

The censoriousness of which we are speaking relates to men and to their moral character, which we ought to treat as candidly and as tenderly as we would have our own treated. As to the opinions relating to religion, and maintained by Christians of various denominations, we have a natural right to judge freely of them, if we be duly qualified by understanding the subject; and we may express our dislike of all notions which have a bad tendency, and are contrary to truth and reason: but here we ought to distinguish between the opinions and the persons, and whilst we attack the former, we should spare the latter, and not charge them with holding consequences which they see not and admit not. As to men's abilities natural and acquired, their learning and their writings, we are also at liberty to form our judgments, if we have skill for it: nevertheless, since men's reputation in these things may

often be connected with their temporal welfare and with the peace and comfort of their mind, it is better to be too indulgent towards them than too severe; and it is what we should desire to be done to ourselves, if we were in their circumstances.

2. This parable was intended to correct those false notions of religion, which lead men to overlook the principal duties of it,

The Pharisee, giving an account of himself, says, that he was not unjust, or an extortioner, or an adulterer. Possibly he might be mistaken; and not altogether so free from all those faults as he imagined. But though he could affirm all this with truth, to abstain from these sins was not the whole of religion. He adds, as the completion of all, that he paid his tithes exactly, and that he fasted twice in the week, which was more than the Law required.

Our Lord hath not blamed the Pharisees for paying tithes even of the smallest matters: he calls it one of those things which ought not to be left undone, that is, which had a lower degree of goodness in them. Nor hath he censured their fasts; but the reason for which they kept them, and the confidence which they placed in them. If therefore the Pharisee found his frequent fasts subservient to religion, and conducing to make him a better man, he did well; if they had no good effect upon his mind, they were of no use and value; and if he submitted to them for worldly ends, from the world he was to expect his reward.

The Pharisees observed the ceremonial Law and the traditions with exactness; but they took no care to restrain their inordinate affections, to purify their heart from lust, from envy, from covetousness, from malice, from vain-glory, from an excessive love of the world; they would not adhere to the cause of truth and virtue against the smallest of their temporal interests.

The

The Pharisee, in pleading his own merits, mentions either good works, or works which had the external nature of goodness, as an abstaining from certain vices, justice in his dealings, and scrupulous payment of all that the Law of God required. There have been persons who have talked more absurdly than this Pharisee, namely, they who have magnified faith so indiscreetly as to undervalue good works. Christian faith and Christian virtues are indeed inseparable; but yet faith and works, or believing and practising, may be in some manner distinguished in the mind; that is to say, You may consider believing separately from acting, and you may consider acting separately from believing. And if you view them in this manner, it must be owned that works without faith are better than faith without works, for this obvious reason, that moral actions, from what principle soever they flow, such as justice, charity, gratitude, affability, liberality, forgiveness of injuries, are of a social and diffusive nature, and others are the better for them; but a persuasion that we are in the favour of God, and a speculative belief of revealed religion, are of no advantage to any creature besides the possessor. If I am in distress, and a person pities and relieves me; let him be a Pagan, a Publican, a Jew, a Samaritan, a Schismatic, a Heretic, he is my benefactor: if he gives me nothing, let his faith be ever so right, it will not feed and clothe me.

3. Our Saviour's design in this parable was to expose and reprove that part of self-love which makes men proud of their righteousness.

The Pharisee's prayer discovered the disposition of his mind. He begins it indeed with an acknowledgement of God's assistance: God, I thank thee. But this seems to be thrown out for fashion's sake; it being scarcely possible that a man can have a due sense of his weakness without the divine support, and be lifted up with notions of his own performances. We may sup-

pose that he did not much regard what he said, when he returned thanks to God that he was a good man, but that his chief design was to boast of his uncommon piety. His address to God is drawn up in a form of thanksgiving, and as if he had no sins to confess, and was in no danger of falling into any for the future, and wanted no improvement of any kind ; he makes no request for pardon and support, and seems to be talking with himself rather than with his Maker, and blessing himself rather than blessing God.

That he may set his good works in the most favourable light and the most advantageous view, he takes care not to compare his practice with his duty. If he had done so, his conscience must have reminded him of several defects. But he chuses an easier method of examining himself, and compares his own with the actions of wicked men, that he may appear to be righteous, because he is not so bad as they are.

Many are the evil consequences of this spiritual vanity and religious pride, which is commonly compounded of self-conceit, ignorance, folly, ingratitude, and uncharitableness ; and which our Lord warned his hearers to avoid, because it was a prevailing sin amongst the Jews.

Some advantages, which should have made them better men, contributed to lead them into it. Their Law, which separated them from other people, and the peculiar favours which they had received from God, produced in them unsuitable effects, a national pride, a high conceit of themselves, a contempt and a bad opinion of others.

Many ceremonies were enjoined by the Law ; and they having a trifling and superstitious turn of mind, added to the burden of the ritual law numerous institutions and inventions of their own, and were not a little proud of the obedience which they paid to them.

4. Our Saviour in this parable recommends repentance and humility towards God, as the first step to amendment.

The Publican, says he, stood afar off, and durst not lift up his eyes to heaven: but smote upon his breast, saying; God be merciful to me a sinner: and he returned home justified rather than the other.

If when he returned home, he had returned to those faults which he had acknowledged, he had been an hypocrite too, as well as the Pharisee, though of another kind: but his humility, and his shame and sorrow were sincere, and accompanied, it is to be supposed, with amendment of life.

5. Lastly, the design of our Lord was to caution us against all pride in general. The parable indeed sets before us only one kind of pride, a groundless conceit of our own religious merits; but then the moral and application are unlimited, and seem to relate to all sorts of arrogance.

Spiritual pride is not common amongst reasonable men. It seems to belong more particularly to those who are far gone in enthusiasm, or very ignorant of the nature of true religion, and of its genuine effects: and upon such persons advice and instruction are usually thrown away. If the light that is in a man be darkness, how great is that darkness! and if reason itself be shut out, how can reasoning have any influence!

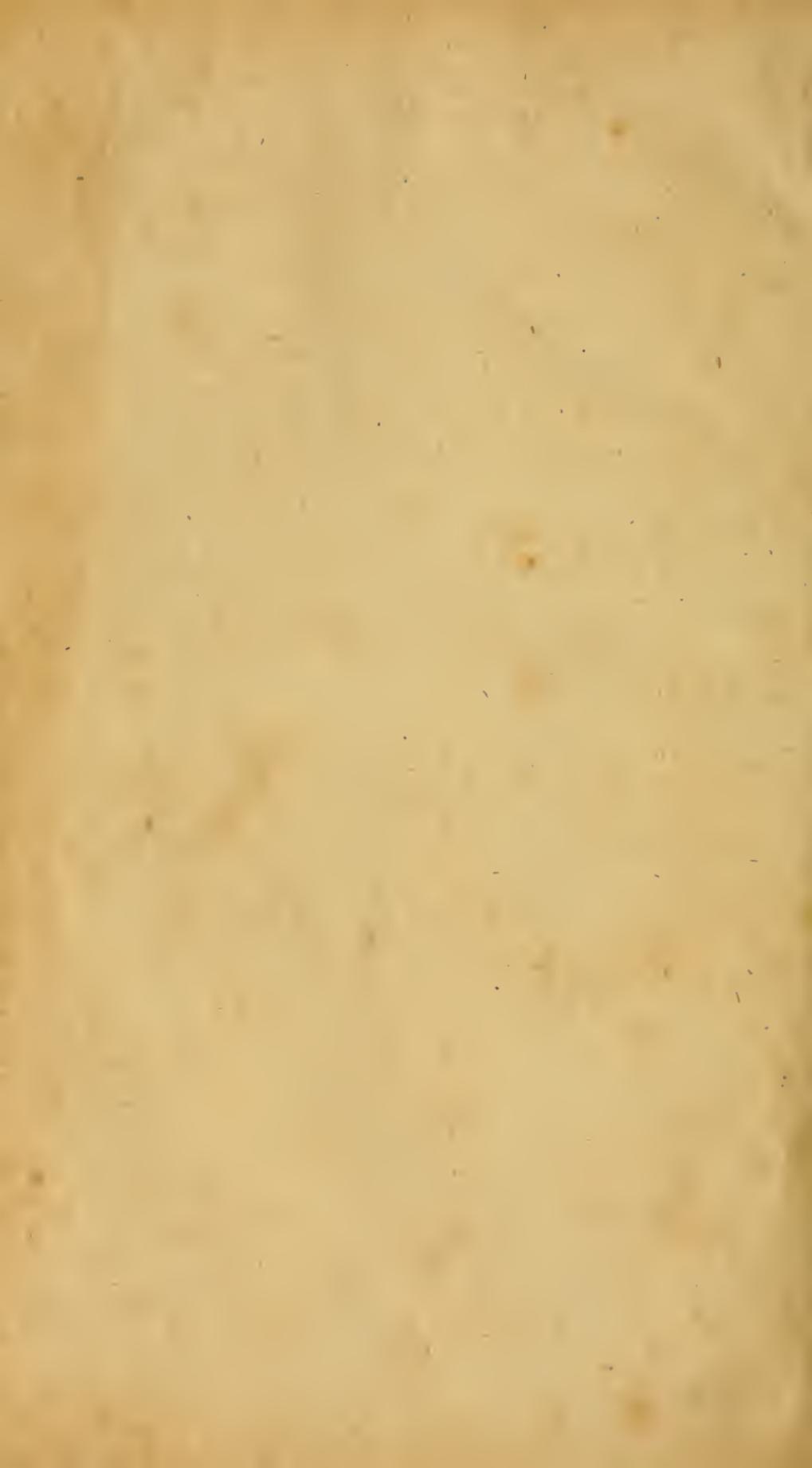
But other sorts of pride are too frequent, and these words are directed against all arrogance: Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased. He will be abased by his own vanity, which blinds those whom it infects, and either finds or makes them fools, and draws them into many errors and indiscretions pernicious to their worldly interests. He will be abased by men, who detest over-bearing insolence, if not in themselves, yet always in others, and seldom miss any fair opportunity of humbling such vain-glorious persons. He will be abased

abased in the sight of God, who is constantly represented in Scripture as abhorring the proud ; for pride, of whatsoever kind it be, is a direct offence against God ; it is to forget, or practically to deny, that we receive every thing from him, all the advantages of body, mind, birth, reputation, and fortunes, which we possess. Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

ul







120 Jan 16

2

180
181
182
205

