SERMONS

ON

Robert Finley

DIFFERENT SUBJECTS,

BY THE LATE REVEREND

JOHN JORTIN, 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.

MDCCLXXVIII.

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.

CONTENTS.

SER-

SER-

SER-

SERMON XII.

Spirituality of God.

JOHN iv. 24.

SERMON XIII.

Impartiality of God.

ROM. ii. 11.

SERMON XIV.

The Love of God.

MARK xii. 30.

SER-

SER-

SERMON XVIII.

Thankſgiving.

EPHES. v. 20.

SERMON XIX.

JOHN xxi. 21, 22.

SERMON XX.

Lord's Prayer.

LUKE xi. 1.

SER-

SERMON XXI.

SERMONS XXII, XXIII.

SERMONS XXIV, XXV.

SER-

SER-

SER-

SERMON XXXIV.

SERMON XXXV.

SER-

SERMON 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 shouldst 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 Messias, 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* (Chrysippus) Orphei, Musæi, Hesiodi, Homeri que fabellas accommodare ad ea quæ ipse primo libro de Diis immortalibus dixerit: ut etiam veterrimi Poetæ, qui hæc ne suspicati quidem sunt, Stoici fuisse 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

(*c*) 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 (h) 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. (h) Chap. xxv. 4.

ture, and which one would not expect to find in this list of vitious 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 ſaith; 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 cenſorioufneſs 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 ſlanders 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

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 II.

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.

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 befal 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*) ὅθεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐν παραβολῇ ἐκομίσατο.

(*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 ἐκομίσατο far more naturally implies Abraham's *bringing away* his ſon ſafe and found, 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* ἐκομίσατο, put for the *Pluſquam perfectum*, is ſomewhat harſh; and that the ſenſe, *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 reasonableness 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 imagination 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 disbelieving, 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 senses, upon numerous revelations made to him, and upon the veracity, the omnipotence, and the goodness 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 recompenſe 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

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 Meſſias was made to Abraham; ſo the moſt expreſs and lively type of the Meſſias 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

(*b*) Tillotſon. (*c*) Antiq. i. 13.

(*d*) Ἰσαὰκ μετὰ πεποιθήσεως γινώσκων τὸ μέλλον, ἑκὼν ἐγένετο θυσία. Clemens *Epiſt.* 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.

SERMON

SERMON III.

MATT. 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 harraſs 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 titie 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 ingratis tribuunt; ſed illa bonis paraverant: contingunt autem etiam malis, quia ſeparari non poſſunt. Satius eſt autem prodeſſe malis propter bonos, quam bonis deſſe 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 diſſention 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 inconveniencies 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-

 guiſhed

(*c*) — — — — — Gaudet patientia duris;
Lætius 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-reproof and reaſon are not quite extinguiſhed. Good example allures 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 forerunners 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.

SERMON 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 neceſſariarum 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 wave 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) *De minimis non curat lex*, 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. *Messaliens.*

(*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)* loaths 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 ſtreights, 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 ſavour, 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) —— ἐτάσιον ἀχθος ἀρούρης.

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 (*h*) 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-

 lities,

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

(*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 ſeculo 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: auctum nihil ulli contingere, niſi ſapienti, obtell. *Idem*, Ep. lv

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

 this

(*k*) —— maleſuada 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 confider that in all honourable and profitable employments, in all arts, in all ftudies, the beginnings are difficult, and the difficulties muft be maftered by obftinate application. But many things contribute to leffen thofe difficulties daily, or to make men lefs fenfible of them, as a fprightly refolution, prefent profit, the hope of ftill greater advantages, experience and practice, and long cuftom which is a fecond nature. Thus fome, whom idle by-ftanders judge to lead a wretched and laborious life, are really moft contented and pleafed with their condition; for a man is juft as (*l*) miferable as he thinks himfelf, and if he delights in induftry, induftry to him is a diverfion, and idlenefs is a toil.

So alfo is it in our religious concerns. The duty of a Chriftian is a laborious thing, efpecially to thofe who have bad difpofitions to conquer, or particular difficulties to encounter; but, (*m*) when we do any thing good with labour, the labour paffeth away, and the good remains: when we do any thing evil with pleafure, the pleafure paffeth away, and the evil remains; and then cuftom making our obedience habitual, an even temper, peace of mind, and many other prefent advantages fpringing from it, the hope not only of efcaping future evil, but of obtaining everlafting life, and the divine affiftance vouchfafed to us as far as it is needful, will by degrees make our inclinations join with our reafon, and our duty become our delight.

(*l*) Tam mifer eft quifquam, quam credit, *Seneca.*

(*m*) Ἄρτι πραξὶς καλὸν μετὰ πόνου, ὁ μὲν πόνος οἴχεται, τὸ δὲ καλὸν μένει· ἄν τι ποιήσης αἰσχρὸν μεθ' ἡδονῆς, τὸ μὲν ἡδὺ οἴχεται, τὸ δὲ αἰσχρὸν μένει. *Mufonius* apud *Gellium.*

SERMON

SERMON V.

ECCLES. vii. 16.

Be not righteous overmuch.

A WISE writer requires a wife 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' ἀρχᾶνος ὠκέα βέλη
ἔνδον ἐνὶ φαρέτρᾳ φωνᾶντα συνετοῖσιν. ἐς δὲ τὸ πᾶν, ἑρμηνέων χατίζει.

Ολυμπ. Β. 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 ſecreſy; and this, doubtleſs, was a convenient cover for falſhood 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

ſkilful 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 wickednefs 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 raillery 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 lukewarmneſs 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, almsgiving, 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. Overrighteoufnefs confifts alfo in every thing that is properly called Will-worfhip. Will-worfhip is in general the invention and the practice of fuch expedients of appeafing or of pleafing God, as neither reafon nor revelation fuggeft; and which, fince they are not contained in the law of nature, or in the law of God, muft either be wicked, or at leaft frivolous and foolifh. This Will-worfhip hath been in all times and places the conftant concomitant and the fure badge of fuperftition. To enumerate all the modes of fuperftition, and all the fhapes in which it hath fhewed itfelf in the Jewifh Church, in the Pagan and in the Chriftian world, would be an endlefs as well as a needlefs tafk. It fufficeth to have mentioned in general the nature of Will-worfhip.

To us Chriftians, the Gofpel is our fufficient and complete rule of behaviour; and if any Chriftian underftands it tolerably, he will foon find his rule to be fo ftrict and fo excellent, that he will have no occafion to feek out and aim at fublimer accomplifhments. Let him well confider his duty, as it is there laid down, and let him feriofly afk himfelf the queftion, Have I complied with all thefe precepts? His confcience, I fuppofe, will reply to him; No, thou haft not: thou haft failed in this, and in that. Let him firft live up to the Gofpel, and when that time is come, we will give him full and free leave to apply himfelf to Will-worfhip, and to works of Supererogation. But that time affuredly never will come. His fun will be fet before his tafk is thus accomplifhed; and if God receives him to favour, it muft be, not by an act of juftice, but by an act of mercy, accepting his endeavours, and pardoning his offences for the fake of Jefus Chrift.

3. Religious zeal, being naturally brifk and refolute, is a warmth of temper, which may eafily run into exceffes, and which breaks in upon the great law of charity, when it produces oppreffion and perfecution. The zealot pleads confcience for his own behaviour, but never

ver will allow that plea in thofe who diffent from him: and what a perverfe and faucy abfurdity is this!

In countries where there hath been an Ecclefiaftical eftablifhment, and a national form of religion, perfecutions have ufually been carried on by men, who in reality and at the bottom had no religion at all, but were influenced by political, or by felf-interefted views, joined to a proud and a cruel temper. Yet it is not to be denied that amongft perfecutors there have been people really devout and religious, in their way, and acting according to confcience. We know for a certainty of one perfon upon record, who was fuch, namely St. Paul, before he was converted. Our Saviour fays to his difciples; The time cometh when whofoever killeth you will think that he doth God fervice. That time came foon, and St. Paul was one of thofe furious bigots. His example ftands for an admonition to all men, efpecially to all who are in authority, to reftrain their zeal from flaming out in unwarrantable vehemence in fupport of what they account to be true religion. For the fame caufe is the rafh zeal of St. James and St. John recorded, who wanted Chrift to let them call down fire from heaven, to confume thofe Samaritans who would not receive him with hofpitality. Ye know not, faid our Saviour to thefe impetuous difciples, ye know not what fpirit ye are of; for the Son of Man is not come to deftroy mens lives, but to fave them.

4. Overrighteoufnefs hath confpicuoufly appeared in indifcreet auftcrities, a folitary life, a voluntary poverty, and vows of celibacy. I join all thefe together, becaufe they have very often gone together.

There feem to be difeafes of the mind, as well as of the body, which burft out at certain feafons, and are contagious and epidemical. This fort of fanaticifm, of which we are now fpeaking, had its rife in ancient times, and prevailed all over the Chriftian world. Chriftians then began to be diftinguifhed into two forts, the fecular, and the fpiritual.

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 chearful giver. Solomon

lomon therefore ſpeaks of this practice in a manner rather diſſuading than recommending it. Better is it, ſays he, that thou ſhouldſt not vow, than that thou ſhouldſt 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 diffident, 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 overrightcouſneſs 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.

SERMON

SERMON VI.

NEHEMIAH v. 19.

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

THERE 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

 father

(*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 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*) —— caussas bellorum (Agricola) statuit exscindere. A se suisque orsus, primum domum suam coërcuit, quod plerisque haud minus arduum est, 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 ingenious 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 ſhould 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 œconomy 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 riſque 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 stiled, 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 Nehemiah 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.

SERMON

SERMON VII.

PROV. xxii. 2.

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

TWO 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

dle 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.

1. 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 freq[illegible]ly recom[illegible]nded,

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 undesireable opportunity of doing mischief, for which a severe 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, ſaving 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 encourage-

ment

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

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, Whoſo 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.

SERMON

SERMON VIII.

PSALM 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, Ἀγαθὸν ſtands above Νοῦς and Ψυχή.

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 miſreprefented. 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 noſtrâ laſſat 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, ow 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 eminently 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 wouldſt 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.

 4. The

(*d*) Πᾶς τὸ εἰκεῖον ἔργον ἀγαπᾷ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγαπηθεὶν ἂν ὑπο τοῦ ἔργου, ἐμψύχου γενομένου. *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 conveniencies, 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

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

Lucretius iii. 944, ii. 14. 995.

pofe his felicity to depend upon the opinion which we entertain of him, and the reverence which we pay to him, nor would he be lefs happy, though we paffed over all his favours in ftupid and ungrateful filence! It was therefore goodnefs in God which moved him to create.

Though it was fit that his goodnefs fhould difplay itfelf in the production of creatures, and in that fenfe it may perhaps be *morally* neceffary that there fhould in all times be an inhabited world, yet inftead of us he might have made other beings, who would have ferved his purpofes 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 muft needs be highly valuable, and worthy of that wife and beneficent Mind which beftows them. Such are thofe which God hath conferred upon us.

He hath placed us in a world abounding with all things ufeful and convenient for us, and agreeable to our nature and inclinations, which whilft they fupply our wants and anfwer our defires, are perpetual proofs of his power and goodnefs, who contrived and difpofed them for our benefit. His power and goodnefs prefent themfelves to us in all the objects which furround us; they appear in the earth which feeds us, in the creatures which ferve us, in the heavenly bodies which fhine upon us, in the fucceffion of day and night, in the change and regular return of feafons, in every thing that contributes to our fatisfaction and well-being.

He hath created us many in number, that we might enjoy the pleafure and the profit of a focial life, that we might affift, and comfort, and inftruct, and protect each other. Hence arife thofe intercourfes of good offices, thofe mutual dependences, thofe feveral relations which we bear to others, whence we all reap numberlefs advantages.

He

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 falſhood, 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 juſteſt 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

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.

SERMON

SERMON IX.

PSALM 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 continu-

ally

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 boundlefs univerfe, and to the ages of eternity? The object of God's providence is the whole world, and in it are innumerable creatures. To all thefe the divine government extends, ordering all things in the wifeft, in the jufteft, and in the kindeft manner. But unlefs we could furvey eternity and immenfity, we cannot have a full view of this; and we muft not pretend to fay that there is a defect of goodnefs in the adminiftration of the whole, from the confideration of that very little portion of it, which lies within the reach of our contemplation.

2. If this firft anfwer be fatisfactory, the fecond hath ftill more ftrength.

It is true that there are objections to the goodnefs of God, which have in them no fmall difficulty. But in all queftions of this nature, it is the part of every prudent enquirer to confider the difficulties on both fides, and to embrace the opinion which hath the feweft. By this way of judging, the queftion before us is foon decided; for there are many unanfwerable proofs of God's goodnefs, there are many abfurdities which follow the denial of it; and the difficulties which attend it arife in all probability from our limited capacity, and imperfect knowledge, which cannot difcover the whole plan and fyftem of divine providence.

From thefe general anfwers let us now defcend to a confideration of particulars.

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

But a rational agent muft be a free agent; for to reafon and to act require and imply choice and liberty: and every creature and free being muft have a power of finning, unlefs he had the perfections of his creator, which is impoffible.

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 qualiſying 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 anſam,
Materies laudis dum mea culpa tuæ eſt.
Nam niſi peccaſſem, quid tu concedere poſſes!
Clementiæ 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

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 expofed, are no more than we deferve upon many accounts: but as to the inferior animals, mankind might fay of them, in the words of David, when the people died for his folly; Lo, I have finned, and I have done wickedly; but thefe fheep, what have they done?

This muft be acknowledged to be no fmall (*d*) difficulty; and the Scripture is, in a manner, filent upon the fubject; only it tells us, in general, that they are objects of God's providence, and that the fame hand that feedeth us, feedeth them alfo. Solomon fays, A righteous man regardeth the life of his beaft; 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 unreafonable to fuppofe, that as they have in them a living

(*d*) It muft be confeffed that the empire of Death, which is eftablifhed here over man and beaft, appears as a defect and blot in our fyftem. Every creature here fubfifts by the deftruction of other creatures. If we were to form an imaginary world of beauty and happinefs, there fhould be nothing in it fubject to this cruel law; there fhould be, as the Revelation expreffes it, no more death, neither forrow, nor crying, nor pain.

The Pythagoreans, who held the tranfmigration of fouls, thought it unlawful to feed upon animals, and to diflodge the fouls of their anceftors which were put into the bodies of brutes. But they might eafily have perceived, that it was on many accounts abfolutely impoffible to obferve this precept. The ox kills as many creatures for his fubfiftence, 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, flew his ten thoufands at his dinner.

The Cartefians, to remove the difficulty, have affirmed that beafts are mere machines, void of fenfe. But all the phænomena are againft them, and their notion muft always appear as extravagant as any Stoical paradox.

What if we fhould fuppofe, that the fouls of brutes are fpirits, who have mifbehaved themfelves in a former ftate, and are imprifoned in thofe bodies, by way of punifhment? You will fay, perhaps, that punifhment ought to be attended with a confcioufnefs in the intelligent agent, that he fuffers for paft tranfgreffions. But how do you know that they have not this knowledge? and fuppofing that they have it not at prefent, yet they may in another removal to another ftate retrieve their confcioufnefs and reminifcence.

I dare not lay much ftrefs upon this folution, which I fuppofe will appear fantaftical to many. I fhall only fay of it, that it is far better than the Cartefian hypothefis.

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.

SERMON 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 expreſly. 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 profecto.
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 wherefoever 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.

lute 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 discoverable 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 deſireable 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 ſuperiours. 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

(*d*) Plato.

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 makes 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 γυμναὶ παλῶν εὐσοχῶσί πως περὶ την ἀλήθειαν.

(*f*) De Legibus, x.

genuous, 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-

 ſons,

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

ſons, 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.

SERMON

SERMON XI.

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.

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 inexhaſted 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 caufeth things to be, or come to pafs, according to his will and pleafure, and who fulfils and performs whatfoever he declares and promifes.

Whichfoever of thefe fenfes we follow, the name Jehovah implies, amongft other things, the unchangeable nature of God.

In the fame book, God fays to Mofes, who afked him his name, I am that I am. Thus fhalt thou fay, I am hath fent me unto you. The expreffion of St. John in the beginning of the Revelation is of the fame (*b*) extraordinary kind; Grace be unto you and peace from the Who is, and who was, and who fhall be; that is, from him whofe name is, Who is, and who was, and who fhall be.

When God afcribes to himfelf the name, *I am*, it denotes that he is in a manner peculiar to himfelf. Others things are; but they are in a way altogether different. Material beings are; but, as they are void of fenfe, and know not that they have a being, they are only a fmall remove above nothing. Our fouls are, in a manner far more excellent, for they feel and know themfelves to be; but we are fo changeable in our nature, fo abfolutely dependent for the beginning and continuance and circumftances of our being, that, compared to God, we can fcarcely be faid to be. To him only it belongs to affirm of himfelf, in the ftrict and the true fenfe, I am.

The fame perfection is afcribed to God in other places of Scripture, and in other expreffions. He is called, the King immortal, who alone hath immortality, the incorruptible God, the living God, the Lord who changeth not, who is from everlafting to everlafting, who is the fame, whofe years fail not, the Father of lights, with whom is no variablenefs, neither fhadow of turning.

Moft

(*b*) Rev. i. 4.

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 needlefs and endlefs to cite the paffages of Scripture which eftablifh this truth; for the hiftory of the Old Teftament and the writings of the Prophets abound with proofs and with declarations that the counfels and the purpofes of the Almighty ftand faft for ever and ever; that the rife and fall of empires, and the profperity and adverfity of his chofen people were appointed by his decrees, which were to be exactly and inevitably fulfilled.

III. I fhall confider thofe actions and that part of God's conduct towards mankind, which feem to argue in him inconftancy and change of mind.

Firft; It is often faid 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 faid to repent him of the evil that he had denounced.

When God is faid to repent and to be grieved, it is manifeft that fuch popular expreffions are to be underftood as fpoken in condefcenfion to the weaknefs of our apprehenfions. All that is meant by them is, that as men repent and are grieved when things fall fhort of their expectations, and withdraw their favour from thofe who make an ill ufe of it; fo God deals with finners, though without any perturbation, without any change in himfelf; and as men again, upon the amendment and good behaviour of fuch perfons, will fometimes alter their refolutions to punifh them, will be appeafed, and will treat them kindly; fo God, who is uniform and unchangeable, is always ready to pardon thofe, who by a change in themfelves from fin to righteoufnefs become proper objects of his mercy.

Secondly, We learn from the Scriptures, that God gave the Jews ritual laws, which in themfelves and of their own nature were not good, and which he afterwards repealed by his Son. Human wifdom indeed, which is very limited, imperfect, and fhort-fighted, contrives laws as judiciouffly as it can, and afterwards difco-

vers

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 threatnings, 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 threatnings 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 threatnings 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 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 threatning 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 threatnings are to be commonly underſtood to admit ſuch exceptions and limitations.

Secondly,

Secondly, Wiſe 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 threatning 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*) Deſine fata Deûm flecti 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 ſullied 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

(*d*) Cato, vir bonus, quia aliter eſſe non potuit.

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.

SERMON

SERMON XII.

JOHN iv. 24.

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

THESE 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

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 auſterities, 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 uncontrolable 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 of 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 deſunt. Quinctilian x. 7. p. 953.

ſicknefs, and pain, and diſappoinments, 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.

SERMON XIII.

ROM. ii. 11.

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 inconſiderable 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, ſlights 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 embaraſſes 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 ſaith, 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

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

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

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; conquently 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 oppreſs 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 diſpoſed of to

thoſe

thofe who leaft deferve it, and the childrens bread given to the dogs. It is a melancholy thing to obferve, that many perfons, who have their good qualities, yet have this weaknefs, and cannot bear plain dealing, nor fee through the artifices of parafites, nor diftinguifh between compliment and fincerity.

Covetoufnefs and felf-intereft are unavoidably accompanied with partiality. Such perfons ufually fell their favours to the beft bidder, without any regard to any other qualification, and have no confideration for thofe who can make no other return than thanks and gratitude. As an inordinate love of gain is the root of all evil, fo is it particularly of partiality and proftitution, both in matters of courtefy and in matters of juftice; and perfons of this temper lie under ftrong temptations to violate the rules of honefty and equity, when it may be done with impunity, and with prefent profit.

Party zeal, either civil or religious, when indifcreet and intemperate, hath the fame bad influence in biafing the judgment; and the fouleft things are then faid and done without remorfe, to ferve what is imagined to be a good caufe.

Anger and envy alfo, when indulged, always lead men to carry their fpleen and refentment beyond all reafon and decency, to overlook the good qualities, to aggravate the defects, to mifrepreffent the innocent actions of thofe at whom they are offended, to liften to any calumnies raifed againft them, and to refufe them the offices even of juftice and common humanity.

Credulity, and eafinefs, and indolence of temper, are alfo parents of partiality. Perfons of this turn of mind are led by others, and depend upon their judgment of men, as well as of opinions, and will give themfelves no trouble to look into things, and to get proper information, but will fay and behave as they are directed; and thus it is often feen that even a good-natured perfon 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.

SERMON

SERMON XIV.

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.

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

ſing down the ſoul, the paſſions from within, and the objects from without, diſturbing it, and taking it off from wiſer employments, ſully 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 heighth 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

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

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.

SERMON

SERMON 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

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 threatnings, 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. Supposing

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 committeth 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 treſpaſs 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 rebel-

lious

ſious 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.

SERMON XVI.

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.

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. Thefe things men hope to obtain and fecure.

Therefore, firft, they fometimes truft in a thing of which they have a confufed 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 Goddefs even by her own votaries: fo that this reliance is extremely abfurd, and is not indeed fo properly truft, as thoughtlefs ftupidity, and inconfideration, from which the firft untoward accident will awaken them.

Secondly, they truft in the favour of the world, and hope that at leaft, if they behave themfelves well, they fhall be well ufed. But here they are liable to be often difappointed, through the vices and diforderly paffions of others, and will probably experience the ill effects of envy, calumny, infolence, contempt, fraud and violence, whilft there are fo many worthlefs, felfifh, and difhoneft perfons to be found in all fociety, and in all ranks and degrees of men.

Thirdly, they truft in their friends. But thefe friends may defert them, may want the will or the power to ferve them, may be removed far from them, or may die before them. Indeed there are few immutable friendfhips amongft mutable men.

Fourthly, they truft in their own riches or power, that is, in poffeffions which may be loft, or which may give them no pleafure and fatisfaction, and which cannot fecure health, or reputation, or peace of mind, or efteem and love.

Fifthly, they truft in themfelves, that is, in their own abilities, caution, forecaft, prudence and diligence; and fo far they are much in the right, that it is more reafonable to place a confidence in ourfelves than in other men; for here we are fure at leaft of a friend who will never fail and deceive us willingly. But man finds himfelf

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 ariſeth 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 no where 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, raises 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.

SERMON XVII.

ROM. xii. 12.

Rejoicing in hope.—

THE 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

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 ſayeſt, 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

thefe things will not fuffer a morning or an evening to pafs over his head without a thought of his latter-end, which for wife reafons is hidden from his eyes; and for reafons no lefs wife fhould be ever prefent to his mind.

This to the carelefs and the inconfiderate will feem ftrange advice. Such thoughts as thefe, they will fay, are the fuggeftions of mere fpleen and melancholy, or will be the fure producers of it. It would caft men into continual defpondence and heavinefs of heart. To think of death daily, what is it but to die daily? And fince we muft die once, and only once, why fhould we chufe rather to die a thoufand times? Be it fo. They who do not like to think of death, let them think of immortality, which will anfwer all religious purpofes as well. Let them confider that a time is approaching when death fhall be fwallowed up in victory. By performing their duty they may hope for that time, and in that hope the fervants of God may rejoice.

To anticipate future events of the agreeable kind, is one of thofe difpofitions which are found in active and lively minds. Such for example is the love of honour, fame, refpect, reputation, and glory, obfervable in perfons of a liberal and ingenuous fpirit, which is a fort of felf-love. Rigid and morofe Moralifts have treated it as mere weaknefs and folly; but if it deferves no commendation, it deferves no reproof whilft it is regulated by reafon, becaufe it tends to the advantage of fociety, it ferves to many ufeful purpofes, it excites to many profitable actions, and it is juftified by the word of God, which propounds it as one of the rewards of well-doing.

A perfon who is fmitten with this paffion is pleafed with the thought that his abilities, and his atchievements, of the learned, or the ingenious, or the political, or the military, or the benevolent and charitable kind, fhall fecure 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.

teoufnefs. Eternal life is the gift of God in the Gofpel; but it is given to thofe only who live, not according to the flefh, but to the fpirit; and whofoever hath this hope purifieth himfelf, as God is pure; for without holinefs no man fhall fee the Lord.

And now I propofe to conclude with fome neceffary remarks upon a duty which is frequently recommended in the New Teftament, and faid to have been frequently practifed by the Difciples and the firft Chriftians, namely, to rejoice in trials, temptations, diftreffes, afflictions, tribulations, and perfecutions.

This precept hath ever been confidered by the profane and the irreligious as abfurd and extravagant, as requiring men to diveft themfelves of their own nature, and to have neither paffions nor feelings. Even they, who are by no means to be ranked amongft the fcoffers, find it difficult to give an unfeigned affent to it, and to hope to comply with it; and therefore are difpofed to explain it away. And indeed there are not wanting objections which may be urged againft it. For it may be faid that in the New Teftament there are frequent exhortations to patience, contentment, and refignation in adverfity. Thefe difpofitions feem to contain all that fhould be required of us, and all that we can do. Now thefe meek virtues may produce an even temper and a compofure of mind, but nothing like joy or exultation, nothing of the cheerful kind. The example of our Saviour is alfo fet before us for our imitation; and if we confider his behaviour under his fufferings, we fee the moft perfect refignation, but we fee no rejoicing. Once it is recorded of him that he rejoiced, and that was when beholding the Difciples who accompanied him, he confidered the goodnefs of God towards men of a low rank and condition, neglected and defpifed by the world, but honeft and well-difpofed perfons, to whom were revealed the myfteries of the Gofpel and the way of falvation, whilft they were hidden from the eyes of the wife 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

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.

SERMON

SERMON XVIII.

EPHES. 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 neither, 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 thofe things which might be prejudicial to his true intereft. The temporal advantages which he enjoys not, are often beftowed upon the moft unworthy; therefore he concludes, that their value is comparatively fmall. They have been abufed by many to their deftruction, therefore he accounts himfelf happy, that he is not expofed to thofe temptations. More health might have made him intemperate; more wealth might have made him infolent and debauched; more kindnefs from the world might have endeared the world too much to him. If he be infirm, he knows that the weaknefs of the body often conduceth to the health of the foul; if his poffeffions be fmall, he knows that wifdom and (*a*) peace love to dwell under homely roofs, and that Poverty is often the mother of induftry and knowledge; if he be little efteemed by men, it is a motive to him to feek other and better friends, and to fecure the favour of God, and of thofe good beings, with whom he hopes to dwell and to converfe hereafter.

Fourthly; habitual gratitude confifts in chearfully receiving thofe temporal bleffings which God offers to us, thofe things which are plainly contrived and intended for our ufe and benefit. An exceffive fondnefs of the world is, as we before obferved, not reconcileable with gratitude. There feems to be alfo another extreme, an extreme fcarcely confiftent with thankfulnefs; namely, too great a contempt, or fear, or abhorrence of the world, and of thofe temporal conveniences which are ferviceable to us in our paffage through it. We are indeed exhorted, not to love the world; but by the world, which we muft 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 furround us

(*a*) —— non humiles domos
Faftidit.

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 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 wondeful 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 Caufes which produce health or ficknefs, plenty or poverty, peace or war, as the elements, earth, air, fire, and water, the friendfhip or the enmity of other nations with whom we have to do, the operation of fpiritual agents, good or bad, who are invifible to us; thefe are all the fervants, the miniflers, and the inftruments of the Moft High, executing his will, and carrying on the plan of his eternal Providence. It is with ftrict truth, as well as with poetical elegance, that the Pfalmift reprefents heaven and earth, fun and moon, fire and hail, fnow and vapour, wind and ftorm, obeying his decrees, and fulfilling his word.

Profperity and adverfity proceed from him, and are connected with moral purpofes; they are encouragements, or recompences, or trials, or warnings, or corrections, or punifhments, all intended for wife and good ends.

The advantages of which we partake, as men, as Chriftians, as members of fociety, remind us that we ought to give thanks to God, not only for all things, but for all men. We are interefted in the welfare of mankind, more particularly in the profperity of our fellow Chriftians, our countrymen, our friends and relations. We are indebted to fociety for moft of the conveniences of life, and for the means of improving our underftanding, and acquiring wifdom and virtue: therefore we are bound in gratitude to blefs and praife God for the benefits which he imparts to others. Charity and humanity will alfo 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 perfons, are beft known to each of us; and it is the duty of every one to acquaint himfelf with them, and to return his praifes 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 expreſly 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 ſoul, 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.

SERMON 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 difciples, fays St. John, durft afk Chrift, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. They durft not afk him, becaufe they had fufficient evidence from his deeds, and from his words, and becaufe they feared left he fhould fharply rebuke them for their unbelief, if they expreffed any doubt of it. Probably there was an alteration in his perfon and countenance, and he had a more majeftic afpect now than before his death.

When they had dined, Chrift addreffed himfelf thus to Peter; Simon, fon of Jonas, loveft thou me more than thefe? More than thefe; that is, fay (*b*) fome Expofitors, more than thefe nets, thefe fifhing boats, and thefe worldly occupations. I think that can hardly be the meaning; it is too cold and flat, and Peter might love Jefus more than thefe things, and yet not love him much. More than thefe; that is, more than thefe my difciples who are here prefent. Chrift's words may be thus interpreted and explained;

Thou didft fay to me, on the night when I was betrayed, Although all thy difciples fhould forfake thee, yet will I never forfake thee; I will live, and I will die with thee; which was in effect to pretend that thou didft love me more than they: and now thou haft haftened before them all to come through the fea to me. I afk thee therefore, Doft thou indeed love me, more than thefe my difciples love me?

Peter anfwered, Lord, thou knoweft that I love thee. He would not prefume to fay, I love thee more than thefe; he remembered his own former weaknefs; but he affirmed that he did fincerely love Chrift; who replied, Feed my lambs.

He afked him a fecond time, Loveft thou me? without adding the former words, more than thefe. Peter returned the fame anfwer; and Chrift replied again, Feed my fheep.

He

(*b*) Whitby.

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 wouldſt; but when thou ſhalt be old, thou ſhalt ſtretch forth thy hands, and another ſhall gird thee, and carry thee where thou wouldſt 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 wouldſt 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 wouldſt 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 for ever 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 befell them, where they preached, and how they died, except what is related by St. Luke in the Acts, 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 deſpicable, 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 aud 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 ſhewey 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

righteoufly 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 ſucceſs, 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.

SERMON

SERMON 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 glorioſly manifeſted.

ſented. 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 encreaſed 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 chearfully. 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, ἐπιούσιον. Ἡ ἐπιοῦσα is *the morrow*; as in Euripides—ἡ ἐπιοῦσα λαμπὰς θεῶν, is *lux postera*, Med. 352.

Jerom

ſight, ſeem to contradict the precept of our Saviour, wherein he bids us Take no care for the morrow. But, firſt, the care which he condems, 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 Hebræos, pro *ſuperſubſtantiali* pane, reperi *machar*, quod dicitur *craſtinum*: ut ſit ſenſus, panem noſtrum craſtinum, id eſt, futurum da nobis hodie.

Other ancient Verſions uſe words which anſwer to *craſtinus*, 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

(*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.

SERMON XXI.

PHILIPP. 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 προθελύμνους 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 evellere, quasi calvitio mœror 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 reſonare gentes.
Lenius luctus lacrymæque mordent,
Turba quas fletu ſimili frequentat.—
Ferre quam fortem 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 pœnæ.
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 fuiſſe multos, qui lenierunt aſpera, ferendo placide. *Conſol.* 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 discerned

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 miſpent 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 ſun 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 μεν κατθανειν,
Το κατθανειν δε ζην.
Euripides.

and indeed it is eafier to convince the underftanding, than to reform the heart and compofe the paffions. The true method therefore to acquire contentment is to be good, or, if we have offended, to repent and amend: elfe we may feek it late and early, but we fhall not find it. It doth not ufe to make its abode in wicked minds. It is probable that fuch perfons will not poffefs it even when they are in a ftate of profperity, becaufe guilt is commonly an uneafy thing; but it is moft certain that they will not enjoy it, when evil of any fort overtakes them; for that is the time when their confcience will give them the moft difturbance.

As a careful obfervance of our duty in general is the beft method of acquiring contentment, fo there are particular acts of religion which have a more immediate connection with it: fuch is fupplication to God, that he would raife our minds above the world, and fcatter thofe clouds of fadnefs that overfhadow them, and lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and ftrengthen us againft all events, to which humble and earneft addreffes favourable promifes of fupport are made in the Scriptures; fuch is humility, and a fenfe of our defects; and fuch is gratitude for benefits received.

To thefe we fhould by all means add induftry in our affairs and callings. If you obferve the diffatisfied part of mankind, you fhall find no fmall number of them to be indolent and unoccupied. Idlenefs breeds in them difcontent; and difcontent increafes their averfion from bufinefs; and then every thing difpleafes them. But induftry is innocent, pleafant, and profitable; drives out defpondence and melancholy, by diverting the thoughts, and fixing them on other objects, and by ever prefenting to the mind fomething new, and fomething ufeful.

To induftry fhould alfo be joined a fober and fparing ufe of thofe things which are not abfolutely requifite 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, no 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.

SERMON XXII.

MATTH. 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 ſhewing 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

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 tranſgreſs 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 sect 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 morosenes, by lying and slandering, 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 ſeldomer 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 inviſos faciunt, gratioſos miſeriæ 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 desireable; 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 com-

mand

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 literis, 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.

SERMON XXIII.

ROM. 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.

1. 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 unhapppy. 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

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 inconsiderable. 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

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 enmity

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

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.

reprefented in the Pfalms as taking vengeance, fire is faid to have proceeded from him, and fmoke, and burning coals, and lightnings; fire is an emblem of his wrath and vindictive juftice; by fire he often punifhed the ungodly, as the inhabitants of Sodom, and the rebellious Jews; by fire the world is to be confumed, and the future punifhment of evil angels and evil men is reprefented under the words, everlafting fire.

Befides; fire heaped upon the head, denotes vengeance defcending from above, that is, divine vengeance.

Befides; as the natural effect of heaping fire upon a man's head is deftruction; fo in the figurative fenfe it fhould mean punifhment.

Thus is this interpretation confiftent with other paffages in the Scripture, and with the context. There is indeed an objection to it, which is very obvious, and hath a very plaufible appearance; namely, that thus St. Paul, whilft he feems to diffuade Chriftians from revenge, in reality incites them greatly to it, by fetting before them a revenge which might fatisfy the moft malicious and inhuman enemy; for it is in effect as if he had faid: When you are ill ufed, be careful to avoid that foolifh and often ineffectual revenge of returning evil for evil; but do all acts of kindnefs to your enemies, by which means you will make them guilty of the moft heinous crimes, and bring down the fevereft judgments of God upon their heads.

But there is no occafion to think that St. Paul meant any fuch thing, though we embrace the fecond interpretation, which may be juftified thus:

The duty of a Chriftian to his enemy, as it is laid down in the New Teftament, is to forgive him, and to ufe him charitably.

As this is the only apparent method of reclaiming an enemy, a Chriftian who acts thus, certainly ufes his utmoft

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 recompenſe 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 befal 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.

SERMON XXIV.

ROM. xvi. 19.

I would have you wiſe 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 wife man, in the worldly fenfe of the word.

Thirdly, Becaufe this fort of wifdom, though it be no enemy to piety, yet if not carefully kept within due bounds, is apt to encroach and ufurp upon it. He who is very wife as to this world, is continually enlarging the circle of his affairs, and the number of his acquaintances and dependents, hath much bufinefs upon his hands of other perfons, befides his own, is ever forming new defigns and projects, and is fo intent upon the accomplifhment of them, that he finds little leifure and inclination for religious thoughts and the care of his foul. He in whofe heart piety poffeffes the uppermoft place, confiders moft of thofe things upon which vanity and ambition fet a high value as not neceffary to his happinefs, or equal to his views and defires, thinks the time loft which is fpent in the company of perfons whofe way of thinking, talking, and acting he cannot approve, and efteems every occupation which contributes not to make him better and wifer and more ufeful, to be rather fit for the amufement of his hours of leifure, than for the ferious employment of his life. There have been in all times fome perfons of great capacity and high ftation, and of a virtuous and pious temper, who have found the love of truth and the pleafure of contemplating on things ferious, fpiritual and facred, to grow upon them, and being fully fenfible of the vanity and emptinefs of other objects and defigns, have, as they drew nearer to their end, retired from the bufy world as much as they could difcreetly, and have thought that they then might be faid to live, when they lived to God, to religion, and to good works.

Yet ought not the wifdom, of which we are now fpeaking, to be condemned as unworthy of a Chriftian. 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 progreſs 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 wifdom may be faid to confift, firft, in a knowledge of the truth of our religion. I mean not that all perfons are obliged to know every argument which can be offered in behalf of religion, and every anfwer to the objections which are made to it: but all Chriftians ought, if it be poffible, to be fo far acquainted with the principal and common proofs of it, that their faith may be built upon a rational foundation.

Religion divides itfelf into natural and revealed.

Natural religion fuppofeth a God, a providence, and a future ftate. There are many proofs of the being of God; but thofe which the Scriptures mention, and which are beft adapted to all capacities, are the works of God, the greatnefs, diftance, order, motion, regularity, and beauty of all the parts of the world, which could neither make themfelves, nor confpire together to one certain end, but muft have been formed and muft be guided by a Mind moft wife and good and powerful. To this may be added the general confent of mankind in all ages to acknowledge a Deity; an Atheift excepted, who fometimes arifeth in the moral world, as a monfter is fometimes brought forth in the natural world.

From the being of God appears the certainty of a future ftate; for fince God is, and fince he is juft, good, wife, and happy; and yet, here below, juftice, goodnefs, and wifdom, have not a due proportion of happinefs above folly and vice; this muft be a ftate of trial, which fhall end in a ftate of retribution.

Revealed religion, or Chriftianity, is alfo founded upon plain and ftrong evidence, of which a Chriftian, who would be wife in the religious fenfe, fhould not be ignorant. The proofs of Chriftianity are the concurrent teftimony of Chriftians ever fince the Gofpel was firft preached, the fwift and fucceefsful progrefs of it, which was foretold long before by the Prophets, and which could not have been brought to pafs without a divine affiftance, a great variety of beneficial miracles perform-

ed

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

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 forgiven; 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 thefe few obvious and manifeft truths the confequence is no lefs evident, that our principal bufinefs and our greateft prudence is to acquire and preferve religious wifdom. Whatfoever wifdom is not confiftent with this, and fets itfelf in oppofition to it, is folly and diftraction; and whatfoever wifdom is of a different kind, and is occupied about other purfuits, though it be innocent, though it be laudable, is as far inferior to this, as the earth is beneath the heavens.

SERM-

SERMON XXV.

JAMES 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.

THE 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

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 improveable 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 ſit 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 diffident 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.

SERMON 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

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 dispositon.

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 satisfaction

(*a*) Erigimur, 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 ſup-

port

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 dejection, 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 deficience.

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 whoſever falls ſhort of this muſt loſe much of the pleaſure which religion affords. If his obedience be interrupted by wilful tranſgreſſions, fear and ſelf-reproof, 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.

SERMON XXVII.

MARK 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 difciples were offended at thofe who paid this refpect to Chrift; fo that conjectures only and probable reafons may be offered concerning it; thefe for inftance:

The difciples feem to have been at that particular time converfing with Chrift upon an important fubject, and full of attention to his doctrine; and they might be offended at the importunity of thefe perfons who interrupted the difcourfe.

The difciples might think fuch actions to be beneath the dignity of their Mafter. He came into the world to inftruct men in the moft momentous concerns, to explain and improve the Law, to vindicate it from falfe interpretations, to reject frivolous and pernicious traditions, to call finners to repentance, to fhew forth his power by working miracles, and healing all manner of difeafes. In thefe things they might think his office to confift in fuch a degree, that it could not be proper for the great Prophet, the Meffias, the Son of God, to condefcend to fpend his valuable time in laying his hands upon young children. It is faid indeed, that Jefus, at the beginning of his miniftry, baptized the people; but then, as St. John obferves particularly, he did it not himfelf but by his difciples:

They might then imagine that thefe perfons were unwelcome to their mafter, who went about doing good, and was fo much taken up with other and higher employments; they might think it proper to difcourage them from reforting to him upon this occafion, left others fhould follow their example, and become troublefome to him by their numbers:

Or they might have fome diflike of the parents of thofe children, and think them unworthy of fuch a favour:

Or they might fancy this to be an ufelefs ceremony, becaufe they had never heard their Mafter 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

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, that 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.

SERMON

SERMON XXVIII.

MATTH. 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 ſeditious 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 whofe hearts are free from impurity, deceitfulnefs, and hypocrify, and whofe defigns and defires are holy and upright, will entertain juft notions of God and of religion, and a juft perfuafion that he approves and loves them, and enjoy his favourable influences; and hereafter they fhall have a nearer accefs to his glorious prefence, and that fulnefs of joy which fhall attend it.

Bleffed are the peace-makers: for they fhall be called the children of God.

Sweet is the difpofition, and happy is the occupation, of thofe who defire the welfare of all men, who ftudy to compofe and allay contention and difcord, to extinguifh wrath, malice, bitter zeal, and perfecution, and to promote univerfal peace, friendfhip, and forbearance. Such perfons imitate the moft amiable and glorious perfection of the divine nature, goodnefs and love; fuch God acknowledges for his children, and confequently they muft be happy, happy in being like God, who is called the God of peace, and happy in the peace of mind, ferenity of confcience, and other rewards, which their heavenly Father will confer upon them.

Laftly; Bleffed are they which are perfecuted for righteoufnefs fake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Greater love can no man fhew to God and to Chrift, than to bear what is difagreeable and offenfive to human nature, to lofe what in itfelf is innocent and convenient, and to forego all the outward comforts of life, rather than offend him; to profefs his faith and his hope with courage and conftancy in the face of a wicked world, and not to be deterred by fcorn, contempt, contumelies, wrongs, infults, injuries, loffes, and perfecutions, which his behaviour will draw upon him. Such a perfon is truly a fervant of God, and a difciple of Chrift, and will receive an ample and a diftinguifhed 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 embaraſſed 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 happi-

neſs

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. Whoſoever 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 traditionary 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 punifhed, and at laft lays down his life for the fake of Chrift.

Here is not only a good, but a happy man, in the opinion of him who was beft able to judge of goodnefs and of happinefs; and the truth of this affertion muft appear evident and undeniable, if we confider that the Almighty is able and willing to recompenfe a faithful fervant ten-thoufand-fold for any thing that he fhall do or fuffer upon his account, and that fuch a perfon even at prefent, and in the worft fituation, has many folid advantages and durable bleffings: he has the pleafing confciofnefs of adhering to virtue, the calm compofure and ferious pleafure that accompanies fuch a behaviour, the approbation of all judicious and religious perfons, the fatisfaction of fetting a good example by which he may be ufeful to the world both living and dead, the favour of God, his affiftance to fupport and ftrengthen him, and a reafonable hope of eternal peace and joy when his few days of trial are paft, and the ftorm of adverfity is over-blown.

And yet there are perfons who calling themfelves Chriftians, and yielding an affent, that is, a fuperficial and confufed kind of affent to the Gofpel, believe not thefe things, or act as if they believe them not. They cannot conceive how fuch a perfon can be happy: they would indeed honour and admire and praife him; but upon no account would they be placed in his condition. They would willingly be happy in both worlds; and as to the prefent, eafe and pleafure is their principal care and concern. But they miftake the nature of happinefs, and the way to it. Whofoever immoderately loves the world and the things of the world, and hungers and thirfts after them, takes a fure method to be unhappy; the evils of life vifit him, his wants increafe upon him, his patience and refolution grow weak, he cannot bear a difappointment, every forrow fits heavy upon his foul,

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!

SERMON

SERMON XXIX.

1 TIM. iv. 8.

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

THE 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

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

ſrain 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 difcourfes of Chrift and the writings of the Apoftles we are told that fuch is the lot of the fervants of God, that the world will hate them, that they muft expect to bear the crofs, to pafs through tribulation, and fuffer perfecution of one kind or other, if they will live a godly life.

Thefe things being fo, what becomes of the promife that piety fhall receive a prefent reward, and how fhall we confirm the truth of it againft fuch a cloud of witneffes, and fo much ftubborn matter of fact?

This is what we muft now endeavour to do, by fetting it in a right light.

1. By thefe declarations in Scripture that godlinefs has its reward in this life is not meant that every good perfon fhall enjoy perfect happinefs here below, which is not only contrary to experience, but feems altogether impoffible.

If a man were to give a loofe to his imagination and defires, he might reprefent to himfelf many things in the poffeffion of which he would find great fatisfaction, but which he has no profpect, or a very uncertain profpect, of obtaining. I fpeak not of the cravings of a diforderly and vitious appetite, but of thofe wifhes which a virtuous man might own without fhame.

Such a perfon would be glad to have his fenfes and his paffions in perfect fubmiffion to his reafon, that he might be ever ready to do what is right, and to avoid what is evil, without any uneafy ftruggles between duty and inclination; but man will never acquire this command over himfelf, whilft he is in a ftate of trial and furrounded with temptations.

He would be well pleafed if he could enlarge the compafs of his knowledge, and clear up many difficulties in natural and revealed religion which perplex him, and be able to form a juft judgment upon points in which wife, and good, and learned, and inquifitive 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 unſuccefsful. 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

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.

SERMON

SERMON XXX.

EPHES. 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 addicts 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. *Moreh.* The word ſhould have been kept in the tranſlation, like the word *Raca*, both being Hebrew words. See *Deuter.* xxi. 20.

ſation, 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 etiamſi aberrare ad aliena cœperit, 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 ſullen 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 beforementioned, 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.* ii. 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

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.

SERMON

SERMON XXXI.

MATTH. 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 slowness 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 Chrift, and a difciple, and by that would have been admitted more frequently to his converfation, and have had many opportunities of acquiring religious wifdom. For Chrift had other difciples befides the Twelve and the Seventy; nor does it appear that he rejected thofe who were defirous of joining themfelves to him. On the contrary, he feems often to give a general invitation to any who would follow him, and fubmit to the conditions which he required.

Hence we conclude, that our Lord never difcouraged any perfon from approaching him and confulting him, or concealed any neceffary knowledge from thofe who requefted it of him in a proper manner.

II. We are to fhew, fecondly, that the bad part of his audience deferved to be left in an ignorance which was entirely owing to their own fault.

Our Lord difcourfes to the people in parables. We will fuppofe part of his auditors to have been perfons who had Mofes and the Prophets, and who would not hear them, who finned prefumptuoufly againft the law which they had received, and would not perform what they already knew to be their duty. It is not ftrange that Chrift fhould refufe to inftruct them, fince the inftruction which they had received before had produced no good effect upon them. It appears reafonable, that from him who thus hath not fhould be taken away even that which he hath.

Let us fuppofe them to have been fuch as the Prophet Ifaiah defcribes, perfons whofe hearts were waxed grofs, and whofe ears were dull of hearing, and who had clofed their eyes, men fo enflaved to their prejudices and vices, that no arguments could fatisfy them, and no exhortations could move them. If Chrift difcourfed darkly to them, it is to be confidered, that they hated the light, and hardened themfelves againft conviction.

Let

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

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 conducing 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

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 ſubtilty.

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 ſteddily 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 ſteddineſs 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 steddy 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 widom in securing the objects of his desires, though he may chuse an object which deserves not his affections, and will not recompense 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 steddy 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

rifes up and lies down with them, goes out and returns home with them. All that they fay or do, either hath fome reference to it, or at leaft is not contrary and inconfiftent.

But the children of light are feldom fo intent as this upon their great concern; fometimes they quite forget and overlook it; fometimes they do things which are abfolutely contrary to it; and very often they are bufied in affairs that bear no relation to it; fo that they are rather good by fits and ftarts, and at favourable intervals, than with an uniform and confiftent fteddinefs. Hence it is that repentance is, in a manner, a perpetual duty, from which the beft are not exempt; frailties and omiffions ftick clofe to mortality, and Forgive us our trefpaffes, is a requeft to be daily renewed. But the worldly-wife feldom have caufe to repent in their way, and to reproach themfelves of lofing a confiderable advantage by their own indifcretion, and of neglecting a fair and tempting opportunity.

The children of this world are wife in chufing proper means, and finding out the neareft way to compafs their ends. They try the moft approved expedients; and if they happen to be infufficient they change them before it is too late, and chufe others, and like the diligent fpider, whofe web is broken, they begin the work again. Chriftians are feldom equally careful and judicious: they fometimes truft to deceitful hopes, and fubftitute imperfect expedients to real and fubftantial goodnefs; relying too much upon faith, as it means bare believing, upon zeal for a fet of opinions, upon frequenting the public worfhip of God, upon human authority and common cuftom, upon external ceremonies, upon acts of will-worfhip, or upon fingle virtues and fome laudable deeds. Hence it is that in the Chriftian world there is more fuperftition than morality, and more difputing than practifing.

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 reſolute, 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, overborn 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.

SERMON 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 half dead.

THE 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*, καταβαινων, 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 behindhand 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.

SERMON

SERMON XXXIV.

MARK 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 trees and of no (*b*) value.

But

(*a*) Woolſton.

(b) The wood of this tree is uſeleſs even to a proverb; *inutile lignum.* Ἄνθρ σύκινος, *homo ficulneus.*

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 houſhold 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 ſaith ſhall come to paſs, he ſhall have whatſoever he ſaith.

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 diffident.

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 hypocrify a prevailing vice amongft them. Their feafon of amendment was not come, the fun of righteoufnefs had not fhined upon them, the Gofpel had not been preached to them; from them therefore the lefs was to be required. But the tree which feemed to be in a flourifhing condition, and to promife fruit, and yet had nothing befides leaves, was an exact figure of the Jews. They had a divine revelation to guide them, by which they were diftinguifhed from all nations, they had the public worfhip of God eftablifhed amongft them, they were free from idolatry, they had the appearance of fanctity and religion; but it was all outfide fhew, all hypocrify and diffimulation, and no folid and fubftantial goodnefs; they had nothing befides leaves; and therefore by a juft judgment this (*c*) nothing was to be taken away from them. And as the deceitful tree at the rebuke of Chrift fickened and drooped and withered and died away; fo their national diftinction and privilege, their temple, their public legal worfhip, of which they made fo poor an ufe, were to be no longer continued to them; their city alfo was to be deftroyed, their country made defolate, and themfelves either cut off in a miferable manner, or driven and difperfed over the face of the earth.

The inferences and ufes which are to be made from the preceding remarks are thefe;

God is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. Happinefs 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 juftice and the equity and the goodnefs of the Creator cannot fairly be impeached. But yet, as God hath made a variety of creatures more or lefs excellent, fo he alfo difpenfes 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 educa-

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 Wiſemen, 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 (*Matth.* xxi. 19.) he ſaw by the way-ſide μίαν συκῆν, 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.

SERMON

SERMON XXXV.

LUKE 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 Sadducees, 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 sect 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 sect. 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 soever 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 doctrines; 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 diſobliging: 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 Publican

(*a*) ὥσπερ οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

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 Pharifee, in pleading his own merits, mentions either good works, or works which had the external nature of goodnefs, as an abftaining from certain vices, juftice in his dealings, and fcrupulous payment of all that the Law of God required. There have been perfons who have talked more abfurdly than this Pharifee, namely, they who have magnified faith fo indifcreetly as to undervalue good works. Chriftian faith and Chriftian virtues are indeed infeparable; but yet faith and works, or believing and practifing, may be in fome manner diftinguifhed in the mind; that is to fay, You may confider believing feparately from acting, and you may confider acting feparately from believing. And if you view them in this manner, it muft be owned that works without faith are better than faith without works, for this obvious reafon, that moral actions, from what principle foever they flow, fuch as juftice, charity, gratitude, affability, liberality, forgivenefs of injuries, are of a focial and diffufive nature, and others are the better for them; but a perfuafion that we are in the favour of God, and a fpeculative belief of revealed religion, are of no advantage to any creature befides the poffeffor. If I am in diftrefs, and a perfon pities and relieves me; let him be a Pagan, a Publican, a Jew, a Samaritan, a Schifmatic, a Heretic, he is my benefactor: if he gives me nothing, let his faith be ever fo right, it will not feed and clothe me.

3. Our Saviour's defign in this parable was to expofe and reprove that part of felf-love which makes men proud of their righteoufnefs.

The Pharifee's prayer difcovered the difpofition of his mind. He begins it indeed with an acknowledgment of God's affiftance: God, I thank thee. But this feems to be thrown out for fafhion's fake; it being fcarcely poffible that a man can have a due fenfe of his weaknefs without the divine fupport, and be lifted up with notions of his own performances. We may fup-

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

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.

180
181
182
205