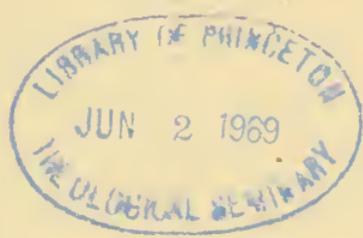


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SERMONS

ON THE

DIGNITY OF MAN,

AND

THE VALUE OF THE OBJECTS PRINCIPALLY RELATING TO

HUMAN HAPPINESS.

From the German of the late
REV. GEORGE JOACHIM ZOLLIKOFER,
Minister of the Reformed Congregation at Leipzick.

By the Rev. William Tooke, F. R. S.

IN TWO VOLUMES, — VOL. I.



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MDCCCII.

THE
AUTHOR'S PREFACE.



AS I delivered these sermons occasionally, and not in the order they here follow on each other, nor upon any settled plan concerning the connection and arrangement of the subjects treated of, it is not unlikely that some readers may observe at least two defects in the work before them; that it is not complete and not sufficiently connected. I presume, however, that these do not essentially affect the undertaking. If every thing whatever that relates to human happiness, or is reckoned as pertaining to it, be not specifically and expressly handled; yet no kind or class of these objects is absolutely overlooked. And the order or succession of them may the more easily be changed by every person, according to his mind, as they are all distinct and separate treatises. Neither did I so much pretend to

write a complete system of the doctrine of happiness, as to examine some of the most important particulars belonging to it; and to treat the subjects in such a manner as was best adapted to a thinking, and, for the most part, an enlightened audience. This last circumstance will plead in my behalf, whenever some passages may appear more philosophical and abstracted than usual. I had the happiness to address myself to hearers, who, in general, were fully competent to such disquisitions, and able to profit by them. The more rare this happiness is, the less excusable should I have been, had I discoursed to them as to children, and not always endeavoured to lead them to farther advances in knowledge. And there can certainly be no harm in it, if the doctrines of religion and morality are delivered in various methods; and, at times, even so as that men, more addicted to reflection, may be taken and satisfied with them. — Experience has likewise taught me, that even people of more slender knowledge, and of inferior cultivation, learn more from such discourses, so soon as they cease to be strange to them, than from others, composed in a hebrew idiom, and exactly fitted to the scholastic system, on which most commonly they never bestow one thought. Indeed discourses in general need not always operate immediately on the spot, unless in the case of charitable collections, but should be calculated to produce permanent effects on persons not totally ignorant and incapable of making reflections of their own. Let a
man

man preach to these as he will, they will never be able to take in the whole scope of the discourse at one view, or even to form clear conceptions of any part of it. Here or there, they will comprehend some detached sentence, some thought that strikes them, and will perhaps occasionally recollect it again; and, if only this happens, and that frequently, they must be always considerable gainers by it.

Should several of the subjects here treated of appear to others not clerical, or not theological and biblical enough; in regard to the former, I intreat them to consider, that every pulpit has its own circle of hearers, and that these hearers have their peculiar exigencies; and, in regard to the latter, to weigh in their own minds whether any thing that relates so nearly to human perfection and happiness, can be either untheological or unbiblical. To me at least, every truth is a religious and biblical truth, that has for its object the substantial improvement and the lasting happiness of mankind; though it should not, as it were, immediately relate to God and to the future world, and is no where expressly and scientifically treated of in the Bible, which presupposes many things, which but slightly touches upon others in few words, and leaves the farther exposition and application of all to ourselves, or which even delivers the very same things in a different phraseology. The force of the scriptural doctrines by no means lies in the words wherein they were anciently promulgated to the jews and the heathens, but in the

truth and the importance of the doctrines themselves. In proportion as the civilization, the language, the manners and customs, the mode of thinking and of living, the compass of human knowledge and of human exigencies, undergo alteration; so also may and should, not indeed the essentials, but the compass, the application, and the method of delivering the doctrines of religion and wisdom be altered and adapted. In the sermon concerning the christian pastoral office, which is the last in this collection, I have more circumstantially explained myself upon this subject.

For the rest, the greater the importance of a right estimation of things, and the stronger the certainty of the fact, that it is the foundation of all real virtue and piety, and the surest way to happiness both in the present and the future life, so much the better grounded is my hope, that, under the blessing of God, this labour may not be without its use.

SOME ACCOUNT
OF
THE AUTHOR.

GEORGE JOACHIM ZOLLIKOFER was born at St. Gall in Switzerland, the 5th of August 1730. His father David Anthony Zollikofer, is still remembered there as an eminent practitioner in the law, and as a pious and upright man. That he omitted nothing in the literary education of his son may well be imagined; it is however still more manifest, that by his own virtuous example he became his moral tutor, a tutor to whom posterity is under such infinite obligations through his pupil. Education at that time had not yet become a subject of philosophical disquisition: among the Germans at least no one had hitherto enlarged upon Locke's principles in a view to render them of more general utility.

utility. The various helps for awakening the curiosity, for opening the understanding and moulding the hearts of children, which so much abound in our days, being then utterly unknown, the formation of the character and habits was left generally to example, and that end was attained, perhaps even more securely. Young Zollikofer, when arrived at the proper age, was put to the gymnasium of his native town; from whence, being intended for the church, he was sent to prosecute his studies, first at Bremen, and afterwards at the university of Utrecht, where the divinity professors are said to have been then in high repute. It is well known that the generality of students at these great seminaries, are wont to adhere pertinaciously to what has been instilled into them by their academical tutors; never venturing to advance one pace beyond the string of ideas that during several years have been constantly imprinted on their minds, in acquiring new ones for themselves, or even presuming impartially and repeatedly to examine the stock they have obtained from others, and forming new combinations among them. Every thing therefore, in regard to their general usefulness afterwards when they come into office, depends on what sort of tutors the young men have had during their stay at college; they being nothing more than organs through which the knowledge infused into them at the universities is brought into circulation, exactly as they received it. It would be beyond the design of these few pages to expatiate on
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the causes whence this proceeds; thus much however is of universal notoriety, that it is extremely difficult to get out of the track in which we have been trained for a number of years, and is so particularly adapted to soothe our natural propensity to ease and indulgence, to abandon our customary guides and boldly strike out into another channel. Zollikofer, however, was a genius of this superior order. He once observed to an intimate friend, that he, with the others was obliged to attend lectures in a systematic theology, resting solely on the unproved formularies, sophisms, technical and scholastic terms of the compendiums at that time in general use, instead of giving him, as the foundation of his future studies, a sound exposition of the Bible, in connection with a strict investigation of ecclesiastical history. And yet where, in all Zollikofer's theological writings is there a trace to be seen that betrays his former forced acquaintance with that dull study? Where is there one idea, either in his sermons or his books of devotion, that discovers even a faint or obscure tint of what has been just now mentioned? A proof of his active, scrutinizing, comprehensive and penetrating mind; a mind to which the noblest property of genius, Truth, was paramount to all considerations besides. — Even in the other sciences, he seems to have been by no means satisfied with the methods adopted. “The little that I know,” this modest man was heard to say, “I was obliged to teach myself, chiefly after I was come to years of maturity; for

for I had but a miserable education." His erudition perhaps might not have been of the vastest extent, and he certainly is not to be reckoned among those literary characters, who, with a great treasure of deep philosophical attainments, possess moreover an abundant store of historical, antiquarian and a variety of other branches of science. Nevertheless he was deficient in no species of knowledge that can afford any philosophical materials for useful and generally serviceable ideas. Both in natural history and natural philosophy he possessed uncommon knowledge. He was well versed in the histories of the several nations of the world; and, from the vicissitudes and revolutions of empires, from the rise, decline and fall of great republics, from the characters and fortunes of the distinguished personages that have appeared in different countries; in short, from the whole of those frequently inexplicable, broken and extraordinary tissues of events and apparent accidents, from the alternate conflicts of light with darkness in various nations, from the foolish, often furious and dreadful fallies of human passions and vices — from all this, I say, he had formed a considerable number either of general or particular ideas, which he had interwoven with the common stock of his acquired philosophical knowledge. In studying history he had always the true and proper end of it in view, considering it, as the wise have ever done, as the preceptor of practical philosophy, and thus derived more real utility from it than many famous

famous persons who have only been learned by rote, having gathered little or nothing from it except a huge collection of facts, names and dates.

In the ancient and modern languages, particularly the latin, french and english he was no ordinary proficient; and, besides other useful works in each of them, had made their best poets, orators and philosophers his particular study. Of Cicero he was a very great admirer. And if Zollikofer were to be compared with any orator of antiquity, it would certainly be with that Roman. Indeed the subjects they had to treat of in their discourses were extremely different, no less than the object they had in view. The former addressed his audience on matters relative to the prosperity and welfare of states as well as of private individuals, the latter on the most important concerns of the human mind; the former was intent upon producing sudden resolutions and actions, not unfrequently by inflaming the imagination and by his rhetorical art setting the various passions of his hearers in motion, the latter, not content with suddenly producing some virtuous emotions or actions, completely convinced the understanding of the importance and blessedness of virtue, warming and animating the heart, by the same pure celestial beam of truth with which he enlightened the mind, not to single acts of goodness, easily performed, but to VIRTUE. Here we see two great orators widely different from each other, as they must be in the nature of things. But in all the accomplishments

complishments required by real oratory, or rather belonging to eloquence, who is so like to Cicero as Zollikofer? In the careful selection of the properest words, in the natural and artless composition of the particular expressions, in the cautious and sparing use of such tropes, figures and metaphors, as may give the most charming variety to the whole, and represent the ideas they denote on their most luminous and beautiful side, in the singular turn and uncommon harmony of the periods, the exact and lucid order in which the thoughts succeed each other, in the rapid, though smoothly flowing stream of the discourse, in the most exquisite symmetry of the whole, and in that energy and noble simplicity which never fails to excite the highest admiration in the minds of all good judges, and is so flattering to such as are not, as to induce them to imagine, that with very little trouble they could write as well or even better: who in respect to these excellences can more properly be compared to Cicero than Zollikofer? He had no less indefatigably studied the difficult art of oratory in his earlier years than the Roman, and had as sedulously employed the so often mistaken and neglected art, though so excellent and necessary to the accomplishment of the orator, I mean poetry in its various forms. It does not appear that in his younger years he tried his talents in any particular species of it; but that he studied it even more in acknowledged models than in simple theory, is very well known, since he had read the best performances of the poets:

both

both in the ancient and modern languages of the most polished nations; and Mr. Christian Viçtor Kindervater, who communicates these particulars of his life, mentions his recollecting to have heard him say, that while a youth he read Bodmer's poetical works so diligently over and over for a length of time, that in composing afterwards some essays in prose, he found many of the sentences had run into hexameters without his being aware of it.

Poetry and oratory are in certain respects not so far asunder as perhaps to some they may appear to be. It is the principal business of the orator to convince his hearers that what he says is true and useful; but if he wish the conviction to pass quickly into action, the ideas he has excited should receive a peculiar energy so as at the same time to affect the heart; and if the orator be desirous on some particular occasion to raise emotions of no ordinary kind, his discourse will of itself rise above the common style of prose, and partly assume a lyric appearance. If this then be one of the necessary requisites of a good orator, what important advantages may not the study of poetry procure him? Or is it no advantage to the orator to habituate himself to an harmonious rhythmus, to enrich and polish his diction, to expand his imagination, and to acquire a dexterity in representing abstract ideas under the charms of agreeable images, and especially to consider his subject not merely in generals, but on its peculiar, though less striking sides, so as to render this study
of

of consequence to him? The genius of Zollikofer shone forth with uncommon lustre whenever his object was rather to affect the passions than to inform the mind, though this was seldom the case with him. What awful sensations did not this great man excite in the hearts of all his congregation, once when he represented the tremendous triumph of death? How anxiously did not even the most insensible souls then shudder as he depicted the horrors of death and corruption! And how every heart throbbed with the liveliest transports, when, presently after, with all the magic of eloquence he delineated the blissful triumph of everlasting life! What inexpressible sentiments of gratitude to the great Sovereign of the universe, glowed in every breast, when he encouraged his hearers to rejoice and give thanks for the grateful return of spring! How he melted every soul into the softest feelings of philanthropy while discoursing on the subject of placability; and there was not a person, who, on going out of the church, would not have eagerly extended his arms in reconciliation towards his mortal enemy, had he been so unfortunate as to have one? But it would be unnecessary to cite instances, as certainly no proof will here be required, which could only be afforded by such as attended his discourses; and every attentive hearer of him has felt in his own heart, how forcibly likewise in this respect the pathetic exhortations of Zollikofer wrought upon it. And was it possible that the politer parts of science, or the belles lettres, as they

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are called, did not contribute their share towards these attainments in oratory? It is well known that they are held in open contempt by some of the learned, and are at least tacitly despised by others: but this science too in return takes a public revenge on its scorners as often as they have to speak with warmth and energy before their audiences. —

Hitherto but little has been said of the particular circumstances in the life of our author; these, however, will not detain us long.

Shortly after he had completed his academical course, he obtained an establishment as preacher in his own country, at Murten in the Pays de Vaud. But here he remained only a short time, having a call to a more considerable place at Monstein in the Grisons. This congregation likewise had not the happiness to possess him for a much longer period; he being invited to Isenburg as preacher there. Yet neither was this station the theatre which providence had marked out for disseminating by his talents and his zeal, truth and happiness extensively around him. In the year 1758, at the age of eight and twenty, he was appointed to the office of one of the german preachers at the church of the reformed at Leipfick. It is not to be supposed that at this time he had arrived at that degree of perfection either in the composition or delivery of his discourses to which he afterwards attained and was constantly farther attaining; but which with the co-operation of so many fortunate circumstances, both internal and external, it

was not likely he should fail of reaching. A congregation consisting of persons far superior in point of education and gentility to those of his former stations; a city which for several ages past has reckoned among its inhabitants so many people of learning and ingenuity, where consequently no small number of eyes are directed towards the professors of divinity, the whole amount of them not being so large as that any one should escape observation; the beneficial opportunity of obtaining without trouble the best writings in every department of literature; the friendship and esteem of so many deserving professors of the university, and among them the great Ernesti; an office in which he had only moderate labours to perform, not hindered by those troublesome functions which occupy so much of the time of several intelligent and able preachers of that city, from giving his discourses that degree of perfection that he wished; and what is even more than all the rest, his own high sentiment of the importance and dignity of his office: what might not be expected from these advantageous circumstances, in conjunction with Zollikofer's extraordinary talents; and what did they not effect? The universal approbation he met with on the part of his numerous congregation from his very first appearance there, constantly augmented from day to day, and adhered to him to the very last day that he addressed them. It is no easy matter to ascertain the utility a preacher procures to a people by his pulpit discourses. The
testimony,

testimony, however, of all that heard him is unanimous in this, that they were not only captivated with the sound eloquence of his compositions and delivery, but that they acquired from his discourses a great number of new ideas, that he illustrated many others which they had found hitherto obscure, that he corrected them of many prejudices, that he communicated to them many incitements to virtue till then unknown or not rightly beheld, and that the generality of his audience were greatly indebted to him in regard to their intellectual and moral improvement. It is not to be denied, that some of his hearers, in frequenting his discourses had no views of becoming wiser and more virtuous by them: but it can as little be doubted that they learned some good, however little, since it is very probable that otherwise they would never have attended on public worship at all.

Several volumes of his excellent discourses have for some years been in the hands of the public, and are in high and deserved repute wherever the german language is understood, by all persons to whom religion and virtue are objects of importance; to which the number of editions they have gone through and are continually publishing, bear ample testimony, as well as of the taste and judgment of the times in compositions of this nature. For whoever is intent upon reading spiritual discourses, in which the truths of religion are delivered free from all learned theological sophistries and controversies, in the most har-

monious order, and in the noblest expressions, perfectly adapted to the subject, with all that can excite a true cordial interest in it, in which so many fatal prejudices are combated with the invincible arms of truth, in which the beauty and blessedness of virtue are represented in the most glowing colours, in which the several incitements and means to the practice of it are clearly and persuasively pointed out, wherein the value of so many objects, which though seldom discoursed of in the sacred chair, yet have so vast an influence on human happiness and human misery are placed in the most just and perspicuous point of view; in short, if he would read purely for the sake of becoming wiser and happier, what can he read better than the sermons of Zollikofer? And if it be true that excellent models contribute more towards the forming of pupils in the art than the most elaborate precepts; then it cannot be denied that Zollikofer has afforded exceedingly much in this respect likewise. A considerable number of young members of the university eagerly pressed to his discourses, listening to him, as may well be imagined with the utmost attention, imperceptibly learning by example, how a subject should be studied and how it should be handled, in order to contribute in any remarkable degree to the advancement of wisdom and virtue among our fellow-creatures by pulpit-oratory. We may therefore indulge the hope that Zollikofer's spirit will continue to operate not only throughout his native country, but likewise over
many

many provinces of Germany, by these his scholars, to the latest posterity, diffusing truth and happiness among mankind.

Our worthy pastor, considering that psalmody and prayer form an essential part of public worship, undertook to make a collection of spiritual songs for the use of his congregation on a plan more suitable to the purpose and more edifying than the old one. In this he availed himself of the advice and assistance of his judicious friends, both in regard to the improvement of the former where it was practicable, and to the proper selection of hymns from the modern poets, particularly Gellert, Cramer and Kloppstock. This appeared in the year 1766.

As he excelled in his doctrine, so also did he excel both in his social and domestic conduct.

In humility and retirement, he pursued his path of life; never wishing to shine, his only aim was to be useful; because in the exercise of that stern virtue which he taught he found his supreme delight. The poor and indigent, especially those of his congregation, beheld in him a father and a friend; though his bounty was by no means confined to them, it also extended to those of other communions, relieving them either by his own donations or by application to others. In this manner he did much good, far more than many of the rich, who indeed give liberally, but only so much as they can spare from their superfluity without missing it; and these acts of beneficence to which he was moved by a sen-

timental heart, were regulated by the prudent maxims of reason and religion, so that his charity partook of wisdom as well as of sensibility. Numbers of people do much good in relieving the poor by their alms; but there they stop, without considering that every thing in the world is not done by money. Zollikofer did incomparably more. His advice, his judgment, his intercession with others, his admonitions, his consolation in misfortune were at the service of all who applied for them, and he even went before their requests. Young men desirous of knowledge, eagerly sought his acquaintance, and all those who enjoyed that benefit have honestly confessed that they derived from it great improvement both in heart and mind. Whatever he said was true; every word he uttered might be relied on as conveying the real sentiments of his heart: and never did he commend or approve from complaisance any thing that was contrary to the conviction of his mind, or that he saw could not be approved upon the strictest rules of morality. His gravity was chearful, his conversation entertaining and sometimes animated, and his raillery, in which he very rarely indulged, the mildest possible. His whole life was one pure, uninterrupted, captivating harmony of virtue and the sweet enjoyment of the felicities arising from it. Among his other satisfactions he had that of being universally esteemed, as of necessity it could not be otherwise. That happy mixture of seriousness and dignity with gentleness and

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hilarity;

hilarity ; his own strict course of virtue combined with so much indulgence towards the failings of others ; his heartfelt and firm conviction of the great truths he taught, which manifested itself in all his actions, in the whole tenour of his conversation and in his discourses from the pulpit, without entertaining the slightest intolerance towards such as differed from him in opinion, or arrogating the smallest superiority over those who possessed not the faculty of thinking for themselves, or of fully comprehending every truth ; his unwearied zeal to lead his auditors to the rigorous exercise of virtue, in his demands however never disregarding the rights of humanity concerning what they could or could not do in these or the other circumstances ; his impartial estimation of mankind, justly discriminating the opinions and principles upon which they acted, carefully tracing out their good qualities, and heartily rejoicing in every advantageous discovery of that nature. — Let the reader contemplate all this as combined in the character of Zollikofer, and then pronounce, whether real undissembled veneration, the general esteem of all ranks and classes of persons must not as inseparably have attended his wisdom and virtue as the shadow follows the substance. Even the wanton wit of those who in the judgments they pass on the ministers of religion are not ashamed to set aside the respect that is due from man to man, was awed to silence at the name of Zollikofer.

Amidst the evils arising from the operation of outward circumstances, from which no mortal is exempt, he still led a happy life: the wife man having the never failing source of his happiness within himself, is constantly armed against the strokes of worldly troubles; and even these, however great, are far less to him than to the majority of mankind, since he forms ideas totally different of them.

He was twice married. His first wife named Le Roy, was a lady of great understanding and considerable attainments. He was extremely fond of her, and his congregation witnessed the manly tears he shed upon her grave. His second, of the family of Sechehay, at Leipfick, was an uncommon blessing to him during the last seven years of his life, and probably the world is indebted to her endearing attentions, that his life and his labours were so far prolonged. Both marriages were childless; providence, doubtless for some wise purposes unknown to us, not dispensing to the man who had thought and read so much on the nurture and education of youth, and even written several valuable pieces on that subject, the happiness of applying himself his wife and excellent lessons to practice.

For the space of a year before his death, feeling his faculties considerably on the decline, and thinking himself no longer able to fulfil the duties of his office to his own satisfaction, he formed the resolution to lay it down, and retire to the place of his nativity

tivity in Switzerland : but at the united request of his congregation, who assured him that they would willingly on his account content themselves with a discourse from him every fortnight, he was induced to remain in his station. His health even seemed to improve during the summer in consequence of his having passed the intervals of his time in the country at the village of Gohlitz, not far from town. But in the following autumn it too plainly appeared that his recovery was only apparent. He still however attended on the duties of his office, though with the utmost difficulty ; till, at length, a few weeks before his death, he was obliged to apply for assistance to a foreign candidate for orders, who kindly took the charge of preaching upon him. His last illness was extremely painful ; yet he bore his sufferings with the patience of a wise man and the resignation of a christian, who looks beyond the grave and corruption to the world of retribution. On the 22d of January, 1788, he gently sank into the arms of death, and was buried on the 25th. The whole of his numerous congregation, together with some hundreds of young students of the university, and numbers of his auditors of the lutheran communion, attended his body to the grave, with every token of unfeigned sorrow,

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SERMON I.

Wherein the Dignity of Man Consists.

GREAT and manifold are thy works, -o God, in heaven and on earth: all abundant in wisdom and loving-kindness! We also, Almighty and all Bountiful, we also are the work of thy hands; and, of all the creatures of the earth, the foremost, the most glorious! Formed after thy likeness; capable of knowing thee, of loving thee, of having communion with thee; capable of understanding, of feeling, of enjoying all the beautiful works and all the effects of kindness, which thou hast so liberally shed upon thy world, our abode; of elevating our minds to thee, the source of beauty and perfection, of coming ever nearer to thee, of becoming ever more like thee, and in thee of enjoying ever purer delight and bliss! — O God! what is man, that thou hast exalted him so far above all the inhabitants of the earth, endowed him with such capacities and powers, allotted him this place in thy dominion, brought

him so near to thy son Jesus and through him to thee, his father and our father, and opened to him such prospects in remote futurity in all the glories of thy creation! O God! what joy, what transports should it raise in our hearts that we are men; that we are thy children, thy image; that we are brethren of thy son Jesus; that we are immortal, and may hope to become ever more perfect and ever more happy! with what gratitude, with what love towards thee, our creator, should it not impress our souls; what lofty sentiments kindle in us; to what good and great actions incite us!—O let this grand, this blissful sentiment of our dignity and thy favour be ever present with us! o let it even now in a superior degree be active and effective in us, thoroughly penetrate and warm us, and so entirely take possession of us, that it may never more by any thing be weakened or suppressed! No; constantly let us be impressed with the excellence of our nature, our origin from thee and our high vocation, and constantly think and live conformably with what we now are and can do, and what we hereafter shall be and may perform! Bless, in this respect, our meditations on these important doctrines; let thy spirit strengthen and exalt our souls, that they may feel the whole value of their privileges and powers, and rejoice in their existence and their connection with thee! We ask it as the disciples of him, who taught us to address thee as, Our father, &c.

PSALM viii. 5.

Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

MAN may be considered two different ways. In one we find him a very limited, feeble, and defective being. Little superior, at best, to the beasts of the field, in many respects apparently below them: more circumscribed, more impotent, more unhappy than they. Considered in another light, he discovers the fairest dispositions, and the greatest capacities. Look at the effects of his external force; they indicate a being far more elevated than the inanimate or the animal creation. He performs actions which excite and deserve universal admiration; but the operations and productions of his mind, give demonstrations of his affinity with the Father of Spirits, and prove him to be, in the most exalted sense, the son of GOD.

Considered on one side, human nature appears an object of compassion. And they who thus view it, take all possible pains to dismay us by derision, by representing our pretensions to dignity as the fancies of a foolish pride. On the other side, man seems to merit the greatest esteem and veneration. And such as regard him in this light, exalt him far above all surrounding creatures, make him capable

of every excellence, and fitted for the highest grandeur.

Now, in which way shall we contemplate man? Doubtless, we should study and understand him in both, if we would judge rightly of the ends for which he was made; if we would neither be rash through pride, nor disheartened by conscious abasement.

It seems to me, however, as if human nature was not frequently enough considered on its fair and advantageous side; though it should oftener be so than on the other. Limitations, weaknesses, defects, and imperfections, never allow themselves to be forgotten; the sentiment of them is too painful, and too importunate, and their baneful influence on our felicity is too multiform and too apparent for us to deny. But talents that are not drawn forth, faculties that are not exerted, abilities that are not exhibited in action, or only operate in silence and obscurity, may easily be overlooked, may easily be neglected. And then there is a vast difference between these two sides, both in scope and duration. Infirmities, weaknesses, and imperfections, which may be often corrected, and which may, in part at least, be removed; which belong not so essentially to human nature, deserve not therefore so much attention, as capacities, and faculties, and prerogatives, which not only at present preponderate over them, but are to go with us into eternity, constantly effecting greater perfection and more exalted happiness.

Certainly

Certainly then the man that accustoms himself to consider human nature, rather on this side than the other, will judge far more rightly, think far more nobly, act far better and more virtuously, than he who suffers the sentiment of his meanness and imperfections to be ever before him. Well then; we will chuse the representation that promises us the most advantage and the greatest happiness.

We will consider the dignity of man. I have often discoursed to you of it before. Oft have I encouraged you to the sentiment and the estimation of it. But, perhaps, this comprehensive term has not always excited the clearest representations in your mind. We will now more distinctly discriminate the principal matters wherein it consists.

By the dignity of man, we are, in general, to understand, whatever is eminently great and honourable in his nature, his situation, and his vocation; all that gives him an eminent value in the sight of God and of all rational beings. A dignity which is grounded on his intrinsically noble and generous sentiments, his privileges, and his powers, and is displayed in the excellency of intellect and power of action peculiar to him. A dignity which forces from us some such exclamations to the deity as those of the Psalmist: "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour!"

Wherein, then, does the dignity of man consist? or what gives him the dignity he has? And how

and whereby does he exhibit his dignity? or, what produces it within him and without him? — These are the principal questions we have now to answer.

Understanding, freedom, activity, an always progressive perfection, immortality, the relation in which he stands towards GOD, and towards his son Jesus, the station he fills on the earth, and what he is and does in regard to all these: this composes the dignity of man; this gives him his eminently great worth.

Man is ennobled by understanding and reason. These form the first and chief ground of his dignity. These exalt him far above all the other creatures of the earth. By these he is related with spiritual beings; by these he takes flight to the regions above, and soars to the seat of GOD. He is neither altogether material nor altogether spirit; not, like the beasts of the field, attached to the earth; not incapable, like them, of resisting the impression of external things. He can lift his eyes on high, and roam in spirit above terrestrial and visible objects: he can investigate himself; distinguish himself from every thing around him, and discern his thoughts from that which thinks within him; can discriminate the past, the present, and the future in the conceptions of his capacious mind; has an inward and clear consciousness of his existence and his actions; can inquire into the causes and motives of events, investigate their proportion and affinity to each other, view their connections and consequences; and, from what he knows and sees, can judge in a thousand cases of what
what

what he knows and sees not yet. And how comprehensive is his intellect! How far does his reason venture, and how often does it succeed in its boldest researches! Who can compute the multitude, the numberless multitude of ideas, judgments, of conclusions, of remarks and observations which arise, which associate, concatenate, or interweave themselves in the human mind, during its short sojourn on this terrestrial globe, and supply it with matter for everlasting reflections? And what is there in the heaven above, or in the earth beneath, in the sea, and in all deep places, in the visible or the invisible world, in the region of possibilities and action, in the obscurity of the past, and in the night of the future, what is there that the curiosity of the human mind does not strive to possess, that does not employ its faculties, that it does not endeavour to know, to fathom, to explain, to compare or to combine with what it already knows? Allow that it frequently mistakes, that it often takes appearances for reality, that it discovers and knows comparatively but little, that in more than one respect it is totally ignorant: yet, who can fail of perceiving the value of what it really does know and by its faculties perform? who the still greater value of its incessant endeavours after what it knows not yet, and is not able to perform? Who can deny the dignity it receives from hence?

Freedom, moral freedom, is another characteristic of man; another source of his dignity. While the

sun, the moon, the stars, and all the host of heaven, move and act and revolve in the regions of space by mechanical laws unknown to them; while the animals blindly pursue their irresistible instincts, and are entirely dependent on impressions from without; man is not absolutely subjected to those laws, nor impelled by these instincts. He can controul, alter, or decline these laws in a thousand different ways, in regard to his motions and actions: he can withstand, or totally surmount these instincts. He can consider, compare, select, resolve, execute his resolves, or relinquish and change them for others. He distinguishes truth from error, good from bad, and semblance from reality; suffers not himself to be imposed on by every specious outside, every deceitful lustre, every desirable or terrific appearance: he stops not at the present moment; sees to the remotest consequences of things; and is neither necessitated blindly to trust to the informations of his senses, nor implicitly to follow his feelings as they arise. He chuses and does that which he finds to be right and good, and best for the occasion; he rejects and avoids that which he holds to be unjust and base, or productive of more harm than good; and directs himself in his choice and his conduct, by the perceptions of his intellect, by the light of his reason. These perceptions indeed may often deceive him; this light may sometimes lead him astray. But then the way is not shut to his return. He can discover the deceit, be aware of his error, repent of his mistake,

take,

take, alter his conduct, and learn by these sad experiences to act more prudently and more cautiously for the future. He thus guides, directs, and governs himself according to the circumstances of external things. Thus is he neither a blind rotatory being in the system of the universe, nor the slave of his own judgment, nor the sport of outward causes and events. Thus he does nothing but what he wills, and nothing can compell him to will any thing but what he at that time holds for the best. And what a high privilege does this give him over all the inanimate as well as the merely sensitive but irrational creation! What importance, what dignity must all his conclusions and actions acquire from hence, that they are peculiarly his own resolutions, his own actions, the principles, aims, consistency, and connection whereof he knows, and can give an account of to himself and to others! How much more valuable must one single good action of a man be, than the whole benign influence of the sun, unconscious of itself and of all its effects, diffused throughout the system.

Activity, the most diversified, the most indefatigable activity, is a third characteristic of man, a third source of his dignity. Indeed every thing in nature is incessantly moving; the inanimate as well as the living, the animal no less than the rational world. Every thing has force, and all force effects what it can and must produce. Perfect inactivity, immovable sloth, compleat death, seem to be excluded from the creation of GOD. But where shall we find greater

greater and more diversified activity than in man? And where activity with consciousness, with reflection, with design, but in him? When does the human spirit cease from thinking? And how rapidly, how innumerably do its thoughts succeed to each other! When does it cease from producing revolutions, various and great, within and without! How much good, how much mischief, how much general advantage, how much general harm is often occasioned by a thought, a word, a look, a gesture, an emotion of man! And how far, how immensely wide is the influence of what he does extended through time and space!—How various, how connected, how intricate, how comprehensive, how extensive are often his occupations and enterprises! What does he not produce, effect, and controul within the sphere of his action? What is there that exists, that happens, wherein he does not participate by a thousand means, which does not exercise his bodily or his mental powers?—And what obstacle, what difficulties can effectually keep him from them, or totally quench the ardour of his activity? What is more hateful to him than inaction and death; what more desirable in his eyes than diversified life and disseminated production? Is not this the scale by which he estimates himself and others, and the value of all external things?—And a creature of so incessant, so unwearied an activity, with an inward sentiment of himself and the faculties which produce that activity, must be eminently superior to beings of smaller activity,

tivity, or beings unconscious of their activity and existence. Does he not acquire very considerable dignity from this alone?

Add to this, fourthly, the capacity of continually advancing, and constantly acquiring new degrees of perfection; and you will discover a fresh ground of his pre-eminence and dignity. The sun is glorious to behold, fair is the moon, fair are the stars, beautiful the vegetables and plants that adorn the surface of our earth; each of them is good and perfect in its kind: but they remain as they are; their figure, their beauty, their motion, their operation is invariably the same. They are absolutely that which they should and can be. Not so is man. He is never absolutely what he should and can be. He is confined by no space; no time can set bounds to his action. One degree of perfection leads him on to another: never stands he so high, but he may ascend still higher. His capacities expand, his powers increase in proportion as he applies and exerts them: and the circle of his views and operations enlarges according to the degree by which his capacities unfold, and his powers improve. When has he learnt so much, that he sees nothing farther to learn? When does he know and understand all that he may understand and know? When has he proceeded so far in wisdom and virtue, that he can make no farther progress in them? When has he performed so much, and acted so beneficently about him, that he is capable of doing no more, and has

no more beneficence to perform? And when do his aims and endeavours cease? Who, in all these regards, can set bounds to the human mind, which it may not hope to transcend by its dispositions and abilities, and by the will of its maker?

Is he not immortal? Yes; and this is the fifth source of his dignity. Man is designed for immortality. He is to continue without end, to live for ever, to live eternally as a rational, free, and active being, as a being continually endeavouring at perfection! — Immortality! everlasting life! what a prerogative, what a dignity is this! All the beauties of nature shall fade and perish; the sun and the orbs of heaven shall lose their lustre; the richest sources of light shall be exhausted; the whole visible world shall sink into night: but man survives them all, and finds in himself, in the world of spirits, in God the father of spirits, far more than all the visible world can give. And where then are the limits that are to confine him, this immortal, this ever-acting being? What degree of light, what measure of power, what rank of felicity shall render him incapable of walking in a still brighter light, of obtaining still greater powers, of enjoying still purer bliss? No; here no perfect stop, no fixt and immoveable point of perfection can be conceived. No; everlasting advancement and progress, everlasting improvement in all that is beautiful and good and desirable, everlasting approximation to the highest, but still unattainable perfection: this is the vocation; this

this the sovereign lot of man ; this the greatest, the highest dignity of a created being !

Man is likewise, and this adds infinitely to his dignity, this sets him in his perfect light, man is the image of God. He is descended from him, is his offspring, and bears the visible traces of his derivation from heaven, and his communion with the Supreme Existence. His understanding is a ray of divine intelligence ; his power an efflux from that of the deity ; his activity something similar to that of God ; his capacity of becoming constantly more perfect, is a capacity of approaching nearer to the divine nature ; his immortality is a similitude of the interminable duration of the Sovereign Being, and the means of an everlasting communion with him. As often as he thinks of truth ; as often as he is inclined to goodness, and brings it to effect ; as often as he perceives, admires, and promotes order and harmony ; as often as he spreads love, and joy, and happiness around him : so often does he think, and will, and perform, and feel, and act in a godlike manner ; so often does he pursue the work of his creator and father ; so often does he promote the designs of the Sovereign Being ; so often does he obtain a taste of pure divine felicity ; and the more he does so, the oftener he acts in this manner, the greater is his similitude with God, the brighter does the image of God shine in him, the less are we able to mistake his high descent, and to overlook the dignity of his nature. It is then that God visibly acts,

acts, as it were in him and through him ; by him he gives testimony of the truth ; he instructs and reveals himself to mankind by him ; by him he maintains the cause of virtue ; by him he speaks comfort to the afflicted ; by him he pours balm into the wounded heart ; by him affords help and support to the wretched, distributes bread to the hungry, and gives strength to the weak ; his world is improved by him ; and through him he spreads life and joy more diffusively around. And to be such an instrument in the hand of God ; to have such a similitude with him, the most perfect, the most glorious being ; to approach so near to the divinity, and, in a manner, to stand in his place upon the earth ; must not this confer a great, or rather the greatest dignity on man ?

This circumstance it is that brings him so near to the only begotten of the Father, to his son Jesus ; this it is that connects him so closely, so intimately with him in whom the Father is well pleased, whom he has constituted Lord of all, and is the highest pattern of all human perfection. And what a dignity does man acquire from his relationship to Jesus, whom he reveres as his restorer and chief ! To have him, the most complete image of the Father, this reflex beam of divine effulgence, for his relation, his brother, his friend, his captain and leader, his lord ; to be as strictly, as indissolubly united with him, as the members of the body are united to the head ; to be so beloved of him as no friend ever loved another,

or can love him, to be so unanimous with him, and to carry on the same designs, to work with him as he does with the Father; in more than one respect to represent him on the earth among mankind, and to forward the purposes he began; how much must this exalt the dignity of man! What honour, what splendor, what eminence must it give him! What may not creatures, whom God has so highly favoured, expect at his hands! What degree of perfection and bliss may not be attainable by them!

Lastly, consider man in his outward figure, and his station in the world. Consider the place he fills upon the earth; what he is and does with all its other inhabitants; and in this regard also you cannot mistake his dignity. See how he stands, full of consciousness, amidst all inferior creatures; how exalted and eminent he is above them; how all proclaim him the sovereign of the globe and its inhabitants, the substitute of its author, and the priest of nature! With what a comprehensive view does he survey, distribute, order, connect, and apprehend; now darting his eye from earth to heaven, and then looking down from heaven upon the earth with sentiments of delight; affectionately cherishing every thing that lives and moves; his sentimental heart expands to the innumerable streams of pleasure and joy, which from all sides flow to meet him, till he is lost in the sweetest sentiments of love and adoration!—

How beautiful, how elevated his mien! How
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significant and expressive every feature of his face, every attitude, every movement of his person! How forcible is the language of his eye! How he displays his whole soul by a glance of it, and with an irresistible energy at one time commands reverence, at another submission and obedience, and at another love; now inspiring courage and resolution, then pleasure and satisfaction in all about him! How often does he confound wickedness by a look, defeat the schemes of injustice, drive sorrow from the breast of the mourner, and dart life and heavenly joy where darkness and distress prevailed. Who can here mistake the elevation and the dignity of man!—

And who can deny, that all things on the earth relate to man, that all are animated, beautified, and connected as the means of human happiness, and for the glory of God? How extensively do the influences and operations of man, either mediately or immediately prevail! What does he not extort from the very elements and the recondite powers of nature! And what revolutions and productions does he not bring forth! What desert does not become a paradise by his presence and industry; and what paradise not more paradisaical when he builds his habitation in it! Represent to yourself the earth without mankind, without rational creatures on it, and what do you discover it to contain? Certainly still many great beauties; but more savage than gentle, more tremendous than delightful beauties; still indeed

indeed much life, but life without consciousness, without reflection, without appropriate enjoyment, without recollection of the great author of it. No ; nature is beautiful, enchantingly beautiful ; but man adorns it, collects about him the scattered and single beauties, and sees and feels, and enjoys them, and delights in them. Nature is fruitful, inexhaustibly fruitful ; but man improves her fertility, guides it, and gives it its most generally useful direction. Nature is full of life ; but man diversifies, elevates, and ennobles this life, and is happy in the enjoyment of it. Thus is he the lord of this part of the creation ; the priest of nature, from whose heart, from whose lips the thanksgiving and praise of all inanimate and all living creatures, ascend to heaven ; the central point in which all that surround him unite, and all attain their completion and perfection. — Would you estimate his powerful and benign influence on all things ; then only compare the regions inhabited by man with those wherein he has not fixed his abode ; compare the european and asiatic luxuriance of gardens and fields, with the wilds of America. Here nature languishes for want of cultivation : there plenty and joy meet the traveller with smiles. Here impenetrable forests, and vast impassable marshes cover the earth ; its undirected and useless fertility, stifles and destroys itself ; and pestilential vapours obscure its surface : there the sun, unimpeded, diffuses its light and heat ; the waters flow in pleasant streams ; the

noisome vapours are dispersed; the winds are admitted to refresh and purify the atmosphere; and the weeds are eradicated from among the useful plants. Where man is not, and does not act, there are trackless wastes; there frost, and cheerless silence, and dreadful death prevail: where man appears, where he lives and acts, there he makes his paths, there he decks the earth with flowers and fruits, there the air brings health and strength and pleasant odours with it, there he animates and gladdens all, there you hear the lowing herds and the expressive joyfulness of man. And how much more beautiful, more glorious is nature now; how rich and beneficent under the guiding hand, and the genial attentions and culture of man! All is now the mirror of the deity, the school of wisdom, the source of pleasure, the means of exercise and perfection; the foretaste of purer joys and higher happiness! How connected now is the visible with the invisible, the present with the future, the terrestrial world with the world of spirits, and the creature with the creator!—

And man, who effects and produces all this; man, who possesses such an understanding, such a freedom, such activity, such capacities for ever tending to perfection; a being immortal; a being in the similitude of God, so intimately connected with his son Jesus Christ; and sustaining such a part upon the globe, and filling such a character in regard to the other creatures; must not man possess great dignity in the
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sight of God, a pre-eminent dignity in his sight, and in that of all rational existences ?

Judge then more justly of mankind, judge more justly of thyself, o thou, who probably only beholdest thyself on the side of weakness and imperfection, and considerest not the superiority and the excellency of thy nature ! Treat mankind, and treat thyself conformably with truth. Debase not the human race, under pretence of exalting their sovereign and father, God ; and when thou speakest of the corruption and misery of man, forget not however that he is the work of the Almighty's hand, that the ignominy of the creature can never redound to the glory of the creator ; forget not, that dimness of sight is not total blindness, that shades give relief to light, that great misuse of power implies great power, that the first act of life is not the whole of life, that the tottering, feeble infant will arrive at manhood, and then will accomplish much ; and that the God, who, on the revision of all that he had made, pronounced it good, and beheld it with delight, will certainly conduct all things to their proper ends, to the summit of perfection.

No ; confess and feel thy dignity, thy faculties, thy privileges, o man ! and feel and confess them with a cheerful and a grateful heart ! It is not imagination, it is not pride ; it is sentiment founded on truth ; and pride can and will undo this sentiment of thy dignity, so long as thou retainest it, so long as thou canst not lift thine eyes and raise thy mind to

him who has given thee these abilities, these prerogatives, who gives thee them afresh at every moment, and to whose glory thou shouldst be and do all that thou art and dost. No; feel and acknowledge the whole value of thy reasonable nature, the whole worth of thy superior dispositions and capacities and powers! Else canst thou not use them worthily; canst not become, not do, not enjoy, that which thou mayest become and do and enjoy by thy nature and thy appointment; else canst thou not render thy creator the gratitude, nor perform the service to thy fellow-creatures, which thou owest to him and to them. No; thou must be respectable to thyself, and all men must be respectable to thee. Each is an important, a necessary link in the chain of things; each an essential, indispensable being, on which all things operate, and which operates again on all; whose influence, however narrow the sphere of it may seem, is immensely large, and its activity continuing for ever.

But let not the knowledge of thy dignity be a bare representation of thy mind. Let it animate all thy sentiments, expand and warm thy heart, and display itself in all thy actions. Think justly and greatly; act freely and generously; be constantly more and more active in justice and beneficence; strive unremittingly after higher perfection; live as a creature that is not wholly to die; that is to live for ever; endeavour to acquire daily a nearer resemblance with God, and to approach nearer to the

model of his son Jesus Christ; fulfil the functions appointed thee on earth, there act and rule with wisdom and loving kindness, and continually disseminate more life and joy and happiness around thee. So wilt thou do honour to mankind, and to God their creator and father, and incontrovertibly evince, that God has crowned thee with glory and honour, and has made thee only for this period of time lower than the spirits of bliss.

SERMON II.

What is in Opposition to the Dignity of Man.

○ GOD! thou hast done much, infinitely much, for us thy creatures and children! Thou hast crowned us with glory and honour, endowed us with eminent prerogatives, and hast made us but little inferior to the angels! What great faculties, what extensive capacities and powers do we not discover in our nature! And what means, what incitements to the expansion and use of them does not thy kind providence daily grant us! how much good might we not do and enjoy; how wise, how virtuous, how happy even now be and become, if we thought and acted ever suitably to the dignity and the prerogatives which thou hast conferred upon us! O God, how ought we to be ashamed before thee and before ourselves, that we are not wiser, and better, and happier; that we so slowly advance towards the perfection

fection to which thou hast made us capable of attaining; that we assert not more worthily the glory of man! Alas! many of us retreat ever farther from thee and from their vocation, debase themselves ever lower by follies and sins, and render themselves ever more unworthy of the rank and station which thou hast assigned them! Alas! still much darkness, much thralldom, much sloth and reluctance to goodness, much neglect and much misuse of abilities degrade; still many low sentiments and actions degrade us men, the glorious work of thy hands! We lament that we are so deeply fallen from our dignity, and have so much obscured the lustre of thy image in us! Yet may we all rise from this depth of guilt and misery, and be renewed after thy likenesses! The sentiment of our sullied dignity is not yet entirely suppressed in our hearts! Desires and endeavours after higher improvement yet frequently remind us of our origin from thee, of our affinity to thee, of what we might be and become! O do thou thyself strengthen and quicken, by the influences of thy spirit, this generous sentiment in us! Let these desires after higher objects ever become more ardent, these endeavours ever more continued and efficient! Rescue our spirits from the dominion of sensuality, raise them above every thing that is earthly and visible, bring them ever nearer to thee, their creator and father, and let them seek and find in thee their sovereign perfection and bliss! Bless our meditations on those truths that are intended now to incite and

invigorate our minds. Let us willingly receive and retain them in a good heart. All this we implore of thee in the name of thy fon Jesus ; and, confident in his promifes, we farther addrefs thee in the words he taught us : Our father, &c.

PSALM viii. 6.

Thou haft made him a little lower than the angels, and haft crowned him with glory and honour.

THE greater man's dignity is, fo much the more highly is he engaged to affert it, and to think and act in conformity to it. The greater his dignity, the more does every thing that is in opposition to it, that leffens or obfcures its splendour, debase and degrade him. Better, far better is it to fill the loweft place, than to be exalted above others, and to disgrace one-felf by low fentiments and shameful actions : better, far better, to live in obfcurity, and be loft in the crowd, than to be conspicuous beyond others, and to walk in the light, but by error, folly, and vice, to betray a greater love for darknefs : better, far better, to have meaner capacities and powers, than great capacities and powers, to mifapply them, or not ufe them at all : better, far better, to poffefs no prerogatives, than to fully them by unworthy behaviour,

behaviour, or by negligence to render them void. And may not this be the case with numbers of mankind, and possibly with some among us? We all enjoy great prerogatives, as men, great capacities and powers: we all display a superiority in various ways, over the other inhabitants of the earth: we all fill a more elevated rank in the scale of existencies, live and act in a higher and a larger sphere than they: we are all endowed with a certain nobility, a certain peculiar dignity which exalts us far above every thing about us. No one that has impartially considered the nature and the destination of man, and knows and feels himself, is able to contradict this fact. Recollect only our last consideration of this subject. Which of us then did not perceive the dignity of man, did not admire it, did not rejoice in it? But how seldom is it displayed in its perfect purity, in all its lustre! How oft is it veiled, like the sun, with thick and gloomy clouds, or obscured by the impenetrable opacity of matter! How often does man forget, belie, and debase his dignity! How often does he think and act in such a manner as if he were not that reasonable, that free, that active, that emulative, that immortal, that godlike creature; as if he were not the wise and beneficent ruler of the earth, the pious priest of nature; but exactly the reverse of all this! And how low must it degrade him in the eyes of all intelligent creatures, how low in his own, when he compares what he is and does with what he might be, and is able to do!

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Would he but frequently make these comparisons, and not decline the salutary shame and confusion it must necessarily produce ! My present design is to facilitate this business to such of you as are fallen from your dignity, or have much lessened or obscured it by your sentiments and your conduct.

To this end, I shall shew you what is derogatory to the dignity of man.

Let every one compare his own sentiments and his own behaviour with it ; judge them both with strict impartiality ; let him not quickly turn his eyes away from those things which deform and debase him, and which he must now feel to degrade and disgrace him ; and by that means let him rouze and apply himself as soon as possible to become what he is not yet, and immediately to set about doing what he has hitherto left undone !

A man acts inconsistently with his high endowments of intelligence and reason ; he acts in opposition to his dignity, debases and degrades himself, when he neglects to cultivate his understanding and his reason, when he neglects to use them to those purposes for which the creator bestowed them ; when truth and error, semblance and reality, are things indifferent to him, when he is contented with fewer or with worse attainments and perceptions, than such as he might acquire by his abilities, by his capacities, by his station, by the peculiar means and opportunities he has or may have to that end.— Where is then your dignity, how does your nobility appear,

appear, you who avoid that retirement and silence which is so favourable, and generally so indispensable to reflection; you who benumb your spirit by an unceasing round of dissipation, distraction, and tumultuous amusement; who seldom attain to any clear and intimate consciousness of yourselves and your condition; who seldom exercise yourselves in consideration or reflection; turn your thoughts constantly more without than within; exist more by the opinions and judgments of others, than live in that self-sentiment which is the necessary concomitant of habitual meditation? Where is your dignity, how does your nobility appear, you who rest merely in what you see, and hear, and feel, who so seldom inquire into the causes and grounds and views of things; and, like the beasts of the field, are occupied in enjoying the present moments, forgetful of the past, and losing sight of the future? Where is your dignity, how does your nobility appear? you, who find it so difficult to raise yourselves above visible and earthly things, who so soon feel weary and disgusted of any serious reflection on God and religion, on duty and virtue, on death and immortality, on the vocation and the important concerns of man; to whom rational exercises of devotion, those noblest elevations of the human mind, afford so little recreation and pleasure, and who are more delighted with what affects and flatters the senses, than with any communications with the world of spirits, and with God, the father of spirits? Where is your dignity;

dignity; how does the nobility of your nature appear; you, who, with the best means and opportunities of investigation and conscious reflection, only think as others think, and talk as others talk; you who allow yourselves to be governed merely by the prejudices of education, of appearance, of fashion, who blindly embrace and revere every prevailing opinion; who are constantly whirled about in the same narrow circle of false, obscure, and extremely defective conceptions and notions; who stifle your natural curiosity; who neither seek nor acquire any better information; who remain ignorant in regard to so many important matters, and probably even applaud yourselves for your ignorance; and, therefore, in general take so little pains to cultivate your understanding, and to enlarge and rectify your knowledge? Is not this egregiously to belie your noblest privileges, to pervert or disuse them?

Would you maintain your dignity, you must use the understanding and reason which the creator hath granted you, and whereby he has so far exalted you above the other inhabitants of the earth; cultivate them with care; let the adorning, the invigorating, and the elevating of your mind be at least as much your earnest endeavour, as the nourishment and the embellishment of your person; exercise your reflection on all that you see and do; constantly retain the clear consciousness of yourself, and avoid every thing which beguiles and suppresses that sentiment; rest not in the semblances of things, in their
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outward appearance, their first apparent effects; strive to find out their true quality, dive into their origin, into their aims and their end, consider them in their connections and consequences; direct frequently your eyes and your heart on high, raise them to the first, the eternal cause of all things, keep up your close correspondence with the father of spirits, and thereby perform what no other creature on this terrestrial globe can do; let not sensuality ever weigh down your spirit to the earth; let not sloth ever hinder you from investigating the truth; and be faithful in the use of all the means which providence affords you, to the rectification of your perceptions, and the increase of your knowledge.

Farther, every thing that opposes the freedom of man, whatever contracts and prevents its use, militates against the dignity of man; dishonours, debases him, and renders him unworthy of the station he fills among the creatures of God. But are you indeed free; do you maintain by your freedom the dignity of man, you who cannot withstand any impression, any charm, any strong impulse of outward things, who do only what is agreeable to your eyes and delightful to your heart; you who never refuse or reject, or cannot refuse and reject without conflict and violence, what pleases your palate, flatters your senses, or gratifies your animal appetites?—Are you free, do you maintain, by your freedom, the dignity of man, you who scarcely ever behold with your own eyes, scarcely ever act from your own perceptions,

perceptions, who have scarce any settled principles, and follow no fixed rule in your conduct; you who are blindly swayed by the prevalence of custom, the tyranny of fashion, and the force of example; are constantly inquiring after, and constantly directing yourselves by, what is held to be true, and beautiful, and right, and good, more than by what is really and intrinsically true, and beautiful, and right, and good?—Are you free, do you maintain, by your freedom, the dignity of man, you who suffer yourselves to be dazzled by the lustre of gold, the splendour of station, the richness of dress, to be captivated by every fair appearance, to be deluded by every imposture, to be deceived by every pretence, to start at every fancied terror, to follow every lure; who can surmount no considerable impediment in your way, nor withstand any uncommon temptation to vice?—Are you free, do you maintain, by your freedom, the dignity of man, you whose love and hatred, whose hope and fear, whose joy and sorrow, whose good or ill humour, whose opinions and resolves, whose whole behaviour in general depends on mere outwards things; almost on every accident, on every company, on every slight alteration in the body or in the weather, so as one while to make you think thus, and at another otherwise; who are seldom in agreement with yourselves, so seldom do that which you had resolved to do, and leave off that which you had determined to forsake?—Are you free, do you maintain, by your freedom, the dignity of

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of man, you who are in bondage to vice ; who suffer yourselves to be so tyrannized by some base inordinate passion, that you follow its impulses with implicit obedience, comply with its orders to do such things as your hearts rise up to condemn, which your reason and conscience tell you are unrighteous and wrong? — Are you free, do you maintain, by your freedom, the dignity of man, you who disown the rights of mankind, and their natural equality ; who obsequiously bow down before greatness and power, who blindly submit to their judgments, their actions, and their orders ; who tremble at every frown, at every threat, of the mighty ; who purchase their favour by cringing flattery, by criminal complacency, and are entirely dependent on the looks and dispositions of feeble mortals ?

No ; your freedom, that noble, that inestimable privilege of man, is by this, at least, much weakened, if not totally obscured ; is more natural temper and disposition, than operative, active energy. Ye are slaves, slaves to the senses, slaves to accident, slaves to men, slaves to your lusts and appetites ; and, so long as you are so, you reduce yourselves to the level of the beasts of the field, so long is the dignity of man scarcely distinguishable in you ; and only now and then a feeble ray of your lustre appears through the thick veil which covers it. Would you have it shine forth again in all its splendour ? Oh ! then break the chains of that bondage by which sensuality holds you captive ; make use of the reflection

fection which the creator has given you ; learn to act with thought and consideration ; trust not to the first impressions of things, to the first suggestions that arise within you ; in all your determinations consult experience, reason, and the revealed will of God ; hearken to the voice of your conscience ; and act not against your own conviction, nor do contrarily to what you must acknowledge to be good and proper. Endeavour to acquire a certain firmness and consistency in your thoughts, your inclinations, and actions ; which is the foundation of all true freedom, the completest security against all servility and bondage, an infallible feature of human dignity.

If that natural activity, which is constantly more or less operative in man, and can never be entirely destroyed, be another characteristic feature of his dignity ; then, thirdly, every thing must be contrary to it which enervates, suppresses, enthral, or gives it a perverse and pernicious direction. And what numberless faults are men guilty of in this respect, by which they debase themselves, and dishonour their nature ! On one hand, are men who sedulously avoid all attentive and serious reflection, all exertion of their bodily or mental powers, all inquiry that demands any trouble, any pains, or any deep investigation ; who shudder as it were at any labour, at any intricate business, at any considerable undertaking ; always imagining themselves to be weaker than they are, almost entirely neglecting to use their faculties for fear of exhausting them ; from fear of
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the remotest danger to their lives or their health, of giving up the slightest conveniences, sacrifice every duty and every opportunity of doing good, and of being useful to the community; who are ever panting after rest, and seek their felicity in wealth, or in letting outward things act on them, and please themselves in the idea of them, without wishing to employ them to useful purposes, or once considering that it is more blessed to give than to receive; men, who complain, and probably make it a reproach to Providence, that man is ordained to eat bread in the sweat of his brow; that all he has is to be acquired, purchased, earned, and extorted by painful industry; that he has so many obstacles to surmount, so many difficulties to encounter, so many foes to contend with, in his way to peace and happiness, that he must often watch and think and consider and provide for himself and for others. — Some again there are who direct the whole of their activity and powers, wherewith they might do so much good to themselves and to others, to mere trifles, and waste their cares upon them; ever busied, ever turmoiling, and yet bring nothing to effect, nothing that is worthy of them, nothing that might be useful to society, nothing that can cheer them in the hour of death, or compensate them in the day of judgment; men, who, as if they were always children, trifle, and loiter, and sport, and throw away their whole lives, employed barely in what belongs to the ornamenting of their persons, to making a parade of their exterior attrac-

tions, to figuring in the fashionable circles of society, and thereby neglect their most important concerns. — Others there are, who are very active, but active in wickedness; who bring much to pass, but seldom any good; who sow pestilential seed on all sides, lay stumbling-blocks in the way of the simple, spread snares for unsuspecting integrity, destroy domestic and social harmony, fan and feed the fire of discord, meddle with all things and perplex them all; who, from a misplaced activity, would do every thing themselves, and thereby prevent others from doing it better.

Ye who think and act in this manner, who so suppress your propensity to action, or give it so wrong a direction, awake from your slumbers, be ashamed of your sloth, if you would maintain the dignity of your nature. At present your life is no more than a dream; you can have no rational joys; you possess your eminent powers in vain, or you pervert them by misapplication. To live like a man, means, to use our activity, to be conscious of our actions, and to do as much good as we can. To rest like men, does not mean to be idle, does not imply inaction, but to turn from hard to lighter employments, and to rejoice in the success of our endeavours. Would you not vegetate like plants, nor exist like the inferior animals, but live like rational creatures, and enjoy that honourable repose which is worthy of man; then be active, and augment your industry, but be active and industrious in virtue;
then

then lead a busy life, but be busy in beneficence; then use and improve your faculties till they be indefatigable, and decline not the greatest exertions when duty and humanity demand them of you.

If the capacity of ever advancing, and of ever tending to greater excellence, be a fourth prerogative of man, then must every thing be in opposition to his dignity that hinders the expansion of that capacity, that checks him, that puts him back, or fatigues and dispirits him in his struggles after higher excellence. And with what numbers of people does this capacity remain nothing but capacity! How few unfold and bring their powers into action as much as they might and ought! Or, is that to stretch forwards; is that ever to improve and perfect our faculties, is that properly to use them, when we are so easily satisfied with what we know, what we can, and what we do; when we indeed prefer the good to the bad, but so seldom the better to the good; when we reckon ourselves sufficiently wise so soon as we in some sort understand the business of our station or calling, and have learnt to act our part with tolerable decency in social life; when we imagine ourselves virtuous and pious enough so long as we keep from open transgressions, from flagrant and shameful vice; when we do not laugh at religion, while we frequent the public worship, and maintain the character of an honest irreproachable man; while we confine our beneficence merely to almsgiving, to general courtesy and friendship, but

are lothe to sacrifice any thing, or deny ourselves in the slightest instance for others, from a generous and a beneficent spirit? Is that to be called stretching forward, always striving after perfection, duly using our faculties, and thereby maintaining the glorious privileges of man, when we are afraid of being wiser and better than others, of shewing our superiority by a sounder judgment, nobler sentiments, and a purer virtue? when we will not venture to leave the common, the beaten path, will not rise above prevailing prejudices and customs, from a dread of being charged with affectation and singularity, and are contented to regulate and frame ourselves by others, and commonly by people of moderate talents and feeble hearts? Is that to be termed stretching forwards, is that to be called always striving after perfection, and properly putting our powers in action, when we suffer every obstacle we meet with in our way to perfection, every unsuccessful attempt, every trip, every loss of outward things, every sneer of the fool, every jest of the self-conceited, to scare us from the pursuit of our aim, or make us abandon our good resolves?

No; would you likewise in this respect maintain the dignity of your nature? then allow neither your sloth nor the example of others to confine you by an arbitrary controul. Never think that you are wise and virtuous and pious enough, that you have already done good enough, and have rendered service enough to the world; regard no height of
knowledge,

knowledge, of wisdom, of virtue and piety as absolutely unattainable; and reckon what you already know, already possess, already can do, and already have done, as the least part in comparison of what you still may hope to know, to attempt, to attain, and to perform. To be all and to do all that man is capable of doing and becoming, and to perform whatever depends on human strength, let that be the exalted, the glorious aim of your steadfast endeavours! an object to which you will be ever approaching, but which you will never completely attain!

Then, you are immortal. And this likewise gives you a dignity which eminently raises you above the whole inanimate and transitory creation. Oh, beware of every thing that is at variance with this your dignity, or may obscure the lustre of it! O man, thou art immortal, thou shalt continue, thou shalt live, thou shalt be happy, for ever; and dost thou still confine thy views to the present, dost thou care only for the moments of this short life, dost thou with thy whole heart depend on what is transient and earthly, and seek thy whole felicity in things which death will snatch thee from, which are granted thee only to use for some few days or hours! Thou art immortal; thou shalt continue for ever, live for ever, be happy for ever; and dost thou still live so, as if thou wert altogether flesh, altogether to see corruption; as if thou hadst nothing to hope for, and nothing to fear beyond the grave; as if no judgment and no retribution, no reward and no punishment,

nishment, awaited thee: as if thy present conduct stood in no connection with thy future lot! Thou art immortal; thou shalt subsist for ever, live for ever, be happy for ever: and still dost thou so little for the future! And still dost thou so seldom sacrifice the deceitful pleasures of the present moment to the abiding bliss of heaven! And yet dost thou so frequently complain of that which educates and prepares thee for that superior state! And yet does every misfortune so easily cast thee down! And yet does every loss of earthly things as deeply affect thee as if thou hadst no other and no greater satisfactions to expect! And still dost thou tremble at the approach of death, which is to put thee in possession of such great felicity! And still dost thou shudder and start at the sight of the yawning grave, as if thou and all thy comforts were there to be absorbed and annihilated for ever! What inconsistency! What self-degradation! Dost thou thus think and act conformably with the dignity of an immortal being, exalted far above the dust? Are these the judgments, the sentiments, the inclinations, the concerns, the joys, the cares, the sollicitudes, befitting a man who has such prospects before him, who has an everlasting life in view?

No; would thou support thy dignity, o man! then never forget that thou art appointed to immortality. This consideration must often strike thee, both in the tumult of society, and in the silence of solitude; in the midst of thy pleasures, and in the
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midst of thy business, must call out to thee with a piercing voice: Let not thy heart be attached to things which thou must certainly lose, which thou probably must leave so soon! Treat not with indifference things that have and will have such great and everlasting influence on all thy future fortunes! Confine not thy desires, thy endeavours, thy hopes, to transient moments, when thou seest an eternity before thee! Neglect not for the affairs and distractions of this short, uncertain life on earth, the far more weighty concerns of thy spirit, which shall live for ever! Let the prospect into futurity be the rule of thy judgment on the present and thy behaviour towards it. Bear and forbear, as one whom no sorrows and sufferings upon earth can entirely overwhelm, whom nothing can deprive of his high destination. Give and lose and sacrifice, as one whose riches are inexhaustible, whose happiness is indistructible! enjoy every pleasure, every delight, as one who expects far purer pleasure, far noble joys! Constantly chuse and do that which thou wilt never rue, which will exhilarate thee for ever! So will the nobility, the dignity, the majesty, of an immortal being be resplendent in thee, in all thy thoughts and in all thy deeds, in suffering and in enjoying, and give a value to thy life which nothing else can give.

Wouldst thou maintain thy dignity, o man! then, sixthly, above all beware of whatever is in opposition to the close and blessed relation in which thou standest

towards God and his son Jesus, of all that may weaken, obscure, or destroy thy resemblance to the deity, thy resemblance to Christ. — Reverence thy spirit, by which thou art not only related to angels, but art the offspring of God ; and beware of misusing its faculties, for that is to misuse what is most glorious in thee, what brings thee into affinity with God. Beware of every error, and of every sin ; for error and sin remove thee from God, and make thee less capable of communion with him. Beware of every thing that is contrary to the mind of Jesus, that pattern of human dignity, that perfect image of the Father. Beware of hindering and, as far as in thee lies, of frustrating the beneficent views of God towards man, and the great work of his delegate on earth, by promoting infidelity or superstition, by corrupt example, by base and iniquitous actions. Rather seek thy whole glory in willing as God wills, in being so minded as Jesus was, in acting as thou seest God act, and in walking as Jesus also walked. So will the spirit of God, the spirit of his son Jesus, be visible in thee, and operate through thee. So wilt thou be in the hand of God to thy brethren, what that extraordinary teacher sent by him formerly was, what heavenly messengers, and what the apostles of our Lord were to them. So wilt thou render thyself ever more capable and worthy of being called, in the highest sense of the word, a son, a daughter of God ; the honour of being a brother, a sister, of Jesus, the first born of the Father. And what a
lustre

lustre will this diffuse over all thou art and all thou dost!

Lastly, o man! there is dignity and grandeur in thy outward form; oh then beware of disfiguring and deforming it by any degrading sentiments, any unseemly grief and sorrow, any violent inordinate passions. Let the beauty and the nobility of thy spirit animate and enhance the beauty of thy person. Let thine eyes speak neither falsehood nor artifice, neither envy nor hatred; thy lips neither treachery nor lies; but both they and these, simple truth, and simple love. Let thy look be friendly to mankind; let thy countenance be open; and all thy mien and gesture express thy cultivated understanding, thy kind and generous heart!

Art thou the principal, the chief inhabitant of the earth? Then rule and govern, o man! in the name of thy Great Superior; and if thou wouldst maintain the dignity of God's vicegerent in this province of his dominion, then rule and govern with gentleness and wisdom. Be not the tyrant, be the guardian, the protector, the leader of all inferior creatures; drive them not from thee, but approach them with complacency, with compassion, with succour. Slay and destroy them not without necessity; and when thou hast need of them, when thou canst not even spare their lives, at least forbear to multiply their sufferings, and to augment their pain; torment them not, to prolong thy savage pleasure, or to gratify thy fastidious appetite. Do not desolate

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late and ravage the earth, which thou art to improve and to adorn. Spread not death and destruction, but life and joy around thee. Be principally the benefactor of thy brethren, of whatever nation, of whatever condition they may be. Despise none; injure none; let none feel thy power or thy pre-eminence, but as the tokens of thy beneficence and love; lay not the shackles of bondage on any, for all have the same pretensions to freedom as thou; disturb none in their innocent pleasures; refuse to none that help which thou art able to afford; hinder no man in his endeavours after perfection; and let the possessions, the wealth, the liberty, the privileges, the comforts of every man, be sacred to thee!

Art thou the priest of nature; and wouldst thou maintain this dignity; then be not indifferent, be not insensible to the wonders of almighty wisdom and goodness which surround thee on all sides. Harken to the voice of nature, take up her song of praise; participate in the joy of every living thing, and let thy heart feel and thy tongue express what inferior beings can neither express nor feel, and offer up thanksgiving and praise, in the name of all, to him who made both thee and them, who hath exalted thee so highly above them, and to whom alone all glory and praise are due for ever.

SERMON III.

*How and by what Means Christianity restores the
Dignity of Man.*

O GOD! who lovest and providest for us with fatherly kindness, unhappy indeed should we be if we knew thee not, if we were not under thy inspection, if we might not trust in thy fatherly providence and support, if we were left to ourselves, to our ignorance and our imbecility! How soon should we then forfeit our dignity! how deeply degrade ourselves by folly and sins! in what a helpless and forlorn condition should we be! But thou, who hast created us, and hast crowned us with glory and honour, thou providest also for our preservation, and for the preservation of the prerogatives which thou hast graciously conferrèd upon us. What great things hast thou not done for us in this respect, particularly for us who have the happiness to be christians!

tians! What light furrounds us! What a glorious course is assigned us! What prospects are opened to us! What new incitements and energies hast thou not granted us to the maintenance of our dignity! What can we not now be and do and become, since we know thee as our God and father, understand thy gracious dispositions towards us, stand under thy inspection, feel thy intimate presence, are assured of thy assistance and support, are authentically certified of a better, an everlasting life, and are brought so nigh to thee through thy son Jesus! Of what virtue, of what bliss are we now not capable! Yes; thanks, everlasting thanks be therefore given unto thee, all-gracious and all-merciful, for having called us to christianity, and thereby raised us from the abyss of weakness and misery to this height of intellectual vigour and felicity! O may we then ever become more worthy of our privileges, may the dignity of man be ever more resplendent in us! O let us never forget, how much thou hast done in us, of how great things thou hast made us capable, never be so ungrateful towards thee, never so inimical towards ourselves as to stop short at the lower degrees of wisdom and of virtue, with the most powerful means and incitements to superior excellence! No; let us be enflamed by a noble ambition, let the sentiment of our dignity, restored through Christ, ever become more lively, ever more fruitful in good sentiments and actions, in us and by us! Bless the meditations that are intended

tended now to incite and encourage us thereto, and hearken to our prayer through Jesus Christ; in whose name, &c.

PSALM viii. 6.

Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

CERTAIN as it is, that man possesses a great intrinsic dignity, and that the attentive observer cannot fail of perceiving it: yet it is no less certain, that error and vice, superstition and slavery, have greatly obscured its lustre; and that there have been times when the prerogatives and the nobility of man, when his relationship to God, and his destination to a higher perfection, were scarcely discernible. Into what a state of weakness, of debility, of degradation, have not many nations formerly been, and are still sunk! And how much deeper yet would not mankind have fallen from that dignity, if God had left them to themselves; if he had put no check to their progressively increasing corruption and misery! But how much has not God done in this respect for mankind, in every age, and in every nation! How often has he raised up, from among them, souls of a finer and a nobler sentiment, spirits of deeper perceptions,

ceptions, of more eminent abilities, and more extensive operation; who have been shining lights in their generation, for inspiring new life, fresh activity to goodness, into multitudes that were in a dying state, and for reaching out a hand to sensual men, for lifting them above their sensuality, and coming nearer to their high vocation! How much has not God in particular done by his son Jesus, for the restoration of the human dignity! Was not this the ultimate aim of the whole of his great work on earth? How much has not God honoured and exalted man by his intimate relationship and connection with his son, the first-born among all creatures! And what noble sentiments does not christianity inspire into its genuine professors! how much does it not extend the circle of their view, and the sphere of their action! of what great achievements does it not render them capable, and how does it not ennoble all that they think and do! Certainly, a christian, who is so in deed and in truth, is he of all men in whom the dignity of man is manifested in its brightest lustre, in its most various and most noble effects! O my pious hearers! could I but cite you all, who bear the name of christians, as a proof of it; how superfluous then would all other demonstration be! Grateful joy at our restored dignity, and mutual encouragement to preserve it, would then be our sole employment. But we must now proceed to set the truth of what we affirm concerning the pre-eminent dignity of the christian, in its true point of view, by
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other arguments drawn from the nature of the case itself. And this shall be the subject and aim of my present discourse. I will endeavour to answer the question: How, and by what means, has christianity rekindled in man the sentiment of his dignity, strengthened and eased him in the maintenance of it?

Christianity places our relation towards God in the fullest light; it teaches us, how great an interest God takes in the destinies of man, and how much he has done, and still does for him; it informs us of the providence and the government of God, of his constant presence every where; of his sovereign inspection over all things; of his influence upon all things; and promises us his particular assistance as often as we stand in need of it; it sets conspicuously before us the dignity of man in the person of Jesus, in his conduct, and his fortunes; and thereby points out to us what the nature of man is capable of; and to what degree of perfection it is able to arrive; it announces to us immortality, everlasting life, a never-ending, an always increasing felicity; it acquaints us with the intimate connection of our present with our future state: and by all these means christianity promotes the sentiment and the restoration of the dignity of man.

First, I say, christianity places our relation towards God in the clearest light; thus causing man to feel his dignity, and enabling him to maintain it. Is man to imagine himself the work of blind chance, or a son of the earth in the strictest sense of the word; may he boast of no other origin than that of the plants

plants ; is he sprung, like the insects, from foulness and corruption ? Could he not elevate his mind into the belief and contemplation of a sovereign deity ; or were not this deity known to him as the creator of the world, as the father of mankind : of how little value would his existence and his nature be in his own sight ! What is more insignificant than a sport of chance, which destroys to-morrow what it produced to-day, which never acts by design and rule, and is perpetually at variance with itself ! What is more worthless and uncertain, than the existence of a heap of dust in this or the other form ; which, being nothing but dust, must sooner or later be wholly decomposed, and fall for ever into dust ! And were not these the degrading conceptions formed by numbers of the wise and the unwise among the heathens, concerning man and his origin ?—How totally different is not the instruction which christianity gives us on it ! It proclaims aloud to each of its professors : God, the only, the eternal, the supremely perfect, is thy creator and father, as well as the creator of all worlds, of all the hosts of heaven, and of all the inhabitants of the earth ! Neither chance nor fate : no ; supreme wisdom and goodness called thee into being, gave thee life and breath, and all things. Thou art no earth-born creature : thou art the son, the daughter of God, of the most high : thou art of divine descent, formed after the image of God, capable of communion, and of an ever greater similitude with him ! Thou art not al-

together dust, only thy present tabernacle is dust; the spirit that inhabits it is exalted far above the dust; is ordained to important, to grand designs; and depends not more on chance for its duration than its production, but upon the will of him who loves thee as a father, and assuredly will not destroy the work of his hands! And the God who has formed thee is likewise thy preserver, thy sovereign, thy inspector, thy judge, and hereafter will be thy rewarder. If man then stand in such regard towards God; if he be so intimately connected with the being supremely perfect, with the creator and ruler of the world; if he be his child, his peculiarly beloved and favoured child, what a value should not this give him in his own eyes! how far exalt his nature above all inferior species of creatures! What a sentiment excite in him of his dignity! How could he boast of his descent from God, and of his fellowship with him, were he to degrade himself by unworthy sentiments and actions? How can he assert the honour of being formed after the image of God, if he be not adorned with wisdom and virtue? How recollect his connection with God, the pure eternal fount of light, and yet walk in darkness?

Christianity teaches us farther, how great an interest God takes in the concerns of man, and how much he has done and still does for him; and what a grand idea should not this give us of our dignity! how forcibly should it not urge us to the maintenance of it! According to the doctrine of christianity, we are not

the creatures of a God who takes no care of his creatures, and leaves them to themselves; not the children of a father who disowns his children, who does not concern himself about them, and is indifferent to their happiness and their misery. No; never has God, according to that comfortable doctrine, left himself unwitnessed to man; never withdrawn from him his fatherly providence and love; never abandoned the fortunes of his feeble, helpless, untutored children, to blind chance, or to their own ignorance. No; from their first progenitor, to his latest posterity, has he, he himself, provided for their support, their instruction, their guidance, their education, their progress to higher attainments. He has constantly revealed himself to them in various ways; constantly shed innumerable benefits on them; sometimes lovingly correcting, and sometimes bountifully blessing them; has constantly been nigh to them, and has left them in want of no means for becoming wiser and better. When has he withheld his fructifying influence from nature? when denied his superior energies to the human spirit? when withdrawn from it the incitements, the strongest incitements to its developement and proficiency? When has such darkness covered the earth, or even any region of it, as not one ray of light has broken in upon and cleared? When did such universal corruption prevail upon it that nothing happened to check or to controul it? How often as he not sent wise and good men as his delegates to their brethren! How frequently

quently has his providence, by various ways, united brighter regions with those that lay in darkness, mixed enlightened persons among the raw untutored people, and the best with the worst of men! How full of wisdom and goodness were not his dealings with the posterity of Jacob, the education he gave them, and through them to so many other nations! And how much, how inexpressibly much, has he not done at length for man by his son Jesus! What a teacher of truth, what a safe and sure guide in the way of virtue and happiness, what a mighty helper and deliverer; what an affectionate lord and king has he not given them in him! What revelations of his will, what assurances and proofs of his favour and love, what promises and views of futurity, what comfort, what new powers has he not sent down to them from heaven by this his representative!—And shall man, for whom God cares and provides so much; shall man, for whom he has done and still does so great things; shall man, for whose sake God spared not even his son, the only begotten, for whom he gave his son, the beloved, to suffer death: shall this man be a contemptible, an insignificant creature? not be of great worth; not have a pre-eminent dignity; not feel this dignity; not be happy in the sentiment of it whenever he meditates thereon; when he considers how much he is esteemed of God, how graciously God is disposed towards him, and with what paternal tenderness he cares for him? Cause and effect, means and end, are in the closest

connection with the Allwise ; and that on which he vouchsafes such peculiar inspection and providence must certainly be, either in itself and its nature, or in its destination, grand and important.

Yet more : christianity places, thirdly, the doctrine of the divine providence and government in the clearest light ; it proclaims to us the constant presence of God with all things, his supreme inspection over all, his influence in all, and promises us his particular assistance as often as we have occasion for it. And how much must this too cause a man to feel his dignity ! how forcibly should it urge him to the maintenance of it ! By this doctrine, all that a man does and all that befalls him, every thing that happens in the world, wears another aspect, and becomes of more importance than it otherwise would. These doctrines spread the clearest light on every thing that otherwise would be mysterious in the state and fortunes of man, or must lower him in his own eyes. To be left to himself, without the superintendance of a supreme ruler, without the conduct and guidance of an almighty and beneficent father ; placed upon so changeable and so perplexed a scene ; subject to so many dangers ; exposed to all the fickleness of chance, every attack of artifice and iniquity ; without refuge in adversity, without assistance in perils ; how weak, how miserable, how contemptible, would not man appear to himself ! how often would he be tempted to envy the condition of the beasts of the field ! - But now, enlightened by the light of

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christianity,

christianity, how may not his spirit exult! With what serenity, what courage, what confidence, must he not now be inspired! What design, what consistency, what order, do not now appear where all before seemed confusion, contradiction, and open strife! The christian may now hold this language to himself: God, the omniscient, the all-bountiful, who rules my lot, the lot of all mankind and of all worlds: he comprehends all, oversees all, directs and conducts all, the small as well as the great, the evil as well as the good; in his hand are all animate and inanimate creatures, all causes and powers, and without his will no atom can change its place, no hair fall off from my head, no man do me harm, no loss, no misfortune attend me; and all that he wills and ordains, is right and good, is constantly the best. He sees in the clearest light, where profound darkness encompasses me; he provides for me where I can find nothing to procure; and makes that to be the means to my perfection and happiness, which I thought calamity and distress. He, the almighty, the all-bountiful, is constantly nigh to me with his help, is acquainted with all my wants, hears all my sighs, manifests his strength in my weakness, guides and conducts me by his spirit, executes his decrees on earth by me, and is ever ready to do more in us and by us than we are able to ask or understand. He, the omniscient, the omnipresent, is every where with me and about me. He knows my heart, is the infallible witness of all I think and do, he sees in se-

cret, and will reward that openly which was done in private. His judgment is pure righteousness and truth, his approbation is ever firm to the sincere, and his approbation is of infinitely more value than all the applause of the world, than all the possessions and all the glories of the earth.—And man, who believes such a providence, who thus walks under the inspection of God, who thus acts in his presence, who may esteem himself an instrument in the hand of God, a means to the attainment of his designs: how grand must not his destination, how important must not the work he is commissioned to transact on earth appear to him! How strong must he not feel himself in the assurance of divine support! What good actions will he not find power and resolution in himself to do under the eyes of his father and judge! How generously, how greatly will he not think and act even in the absence of all human witnesses, when destitute of all human approbation, and even amidst the ingratitude of the world! How undismayed, with what serenity will he not behold the revolutions and subversions that may happen in the world and among mankind! how tranquil and confident will he lift up his eyes on high in reverence to God, as the kind and wise ruler and father of him and the whole creation!

Christianity displays clearly to us, in the fourth place, the dignity of man in the person of Jesus, its restorer and chief, in his conduct and the circumstances of his life, and teaches us therein, in a

no less comprehensible than incontrovertible manner, what human nature is capable of, and to what height of perfection it may ascend. Yes, my pious brethren, in Jesus, who is our relation, our brother, whose life is so indissolubly connected with our lives, whose fortunes so inseparably united to ours, in him our dignity appears in all its purity, in its perfect splendour. What wisdom, what virtue, what piety, did he not display! What love towards God and man did not animate him! What did he not perform! and how pure, how beneficent were all his views in whatever he did! What did he not endure; and how willingly, how steadfastly, how piously, did he exercise his patience! What condescensions, what sacrifices, what uninterrupted obedience to his heavenly father, what indefatigable zeal in beneficence, what unabated progress towards the end of his high calling, did he not testify during the whole course of his life on earth! What temptations were ever able to conquer him, what wrongs could irritate him, what dangers alarm him, what difficulty discourage, or what sufferings make him impatient! And to what a pitch of power, of honour, of glory, by all this did he not attain! How great, how immensely great, is not now his sphere of action! how illustrious is humanity now exalted to the right hand of the father! how should not now, and how should not hereafter, every knee submissively bow to him our chief, and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Fa-

ther! Acknowledge, here, o man, the dignity of thy nature! Here feel what thou, as man, mayest do, what thou mayest endure, what thou mayest withstand; to what a height thou hast power and capacity to raise thyself, as man! Feel the whole value of the privilege whereby God has honoured man, in the person of his chief and restorer! That Jesus, who is now exalted far above all, who so widely rules and acts, is flesh of thy flesh, is thy brother, was a man like thee, was tempted as thou art, was acquainted with grief like thee, and entered into glory through obedience and sufferings! What exercises and trials can now affright thee, what conflicts dismay thee, what sacrifice cost thee too much, what difficulties stop thee in thy course, what pitch of wisdom and virtue, what degree of felicity, can now seem unattainable to thee! Look at him, thy leader and chief, tread in his footsteps, and strive to emulate him; through him thou mayest do all things, with him rise superior to all, with him prevail and triumph, and hereafter behold and enjoy the glory which the Father has bestowed on him, and in him on all mankind who assert the dignity of their nature!

Lastly, christianity has revived in man the sentiment of his dignity, and given him the most powerful incitements to maintain it, by the grand doctrine of immortality and everlasting life, which it places in the most conspicuous light, and has connected in the closest manner with what we are and do, and all
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that happens to us. Though man possessed ever so great privileges over the beasts of the field; though he felt in himself ever so great powers and faculties for the noblest undertakings; though he could bring ever so much to pass, and execute so much good; how little would all this appear to him, if these privileges, these powers, these faculties, this noble activity, were to be lost to him in a few extremely uncertain, quickly-fleeting years, if he were to be deprived of them all for ever by death; had he no fruit to expect from all he has here learnt and done and suffered and sacrificed and practised! How little nourishment for his nobler sentiments, how little incitement to great and generous actions, to hard but beneficial undertakings, what poor encouragement to unremitting endeavours after higher perfection, would man find in his present situation, if death were the period of his existence, if the grave and corruption were the term of all his hopes and exertions! How foolish would not the generality of his sacrifices to integrity and virtue appear! and how wise the saying of the fool: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!" — — But now, enlightened by the bright beams of the gospel, animated by the hope of a blessed immortality, how totally different is the case with man! What a sentiment of his dignity, of his grandeur, of his future exaltation, must it not awaken in him, when he can say to himself, I live, I think, I labour, I endure, I suffer, I exercise myself for eternity! My present state is only a prelude to the future! my future

ture state, the continuation and reward of the present! Whatever I do here draws consequences, unterminating consequences, after it. The worthy and generous actions that I now perform will still rejoice and bless me, after thousands and millions of years. The light which I here spread around me will enlighten me and my brethren beyond the grave; the good of every kind, I here effect in others and by their means, will proceed in operation from everlasting to everlasting, and be ever producing more good in infinite progression; and all that here befalls me has an influence on my future destination for ever. What now oppresses me, and what the world calls misfortune and distress, may be to me the inexhaustible source of pleasure and bliss in future. The violence I now do to myself, the hardships, the sorrows I now endure for the love of God and of my fellow-creatures, work together for my everlasting good. What can I voluntarily surrender for the sake of God and my conscience, which I shall not receive an hundred fold; what give to my brethren, from a truly christian heart, that I shall not hereafter receive again with usury; what sacrifice to my duty, that will not be amply repaid? Nay, the more I here bestow, the more shall I there receive, and the more I shall have to bestow again. The farther I here proceed in knowledge, in wisdom and in virtue, the faster then shall I advance from one degree of perfection and happiness to another; the nearer shall I approach to Jesus my chieftain and lord, and, through
him,

him, to God supreme. Here I learn to be and to do and to enjoy, what in that superior life I shall more perfectly be and do and enjoy. Here is the time for sowing, for planting, for working, for conflicting; there the time of harvest, of enjoyment, of repose, of triumph! No; my existence is not confined to this fleeting moment: it will continue for ever! My activity is not bounded by the narrow circle in which I now live and move: it will be ever enlarging, ever becoming more extensive and diversified. My intellectual powers are not subject to dissolution and decay like dust: they shall continue in operation and effect for ever; and the more I exert them here, the better I employ them, the more I effect by them, so much better shall I use them in the future world, so much the more shall I there effect by them. I see before me an incessant enlargement of my sphere of sight and action, an incessant increase in knowledge, in virtue, in activity, in bliss. The whole immensity of God's creation, the whole unnumbered host of intelligent, thinking beings, all the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Jesus Christ, the unfathomable depths of divine perfection: what noble employments, what displays of my powers, what pure joys, what everlasting progress, do not these afford to my expectations! And, with such prospects, with such expectations, must I not feel myself great, not feel myself happy? can I fail of seeing my relationship with superior beings, my fellowship with Christ, my communion with
God?

God? With such prospects, with such expectations, shall I degrade myself by folly and sin, by folly and sin leave my high destination! With such prospects, with such expectations, shall I ever be discouraged and weary in doing acts of justice and mercy, shall I ever lose sight of the glorious mark that shines before me, or shun any honourable exertion of my faculties, complain of any sacrifice that I offer to God and my conscience, let any opportunity escape me of sowing good seed, and of increasing the abundance of my future harvest! With such prospects, with such expectations, shall I be terrified at any misfortune, or tremble at the sight of death and the grave! Can then misfortune, or death, or the grave, destroy me? Are misfortune and death and the grave any thing but the means and the way to a higher life and greater felicity! No; let every exercise of my powers, every opportunity of doing good, be welcome to me! every misfortune, that makes me wiser and better, be blessed by me, and the summons of death to me a summons to enter on a better life. — O, my pious brethren, if we think so, and so act, — and so we may and so we ought to think as christians, — how luminous, how important are all things to us! What a value does all that we are, and all that we do, and all that happens to us, receive from hence! How operative; how effective in us, must the sentiment of our dignity be!

Wouldst thou then feel and assert thy dignity, o man! wouldst thou display it in all its lustre! then
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be a christian, be wholly christian, be wholly animated by the sense and spirit of christianity, believe its doctrines with thy whole heart, follow its precepts with fidelity and fortitude, firmly repose on its promises, frame thyself entirely on its founder, Jesus! The spirit of christianity will free thy soul from every lower sentiment, every unworthy desire; will elevate thy mind, enlarge thy heart, make thee feel thy powers, and ever transmit thee new; it will raise thee above all that is visible and earthly, will constantly give thee a greater resemblance to Jesus, the pattern of all human perfection, and constantly unite thee more intimately with God. Animated by the spirit of christianity, thou wilt justly esteem every faculty, every talent, every power that God hath given thee, carefully incite and exert them, and constantly produce as much good by them as thou canst. Informed by the spirit of christianity, thou wilt never act like a slave; never allow thyself to be governed by any sensual appetite, or any unruly passion; thou wilt not cringe with servility before any mortal; thou wilt constantly think and act with generosity and freedom. Animated by the spirit of christianity, thou wilt ever be more active, more indefatigable in goodness, wilt never be weary in striving upwards and contending for the prize that awaits the conqueror. Animated by the spirit of christianity, thou wilt already in this mortality think and act like an immortal; and wilt perform a thousand acts of goodness, and enjoy a thousand comforts,
which

which he can neither perform nor enjoy who is unmindful of his immortality, or cannot rejoice therein. O how exalted and divine is the spirit of christianity! that spirit of wisdom and power, of love and felicity! may its animating influence quicken, warm, and penetrate us all! rouze us to the noblest sentiments of ourselves! inspire us with a godlike energy, with the most active zeal in goodness, penetrate and warm us with love towards God and man! How great, how illustrious will then our dignity be, and how much greater and more illustrious will it become, from one period of our lives to another, and from eternity to eternity!

SERMON IV.

The Value of Human Life.

O GOD! the creator and father of our life, how can we be sufficiently grateful to thee, for having called us, who were formerly not, into being and into life! How sufficiently thank thee for having made us capable of a life with consciousness, of a rational, wise, and virtuous life, leading to ever higher perfection and happiness! And with how many bounties, with how many satisfactions, pleasures, and joys, has not thy loving-kindness strewn our path! . What evident traces of thy fatherly providence and love meet we not every where on it! Yes, o God! to whom thou givest life, thou givest also capacities and means to pleasure and delight. Whom thou raisest to the life of a rational creature, to him thou openest, in the knowledge of truth, in the practice of virtue, in communion with thee, in
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the hope of immortality, sources of pleasure and delight, that never fail, from which he may draw eternal joy and felicity. Happy we, that we are, that we live, that we live as men, as christians, as rational creatures and called to immortality, and may be so glad of our life in thee and in the enjoyment of thy bounties! O let us rightly understand and feel the value of our life, and teach us to use and enjoy it conformably to thy gracious, thy beneficent designs. Keep us from embittering it by folly and vice, by violent baleful passions, and misapplying a gift which thou hast bestowed to be a blessing, to our own perdition. Let wisdom and virtue and piety be our guides and conductors on the road of life, and let us all, under their direction, attain to that perfection and happiness to which thou hast appointed us in this and in the future world. Bless to that end the meditations that are now to employ our thoughts. Let them diffuse a clear light upon the nature and destination of our present life, and let that light correct our judgments on it, and regulate the whole of our future conduct. Our father, &c.

PSALM CXIX. 175.

Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee.

THE desire to live is natural to all men. Neither grief, nor pain, nor misfortunes, can totally suppress it; and the generality of mankind would rather begin again their course on earth, however gloomy, however troublesome, however perilous it may have been, and expose themselves again to all its difficulties and dangers, than have them ended by the loss of life. Seldom is the burden of misery so heavy, and the sentiment of it so oppressive; seldom do passion and error blind a man so far as to make him prefer death to life, and non-entity to existence. Very rarely do we find him so pious and so holy as to say from his heart, with the apostle, "I have a desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ, which is far better." Let us admire and adore the wise goodness of our Creator, for having given us so innate an attachment to life, so interwoven and connected it with our nature, and thereby furnished us with such a powerful, such an irresistible incentive to preserve it! But let us dignify this desire to live, by investigating the ground of it, that we may be able to justify it at the bar of substantial reason. To love and to wish for life, without knowing why

or wherefore, is blind animal instinct; but to love it on true and solid principles, and to wish for it in the best designs, will be no discredit to the philosopher and the christian. Thus the Psalmist is desirous of it in our text. "Let my soul live," says he to God, "Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee." Would we do so likewise, my pious hearers, would we so wish for life, that we might truly rejoice in it, and praise God for it, then we must understand the real value of human life. We must neither esteem it as better or as worse, neither as more important nor more insignificant, neither as more happy nor more unhappy than it actually is. In one case our attachment to it would be too strong, in the other not strong enough. In both cases we should more or less mistake its destination, and seldom make so good a use of it as we might.

Well then, let us turn our reflections to-day on the value of human life, that we may discover why, and to what purpose, we should wish to live. For examining this matter properly, we must do two things. First shew, what is implied if we would have human life of value, and indeed of great value to us; and then what gives it this value, or what makes it desirable and estimable to us.

If we would have our life to be of real value to us, and rightly appreciate that value, we must study it, we must seriously reflect upon it, we must consider it on every side and in its whole circuit; we must regard it, not under any false appearance which present,

sent, transitory, pleasant or unpleasant sensations, any fortunate or unfortunate accidents may throw upon it. We must therefore bring into the account its joys as well as its sorrows, its satisfactions as well as its hardships, the days of delight and pleasure, as well as the hours of pain and grief, the good we enjoy or may enjoy, as well as the evil that befalls us. We must consider it, not as the whole of our existence, not as the capacity and measure of our whole felicity; but only as the beginning, as the lowermost step of our rational being, as the preparation to a greater and higher felicity; and in so doing not suffer ourselves to be guided by prevailing prejudices, but by just experiences, observations and principles. Whoever, deceived by certain images, represents this earth to himself as a joyless desert, as a vale of tears and sorrow, as the abode of darkness and misery; whoever, in opposition to universal experience, imagines that its evils preponderate over its satisfactions; whoever, from misanthropy or ill-humour, at one time thinks that all mankind are fools, and at another knaves; forgetful of their origin and their vocation, degrades them into brutes, or considers man only as a comedian that has a part to perform, without any farther consequence or view; and when this part is played, falls back to his primitive nothing; he who confines all his prospects and hopes to the present momentary state: to him indeed this life can have no great value, to him it must be a contemptible object, the preservation of it of no importance,

and the loss of it not to be lamented. But is this a true representation of human life? Has then this earth, which God has adorned with such numberless beauties and pleasures, has it the appearance of a desert? Is weeping and wailing so frequent or so loud upon it, that the voice of joy and gladness is nowhere to be heard? Does not man pass far more hours in health than in sickness; does he not experience far more bright than gloomy days? In the whole amount, does not the sum of his agreeable sensations very far exceed the sum of his uneasy and painful feelings? Amongst the fools, are there not likewise many intelligent men; and amongst the wicked many good? Is not, upon the whole, much more good than evil practised by them? And how can the philosopher, the christian, mistake the dignity, the nobility, the vocation of man, I mean his reason, his capacity of constantly becoming more perfect, his immortality, and the connection between what he now is and does with what he is to be and to do hereafter; and if he does not mistake them, what a value must not this give to his present life!

Farther, should this life be of real, of great value to us, and should we confess and feel that value; then must we actually use it, and employ it in the best and the most rational way. We must live with consciousness, with consideration, upon certain principles and to settled purposes. We must be as active as possible, and be active in the best and the most generally useful manner. To live, to live as men,
does

does not imply simply to exist, not barely to have abilities, but to exert and apply these abilities, to act inwardly and outwardly in receiving and communicating happiness, and to be conscious of it. He who leads merely a vegetative or an animal life; he who sleeps, dreams, trifles, or sports his life away; who lives for the day, without reflection, without consideration; who gives himself up to idleness and sloth, or is industrious without design; exerts his powers without any particular aim; is always busy, and yet does nothing with all his bustle, always seeking happiness, but never finding it; to him indeed this life must be an insignificant matter. And how great is not this last class of men, the class of busy idlers, in the world! men that seem to be for ever employed, and yet in fact do nothing, bring nothing to effect; nothing of any importance to themselves, or to others; nothing that can secure them any lasting satisfaction and joy. Free from any settled employment, from the duties of any particular business, they undertake now one thing and then another, and are soon weary of both; they run from one company to another, from one pleasure to another, ever raising great expectations from them, and ever deceived in their expectations, get nothing from these companies, and acquire no soothing reflections from the enjoyment of those pleasures; can give no account to themselves of this application of their time and of the use of their abilities; and, as often as the sentiment, as often as the clear consciousness of their condition arises

within them, so often feel the emptiness of their hearts, the wearisome monotony, the dissatisfaction, the vanity of their pleasures; are disgusted with life and its joys, and then exclaim, not from wisdom, but from the involuntary sentiment of their folly, in the words of the royal sage, "All, all is vanity!" What great value can there be in life to such men as these! How much more natural is it that it should be a burden, a martyrdom to them! How many have not hence been induced to lay it down as a load they were no longer able to bear! No; for him alone who understands and constantly pursues the true ends of life; who has a determinate occupation; who exerts his powers with consciousness, upon solid principles, and does good with them; who can give himself a satisfactory account of what he does and accomplishes with them; who by every step he takes, by every day he survives, approaches as it were nearer to perfection; who, as a reasonable creature, as a christian, looks not barely to the present, but is continually regarding the future; lives not barely for this present moment of time, but for the unending ages of eternity. The other, the unwise, the fool, the busy idler, wanders about in error, and must necessarily at length be weary of his wanderings: while this, the wise man, the christian, has a fixed mark in view, worthy of his course; never entirely loses sight of it, and the nearer he approaches it, the brighter it appears before him.

Lastly,

Lastly, if this life is to be of great and real value to us, and if we would know and be sensible of its worth, we must effectually enjoy, and enjoy with consciousness, the various goods and satisfactions it affords. We must be at least as sensible and susceptible of the good and agreeable, as of the evil and disastrous it contains. If we pass through the world as though our senses were locked up, or with unfeeling and hardened hearts; a thousand beauties that surround us will be unobserved, a thousand sources of pleasure that invite us to enjoyment will be left unexplored; or if we had rather scrutinize for defects, than look out for perfections: then, indeed, must this life appear to us under a dark and mournful aspect, and have but little value for us. But does any thing lose of its real value, merely because we neither use nor observe its advantages? No; we must open our hearts and our senses to the agreeable impressions which the advantages, the pleasures, the joys of life are capable of making on us; we must see, and feel, and use, and enjoy the beauties, the blessings, that present themselves to us in such diversified forms, and invite us to use them in such various ways; we must not trample, with haughty disdain, on the flowers we meet with in the path of life; we must not ungratefully reject the recreations and comforts of which our heavenly father hath not suffered even the ruggedest way to be totally destitute, and never turn our eyes from those glorious prospects which border on our course. Only thus shall we rightly estimate the value of life,

and learn to reckon it of high importance, and worthy of being coveted.

And what gives it now this great value? What makes this life so estimable and desirable? In this life we may learn much truth and goodness; attempt and execute many good undertakings; enjoy many blessings; and render ourselves able and fit for doing and enjoying still better and greater things in the future world.

Four particulars which must give great value to this life, imperfect as it is, in the eyes of all reflecting persons.

Our life is therefore of great value, it is covetable, first, as we may learn in it so much truth and goodness, and may so much advance our spiritual perfection. All that surrounds us, all the events that befall us, indigence and infirmity, business and pleasures, joys and sorrows, unite themselves in this regard; every thing is either occasion, means, or incitement to improve, to rouse, to exert, to expand, to exercise, to perfectionate our spiritual powers; every thing teaches us to think, to consider, to investigate; every thing is ordained and adapted to make us rational of sensual creatures, of relations to the beasts to make us the kindred of angels. And how many ideas, how much various knowledge, how many perceptions of every kind, may we collect in this life by experience, by observation, by reflection, by instruction, and by conversation! How the sphere of our view and our comprehension is enlarged, as it were, every year! How considerable is the circuit
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and range of human knowledge! Indeed, what we know is extremely little in comparison with what we do not and cannot know; but still of itself is much, much for creatures who are only at the first stage of rational thought; much for scholars, for beginners, who only live and think from yesterday, and who are to live and think for ever. How high has not the human spirit soared in numberless respects! how far has it raised itself above visible things! It has risen even up to the deity, to the first, the eternal cause of all things, and feels itself happy in the adoration of supreme perfection! How much does it not comprehend, survey, and compare, by meditation! And where are the limits that it cannot absolutely transcend! When has man learned so much, and so much exercised himself in thought, that he has not much more still to learn, and may not employ himself much better? Who can reckon up the number of ideas and thoughts that find place in one human mind of ordinary capacity? and when is the sum-total of them so great, that it may not yet be immensely increased? Indeed, we neither can nor should be all scholars, all apply the greatest part of our lives to the investigation of truth, to reflections on invisible things, to the improvement and the augmentation of our knowledge. But we may all learn much, actually learn much; and all advance by many considerable strides on the way of knowledge and spiritual perfection. We may all learn to think, to think with consciousness, to think rationally:
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and if we be wise men, if we be christians, we learn to controul sensuality, and to govern ourselves; we learn to be virtuous, to be pious, to act upon sound principles, from pure and generous motives; we learn to know God, to love him, to converse, and to have communication with him; and the longer we live, and thus employ our lives, so much the better do we learn all this, so much the apter are we in all these matters, so much the easier, and with so much the better effect, can we apply our mental powers to them; so much the more do we heap up treasures of useful knowledge and juster perceptions; so much the nearer do we approach our perfection. Something may be added to our improvements every year, every day, every hour, and it is purely our own fault when this is not the case. Who would not then in this view cry out, with the Psalmist, "Lord, let my soul live, and it shall praise thee!" that it may ever advance in the knowledge of truth, in the knowledge of thee who art the fountain of all truth; that it may be ever advancing, ever be thinking more justly, and ever be learning to employ all its powers in a better and worthier manner?

This life is, farther, of great value: it is highly desirable, as in it we may attempt and execute much good. And, in fact, my dear brethren, how much may we not do for ourselves and for others, for the large and the little society to which we belong! How far, either mediately or immediately, operate about us! What a manifold influence, and of what
immense

immense extent, may we have on the happiness of our brethren! And to this purpose, we need neither be sovereigns, nor ministers of state, nor heroes, nor inventors of new discoveries, nor leaders and teachers of the people; in every condition, in every station, in every walk of life, in every lawful calling, we may daily and hourly effect some good. We have only to fulfil our duties, to discharge them continually in the best manner, only ever to walk the way of christian integrity and virtue, and in every circumstance to do what the love of God and man invites us to; so shall we spread goodness in general all around us, disturbing none, and injuring none, but rejoicing thousands, and being useful to thousands more. What a beneficent influence have not order, application, industry, diligence, fidelity, and conscientiousness in affairs, upon all with whom we have to do, who stand in a near or a remote connection with us! What a genial light, what a clear lustre does every good, every generous example, throw around it! and how fruitful is it not frequently in as good, as generous actions! How much may we not do by words and by works, by our deportment among the members of our family, our acquaintance, our friends, and our fellow-citizens, and again by them among others, and probably among people utterly unknown to us, and far distant from us! Who can number up all the blessed consequences often produced by a prudent piece of advice, a word well spoken with feeling and energy, a truly

truly christian act, an admonition seasonably introduced, some magnanimous sacrifice, some public-spirited undertaking — and which it will produce in future? And when are we wanting in an opportunity either of comforting some mourner, of cheering some wretched being, of assisting some indigent, or relieving some poor and needy person? When is there a scarcity of opportunities for instructing the ignorant, for correcting and reforming the wicked, for confirming and delighting the good, for encouraging and supporting public establishments for the common good, and by all these means of providing for our own? How few days, how few hours of our lives, without our own fault, pass quite destitute of occasions, quite void of incitements to do some kind of good, to further some beneficent designs, or to bring them to effect about us! May not therefore every day, every hour, we pass as wise men, as christians, increase the sum of the good we do, and the sum of human happiness promoted by our means? And how great must not this sum be in the course of a whole life spent according to the precepts of christian wisdom and virtue! What think ye, my pious hearers, is a life, that may be so rich in good consequences and effects, without any worth? must it not be of the highest value? may not a man say, upon the soundest principles, “Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee,” that it may glorify thee by righteousness and beneficence, and like thee diffuse more joy and felicity around it?

This

This life has, thirdly, a great value, it is highly desirable; as we may enjoy so much good in it. How manifold, how rich, how inexhaustible, are not the sources of pleasure, delight, and joy, which God has prepared and opened for us, in nature, in religion, in domestic, in civil and human society! Of what various and inexhaustible impressions and feelings are we not rendered capable by our senses, our understanding, and our heart! Certainly, if we were less inattentive, less cold and insensible, than we but too frequently are, we should be astonished at the amount of the blessings we daily and hourly enjoy; we should acknowledge and feel at our hearts, the overbalance, the great and manifest overbalance of good to evil in life; and, struck with admiration and gratitude, should exclaim, Lord! the whole earth, and our whole lives, are full of thy goodness! —What agreeable sensations of our abilities and our health have we not had, during the greatest part of our lives! What pleasure is there not connected with eating and drinking, with waking and sleeping, with employment and rest, with the use of our organs of sense, and the application of our mental powers! What pleasures do not silence, and the meditations of retirement, afford us, and what pleasures the social converse and the communication of our thoughts and sentiments to others! What joys belong not to the father and the mother of a family in the comforts of their dwelling, in the possession of domestic felicity; what joys to the friend in the heart

heart and in the company of his friend! And with what still purer, still higher joys, is not the man, the christian, blessed in the pious elevation of his heart to God, in the public and private adoration of him, in communion with the spirit of supreme perfection! What satisfaction, what agreeable, what delightful sensations do not follow upon every labour successfully ended, every vanquished difficulty, every surmounted sorrow, every good action, every victory over ourselves, every advance to perfection, every view of our future felicity! — And how much alleviation of toil, how much refreshment and comfort in afflictions, how many helps in distress, how many means of escape, or how much courage and strength in danger, how much hope even in misery, does not a wise and kind providence cause us to find within and without us; and how much light does not all this shed even on the gloomier and less happy periods of our lives! Nay, what day, what hour of our lives, that does not some way or other testify of the kindness of our author and preserver, that does not bring with it some kind of satisfaction or pleasure or comfort to the wise man and the christian? And if some gloomy hours, some dismal days succeed, how are they lost among the far, far greater number of more happy, more delightful days and hours! But how much value must not such a life be of, that is so rich in satisfactions and joys, to every man of reflection and sentiment! What a noble present must not the preservation and continuance of it be in his

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fight!

fight! And how much reason has he not to pray to God in the words of the Psalmist, "Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee!" that it may enjoy thy bounty, and praise thee for it with a joyful heart!

But that which gives the greatest weight to these arguments for highly prizing human life, what renders it most desirable, is, that during the course of it we may fit and capacitate ourselves for better and greater objects in the world to come. Without this prospect, our knowledge and spiritual perfection would have but little value, our virtue but little incitement and comfort, our joy but little satisfaction, and still less continuance. Chiefly by the connection of the present with the future, by the influence this has upon that, all we now are and do and enjoy, is of real importance, and brings unending consequences after it. At present we can do nothing for becoming wiser, better, and more pious, which does not prepare and smooth the way for us to a higher degree of perfection and happiness in the future world. We can now perform no good deed that does not draw after it everlasting satisfaction. We now enjoy no innocent, generous delight, which does not render us capable of still greater delights, and secure them to us. We are now working and labouring for eternity. Now even exertion and toil may become pleasure, sorrows become joys, and losses become gains. Here we are to learn; there put what we have learnt to the best use: here strengthen our abilities by exercise; there apply them to more important

portant matters : here sow good seed ; there reap of it happiness and glory : here make ourselves fit for converse with superior spirits ; there actually enjoy their converse : here resemble Jesus, our chieftain and lord, in virtuous and pious sentiments ; there in glory and bliss : here approach nearer to the deity ; there find the completion of all our aspirations in more intimate communion with him. The longer then we live here, the more good we imagine and perform and promote and enjoy ; the greater perfection and felicity await us hereafter. The purer and richer our sowing here, the richer and more glorious will be our harvest hereafter. Thus may every day and every hour of this life lay for us the foundation of unfading honours, of ever blooming joys. And shall such a life, a life attended by consequences so great and continuing in eternity, shall such a life be of no great value in our eyes ? shall it not inspire us with the wish of the Psalmist : “ Let my soul live, o God, and it shall praise thee ! ” that it may here be expert in thy praise, and be able more worthily to praise thee hereafter !

Yes, my pious hearers, human life is incontestably of great and real value : the desire of its preservation and continuance is not unworthy either of the philosopher or the christian. It is the school of wisdom, the school of virtue, the first step to our perfection, a source of numberless pleasures and joys, the preparatory station to a more exalted, to an everlasting life. Rejoice then in it, rejoice in your life ; thank
God

God daily for this gift of his bounty ; acknowledge and feel its value and its destination ; support, preserve it carefully ; use it worthily ; pursue its affairs with pleasure and fidelity ; enjoy its satisfactions and delights with a grateful and chearful heart ; bear its hardships and afflictions without murmuring ; exercise your gifts and powers ; strive constantly to learn more useful knowledge, constantly to do more good, to enjoy more pure and more generous satisfactions, constantly to become wiser and better and more generally useful ; be never weary in well-doing, and in promoting the happiness of your fellow-creatures, since you may expect to reap in due time without ceasing ; work, like our great leader and precursor Jesus, while it is day, that the night may not come upon you before your task be finished ; carefully redeem the time, and mark as much as possible every day of your lives with some good action ; regard and treat all things according to their reference to the future, and let the sublime, the joyful sentiment of a better and an everlasting life be constantly present to your mind.

SERMON V.

The Value of Health.

O GOD! who, among the innumerable multitudes of creatures which thy almighty goodness called to be, hast also given us existence, praised be thy sovereign bounty for all the gifts and powers thou hast bestowed upon us, for all the pleasures and joys of which thou hast made us capable, for all the connections in which thou hast placed us towards visible and invisible objects, towards the material and the spiritual world! Though we have much in common with the beasts of the field, yet are we also related to the angels; we are thine offspring. Yes; our body as well as our soul plainly testify of thine infinite intelligence, and the more than fatherly kindness with which thou dost embrace and bless thy creatures. And the place that thou hast assigned us in thy dominion, how adequate to our nature and destination!

destination! how adapted to unfold and to exercise our capacities and powers, to form us into intelligent, wise, and virtuous men, and thereby to prepare us for a superior life! Lord, we humbly adore thee, as our creator and father, rejoicing that we are, and that we are what thy wise goodness commanded us to be. Let us then, O gracious God, continually rejoice in our existence and our nature, and grant that we may constantly seek our perfection and happiness in the way wherein creatures as we are should seek and attain them. Teach us to use our body and our mind, which are both thy property, according to thy will; to treat them both as a possession committed to our trust by thee, and so to nurture both, as becomes men, whom thou hast indeed placed far above the irrational animals, yet not elevated to the rank of pure spirits independent on terrestrial wants. To the furtherance of these views, bless our reflections on the doctrines about to be delivered. Let us clearly perceive the value of the benefits which thou vouchsafest to us by the preservation of our health and our abilities, and thus be incited to the best employment of them. We implore it of thee as the votaries of thy son Jesus, and address thee farther in his holy name: Our father, &c.

EPHES. V. 29.

No man ever yet hated his own flesh ; but nourisheth
and cherisheth it, &c.

IT seems superfluous to admonish mankind of the great value of health, and to incite them by many arguments to fulfill the duties incumbent upon them in this respect. Who does not readily shun every thing that is called sorrow and pain? Who does not hold his health in high estimation? Who is not desirous of maintaining and preserving it unimpaired even to extreme old age? Who is apt purposely to do any thing that he is certain will be prejudicial to him in this regard? "No man," says the apostle, "ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it." All this, my pious hearers, generally speaking, is very true. But probably we do not consider the matter sufficiently as a duty. Perhaps we set not a sufficient value upon health, or not upon right principles. Perhaps we do not plainly perceive how serviceable christianity may be likewise in this respect to its true confessors. And from all these causes we certainly fall into many errors, which, if we had a plainer and juster conception of the matter, we should certainly avoid. Well then, permit me now to submit a few suggestions to your consideration

sideration hereupon. And to this end, let us first examine into the value of health; then consider the duties we have to fulfil in that respect; and, lastly, inquire how much adapted the christian doctrine is to assist us in the performance of these duties, and to promote our felicity even in that respect.

Health is, doubtless, of great value to us. It is the first and principal of all the outward blessings we possess; the ground and means of the chearful enjoyment and best use of all the rest. It far excels riches, authority, and honour, and every splendid pre-eminence; which, by the loss or decay of this, lose almost the whole of their value. This is a matter which neither our own experience, nor that of others, will allow us to doubt of. Would you sensibly feel this truth? you have only to recollect the hours, the days, you have probably past in sickness and pain; the hours and the days in which you have been dispirited, enervated, and utterly unfit for all useful occupations, for all arbitrary motion, for the enjoyment of the pleasures and satisfactions of life; sighing on a gloomy couch, and with every returning day, with every restless and anxious night, saw nothing before you but fresh pains and sufferings, or the total dissolution of your body: and then compare with them the activity and chearfulness that animate you now that you are in health; the delightful sentiment you have of your powers; the ease and agility with which you move and use your body and all its members; the vivacity with which

you undertake and transact your business; the relish with which you can enjoy the pleasures of life; the careless tranquillity with which at night you throw yourself into the arms of sleep, and the chearful serenity with which you behold the rising day. — Or, if you have been so happy as to have had no personal experience of pain and sickness, then visit your friends and acquaintance, who groan under the burden of such afflictions, or lead a life of infirmity and languor, and for a moment put yourself in their place, and set their condition against yours: and, unless you are totally void of sensibility, a genial consciousness of the high worth of health will flow through your heart, accompanied by the sincerest gratitude towards God; you will look upon it as the richest blessing of life, and acknowledge it to be the comfort, without which all others have hardly any value.

And indeed, without health, what are all the beauties, all the bounties, all the delights, and all the joys of nature and society? While all nature appears in festal splendor to the man in health; while the unclouded sky, and the variegated earth, enamelled by a thousand flowers, expand his soul; while he, with a merry heart, unites in the jubinations of all living creatures rejoicing in existence; the man labouring under sickness and infirmity disregards all this as nothing, or prizes it at a slender rate. Every thing appears to him in a mournful garb; all nature seems clad in sorrow, and the world about him empty
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and dead; the earth without form, and void, and darkness upon the face of creation: and though he cannot hearken to the sweet sounds of joy, yet he hears them but too often with inward sadness, and feels the irksomeness of his life and his own deficiency of joy but so much the deeper. While the man in health is exerting his faculties and powers to the pleasure and advantage of society, and bringing his designs to effect, thereby magnifying the value of them in his own eyes; while he is enjoying the most diversified pleasures of esteem and love, of friendship, of conversation; is finding on all sides entertainment to his mind, food for his spirit, and comfort to his heart; and, in all these respects, is able to give as much as he receives: all this time the sick, the infirm, confined to his close apartment, to his dismal couch, to a small circle of people, who probably attend him more out of obligation and necessity than from affection, is perhaps a burden to himself and to others; and how easily may he not sink under the pressure of uneasiness and trouble, if he have not learnt to find sources in himself of satisfaction and joy! — No; without health, there is no real enjoyment of life, no inward cheerful sentiment of the faculties of either mind or body, no free and confident exertion of these faculties; but, instead, a tormenting sensation of infirmities and pains, recollections of past, and anxious apprehensions of future sufferings, the dreadful sentiment of declining faculties, and horror at the constant threats, the constant approach

of their total decay. And who can sensibly represent to himself this doleful condition to which mankind is doomed, without feeling the value of its contrast, the value of health?

Health has farther a great value, as a means to higher purposes, as it may every way promote our intrinsic excellence, and our usefulness in the world. What can we not do, if we be but in health! How we are encouraged and animated to all things! For what labours and what undertakings do we think we have not sufficient strength! What difficulties or obstacles do we allow to deter us from them? How much easier is reflection and every application and use of our mental faculties! How much happier do all our enterprises proceed! What exertion, what intrepidity, what perseverance, are we not capable of with it! How little do we heed danger! How many adverse events does it not enable us to bear, without being much dismayed at them! How capable are we not therefore of performing all, even the harder duties of our station, with cheerfulness and pleasure, and of labouring at our own felicity, as well as that of our brethren, with activity and success! How ready to diffuse happiness and joy, of various kinds, on all around us!

How very different is not the case in general with such as are in the opposite condition! How various, how great is not the detriment which infirmities and the loss of health draw after them to ourselves, and to others, in regard to morality, to the performance
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of the duty of general utility! The want of health most commonly disturbs and debilitates our mind; and while it threatens the ruin of the former, it likewise threatens this with lethargy, inactivity, and lifelessness: either totally incapacitating us for deep and continued reflection, or rendering it extremely difficult; darkening and confusing our former conceptions and ideas, and laying frightful difficulties in the way of every attempt to exert our faculties. Frequently all light and truth and certainty vanish from before our eyes; darkness and doubt obnubilate our weakened mind, and our deadened heart can feel no influence of reviving hope, and is shut up against every sentiment of the higher and nobler kinds. How oft and how easily are we reduced by the want of health to a fullen and repining temper, to impatient murmurings, to discontentedness with our condition, and the methods of providence! And how easily may all this dispirit us in the pursuit of a superior excellence! how sadly impede us from becoming so wise and so good as we otherwise might!

I am not ignorant that sufferings and afflictions of every kind, when rightly estimated and properly applied, may contribute much to our spiritual perfection, that they are adapted to render us wiser and better. But we need not be afraid, that we shall be deprived of the advantages of afflictions, though we perfectly understand the full value of health, and fulfill our duties in the preservation of it never so conscientiously. The inconstancy of all worldly things, the
versatility

of fortune, the concern we take in the welfare of others, so many unsuccessful labours, disappointed expectations, and insurmountable difficulties, will always furnish us with opportunities enough for exercising the wisdom and virtues of christianity. — And then certainly the fruit produced by a strong and healthy tree on its natural soil, will be sounder, riper, and of a finer flavour, than that which is forced by artificial heat to an unnatural maturity.

This is not all. Still more various and more grievous is the injury occasioned by the loss of health to ourselves and to others, when we ourselves are guilty of it: and this we must not omit to notice if we would see and judge the matter on its moral side, as in that respect it is of the utmost importance. If we hurt or ruin our health, we thereby become not only a burden to ourselves, but are likewise troublesome to those who are connected with us, or dependent on us. We spread uneasiness, anxiety, sorrow, and distress on all about us, in a narrower or a larger circle, according to our situation in life. We wound and afflict some, and drive others to impatience, to anger, and to criminal violation of their duties. — Nay, more, we thereby injure the whole community in which we live. We rob it of our services, or add to their burdens who had already enough to bear. We deprive ourselves of the means and the opportunities of being useful to others, or of promoting their advantage in a higher degree. We, perhaps, stop short in the fairest and most laudable course,

course, and leave our best works and undertakings unfinished. And what sources of satisfaction and pleasure for future times, and even for eternity, do we not thus exclude ourselves from!

By impairing and ruining our health, we not unfrequently do an irreparable injury to such as have the justest title to our entire affection, as being connected with us in the closest ties. We cut them off from the advice, the protection, the assistance, the provision, they have the strictest right to expect from us, and which they cannot so confidently hope to receive from any other. We thereby plunge them, perhaps, into the utmost indigence and distress, bring them to the brink of ruin, and leave them a prey to poverty, seduction, and misery. Let parents particularly reflect on this; and when they are tempted to extravagance, intemperance, and voluptuousness, to violent passions, or to any thing that may be hurtful to their health, let them cast one serious compassionate look on their uneducated, helpless infants, or children who stand still more in need of their advice and care; or on the dear partner of their life; and it should bring them back to the discharge of their duties, and make it again their delight!

Nay, it happens not unfrequently, that he who impairs or destroys his health by irregular living, renders himself guilty of a crime against his whole posterity, and diffuses misery and death even upon those who open their eyes to the light of the world not till long after he is no more. Children produced from
infirm,

infirm, unhealthy parents, commonly become parents to children still more unhealthy and infirm, and these have again a like posterity, till the race, sinking deeper and deeper under the burden of its various diseases and infirmities, at length dies out and is extinct.

So variously and so widely extend the injuries that proceed from the impairing and the ruining of our health to ourselves and others, that our account must be heavy when we have rendered ourselves guilty of it.

And now, my pious hearers, should any man seek his honour and renown in such a practice? should he presume to call it true courage or strength of mind, to despise all care of his health, or not to be sparing of it; to trust to his youth or his strength, and attack it on purpose by irregularity and riot, and slight the admonitions of prudence? No: it is rashness; it is folly, unjustifiable folly, for a man resolutely to endanger the loss of so invaluable, so indispensable a blessing of life, and to occasion such manifold, and frequently such irreparable injuries to himself and others. Consider this, all you that are still in the bloom of life, and in the full possession of your vigour. Reflect upon it not barely as to the present, but also to the future. Practise not with your health and strength, as if they could never be weakened or worn out. Lavish them not away in the service of vice, or a loose and irregular conduct. Forget not, that, in advanced years, many occupations

tions and duties, many hardships and sufferings, await you, which will then fall heavy or gently upon you, as you have managed your early years and your youthful vigour.

And let no man say, when he transgresses the bounds of moderation in eating and drinking, in the indulgence of anger or any other passion, "That is my business; if I do an injury I do it to myself alone; it is I that must suffer and do penance for my folly." Certainly thou wilt, whoever thou art that thinkest and speakest thus; thou wilt suffer and do penance for it, and probably much more, and much longer than thou dost at present imagine; and thou wilt suffer what thou hast deserved. But thou canst not suffer alone, others must suffer with thee; and they innocently suffer. Is this no injustice? no crime? does this deserve no punishment? Or how? Can the father of a family, can the mother of a family, can the person who fills a public office in the state or in the church, can one whom God has endowed with particular gifts and accomplishments, can any one who stands in connection with others, weaken and ruin his health, lose his faculties by the abuse of them, render himself unfit for his business and the duties of his calling, without injuring at the same time many others, directly or indirectly, at present, or in the sequel, in body or in mind, without diminishing the quantity of abilities, and the good arising from them to the common welfare?

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Can we possibly reflect upon all this, and entertain the smallest doubt that health is of very great value; that the abuse and wilful neglect of it are highly criminal, and that it is by no means indifferent how we behave in regard of it?—And how then must we conduct ourselves in this regard? What are the duties we have here to observe?

We must, above all things, esteem health as a gift of the divine bounty, granted us for important purposes, and intimately connected with our perfection and happiness. And here we are to avoid certain false conceptions of the little value and low destination of the human body; conceptions by which it is not unfrequently represented as the prison, as the dungeon of the soul, the greatest impediment to its perfection. All such representations are the offspring of a gloomy and repining disposition, or of a heated and fanatical imagination, which misleads the man to pretend to be more than he is or can be, and, dissatisfied with the rank assigned him by his maker, would exalt himself into a totally different class of beings. Hence it is, that sensual desires and pleasures are too often confounded with sinful desires and pleasures; and by condemning the former as well as the latter, the body, as the cause and the instrument of them, is considered as something vile and detrimental to our perfection. No, my pious hearers, the body, at least in our present state, belongs as essentially to the nature of man, as the soul; and the connection of both, makes man to be what he

he is. As the body, without the soul, would not be a man, but a machine or an inanimate organized substance; so the soul, without the body, would not be a man, but a spirit or rather a spiritual being, whose thinking faculty could probably never be unfolded and brought forth into action without this connection. Thus the christian doctrine, that heavenly wisdom, is completely consistent with this idea. It always considers man as man, and treats him as man, as a compound being, and not as some spirit, confined during a series of years, for its punishment, to this earthly shell. It enjoins us indeed to govern our body and our sensual desires, but not to despise the former, or exterminate the latter. It gives us to expect, after this life, a new, but a more perfect and more durable cloathing or dwelling than the present; and consoles us, not so much with the hope of being soon delivered from this body, as by the assurance that we shall receive it again at the resurrection of the dead, or that from the germ lying concealed in it, a new one, more glorious and incorruptible shall expand around us. — Neither reason nor scripture, therefore, command us to contemn our body and its welfare; but we are taught by both to prize and to rejoice in the health and strength of it as real important benefits to man, as an estimable present of divine munificence.

But, if it be so great a privilege, so great a present, then is it further our duty, on one hand, to avoid all things that may deprive us of it, or disturb us in
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the possession or enjoyment of it ; and, on the other, to neglect nothing that may maintain or confirm it. On this head you do not certainly expect me to give particular prescriptions. Every person must in this respect pay attention to himself ; observe the noxious or salutary effects, which outward things, as well as inward alterations in the temper of his mind, have upon his body and his health ; compare and contrast together his bodily frame, his faculties, his affairs, his circumstances ; and then conduct himself by the judgements arising from repeated and careful observations and experiences. We must however,—and this is what, as a teacher of religion, I ought to recommend to you, and can with the utmost confidence recommend,—we must cultivate temperance, peace of mind, and content ; we must follow a busy, a laborious, and innocent life, free from all anxious and unchristian cares : we must judge of the good or bad condition of things, of their utility or their hurtfulness, not barely from their present effects, but from their future consequences, what, sooner or later, they may, and probably will produce ; we must lay it down as an inviolable law, never, for the sake of a short present pleasure, to run the hazard of impairing our health, or of laying the foundation of longer sufferings in future, or of continued infirmity ; so neither must we ever shun any matter merely because it is at present disagreeable and difficult, or lays some restraint upon us : we must, in fine, never forget that our powers are circumscribed, that we
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cannot exhaust them without detriment and danger, that we must deal œconomically with them, and that we shall always be able to execute more by them, if we use them for a considerable series of years with prudent moderation, than if, by a too severe and uninterrupted exertion of them, we should shortly render them utterly unserviceable.

Again, we must not, and this is a third duty we have to observe in this respect,—we must not pamper our body, not leave our powers to stagnate for fear of exhausting them; never decline any duty for fear of hurting our health; and, if we do but lead a temperate and regular life, we need not frequently, not anxiously dwell on all the possible consequences of every, even the smallest and most indifferent actions of life, or on every scarcely perceptible alteration in our body. Least of all must we be swayed by this timidity, or this anxiety, in our moral conduct, in what we owe to God and to our neighbour. No; our duty must be the weightiest of all weighty concerns. This we must punctually endeavour to discharge, as often as it comes in our way and we have ability for it, even though the consequences of it, in regard to our health, should not always be the best. These consequences we must resignedly leave to God, who has laid these duties on us, and has given us power and opportunity to fulfil them, and on whose good will it entirely depends, how long or how short, and in what measure we may promote his views in the world, and the benefit of our fellow-

creatures. Estimable as health and life may be, yet both of them lose their value, when they are purchased by an intentional violation of duty, by a conduct at variance with the will of God, and, therefore, at the expence of his approbation and a quiet conscience, or are to be preserved by becoming an inactive, useless, or even a noxious member of society. Even in this respect may it be said, "Whosoever will save his life," by the sacrifice of his conscience and his duty, "shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake," for the sake of integrity and virtue, "shall find it."

This is the rational, the christian concern for our health; a concern that is adequate to the great value of it. If we would fulfil our duty in this respect, we must take the christian doctrine to our assistance. It is in an extraordinary manner adapted to facilitate our performance of it, and to promote our happiness also in this regard. A few short observations will set the matter beyond a doubt.

The great command of the christian doctrine is love, love towards God and man. On this it grounds all our duties; on this it builds our whole felicity. If then we faithfully apply ourselves to this injunction; if we are sincerely animated by love to God and all mankind: the health of our body must necessarily gain greatly by it. For, as envy, hatred, anger, malice, and revenge, are not only ruinous to our spirit, but destructive to our body; so are love, kindness, gentleness, peaceableness and friendship, beneficial

cial and cheering to them both. As any base and violent passion, like a sharp poison, excites disorder and disturbance in the human frame, by setting not only the thoughts, but likewise the blood and vital spirits in the most hurtful commotion, and keeping them, as it were, in a constant fermentation: so, on the contrary, the gentle and humane dispositions of benevolence and love, produce peace and tranquillity, regularity and harmony in the body as well as the soul; allow no inordinate emotion to swell into violence, but diffuse life and joy, like a precious ointment, over all the human creature. — And love towards God, my dear brethren, how beneficial, how salutary must it likewise be in this respect! If we meditate upon him with a steady complacency, with delight and filial confidence; if we constantly rejoice in his bounty, and, in all the good we have and do and enjoy, are ever perceiving and feeling fresh testimonies of his fatherly providence; if we revere his hand in all that happens, as the hand of the wise and gracious parent of the universe; if we never forget that we live under his guardianship and inspection; if we expect of him only good, and what we are convinced must be the best for us; — and he who loves God does all this; — how much courage, how much life and joy must it not infuse into our frame! From how many corroding cares, from how many anxious troubles, must not this secure us! How many kinds of fear and terror must this remove from us! How very much must it alleviate the afflictions

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and troubles of life! — And who does not perceive what a salutary influence all this must have on the preservation of our faculties, the cheerfulness and the health of mankind?

Christian love, moreover, inculcates temperance and moderation. Not only temperance in regard to eating and drinking, and all other kinds of sensual pleasure; but moderation also in regard of our desires and endeavours after riches and honour, after consequence and authority, and other external advantages. It teaches us not to look upon these things as our supreme felicity, not as necessary and indispensable parts of our happiness, not as the ultimate aim of our endeavours: and if we wish for them and seek them, yet our desires should never become passions, nor our endeavours be accompanied by restless anxiety. To whom is it not apparent, how advantageous such a moderation must be to man in regard to his health? If the man, who, with a passionate ardour, strives after riches and honours, or other transitory goods, soon exhausts his strength; if he lose his temper on meeting with any disappointment, any unexpected obstacle, any triumph of his adversary or competitor, puts his blood in a feverish heat, or resigns himself to a dark and gloomy despondency, which, like a subtle poison, undermines his health: yet he who cultivates christian moderation is unmoved; requires nothing impossible in his circumstances and his situation; is not surpris'd at the opposition he meets with to his endeavours; resigns

the issue of them to God and to his wife decrees ; and having learnt with the apostle, in the school of Jesus, how to suffer want, and how to abound, and withal to be content, the repose of his mind may indeed at times be ruffled, but never entirely destroyed ; at times he may feel stronger, inordinate emotions and sensations, but they will never swell into ungovernable and destructive passions.—And how many dangers does he not thus avoid, in regard to his health and his life !

The christian doctrine excites its followers to cheerfulness, and supplies them with the best motives thereto. It frees them from all needless cares, and inspires them with a resolute courage. It teaches them to be satisfied with God, with themselves, with the world, with the state which God has assigned them ; it accustoms them to fix their attention more upon the good than upon the evil that is in the world and amongst mankind, and to enjoy all the good they can whenever and wherever and with whomsoever they find it ; and this keeps their intellect clear, and opens to them, on all sides, sources of sensations as innocent and virtuous as they are full of joy. Now, ask the physician how much such a state of mind and temper contributes to the maintenance or restoration of health and strength. He will tell you, that in most cases, what his whole art has not been able to effect in many years, serenity of mind and cheerfulness of temper has brought to pass in a few months or fewer days.

The christian doctrine gives us, in short, hopes not less great than certain in regard to futurity. It promises us the assistance and protection of the Almighty in whatever can befall us. It opens to us the fairest prospects in a better, an everduring life after death; therefore deprives this enemy of his terrors, and alleviates to us every misfortune and disaster by the expectation of a felicity, which will satisfy all our desires, and more than make up for all wants and sufferings; and no disposition of the soul, according to the best judges of human nature, is so adapted to the support of our faculties and health, as hope, which is not counteracted or diminished by any anxious doubts, as chearful prospects into futurity, on which the man firmly relies.

Conclude from all this, how comfortable the christian doctrine is. Perhaps you have seldom reflected on the vast influence it may have on your bodily health. And yet nothing is more certain. Nay, it renders the whole man, I mean the man whose spirit is animated and governed by it, it renders him thoroughly happy in body and soul, both in the present and the future world. Oh, let this confirm and strengthen you in esteem and love for that divine doctrine to which you are indebted for it. Make yourselves more and more acquainted with its maxims, which exalt the soul, comfort the heart, and perfect the entire man; follow its precepts, which all tend to your happiness, more firmly and faithfully. Let the love of God and man abide and predominate
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in you ; exercife yourselves in christian moderation ; endeavour to kindle and improve in you, by a right way of thinking, by an innocent and virtuous life, a fettled and chearful confidence ; fix your hopes ever more strongly on a blessed immortality, and learn to enjoy your future happinefs by anticipation : fo will you affuredly promote the health and strength of your body, as well as the health and strength of your foul, remove a thoufand dangers and calamities from you, be lefs fenfible to the unavoidable inconveniences and troubles of life, much more fully enjoy its fatisfactions and pleasures, and in all refpects be happy.

SERMON VI.

The Value of Riches.

O GOD! creator and preserver of all things, from thee proceeds all good, and all that proceeds from thee is good — has the advancement of our perfection and happiness in view! To this end thou dispensest riches and poverty, abundance and want in very various and manifold proportions. Some of thy children thou settest as guardians and monitors over the others; to some thou committest much, to others little of thy goods; that all may mutually give and mutually receive, each according to the talent thou hast imparted to him; that thereby the whole of thy large household upon earth may be as well educated and as happy, as it at present can be. We humbly adore thy wise bounty, o merciful Father, and desire to revere thee, with entire resignation and content, even when we cannot fully comprehend

comprehend thy ordinances and dispensations. Only teach us, we heartily implore thee, only teach us to employ for the best what thou thinkest fit to entrust us with, be it little or much, to look constantly in the use of it to thee and to thy will, and never to forget that we are not proprietors but stewards of thy bounties. Let us to that end thoroughly study the value and the appointment of terrestrial things and constantly hold them for what they are, and what they particularly should be to us, that we may never more highly prize them, never be more strongly attached to them, never more vehemently seek them, than they deserve. To the furtherance of these designs, bless the observations we now intend to deliver. Let us clearly and with conviction discern the truth, and let it become in us a source of good dispositions and actions. We offer up our petitions to thee in this behalf in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and farther call upon thee, as he vouchsafed to teach us: Our father, &c.

LUKE xii. 15.

A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

THE judgements passed on the value of riches have been in all times and are still very various; as different as the perceptions, the dispositions, the circumstances, the wants, and the views of men. With one man riches are every thing; with another nothing: to the former they are the most essential, the most excellent good; to the latter a contemptible spurious good: to those the means of happiness — nay, happiness itself; to these the way to perdition, the source of cares and misery. Some maintain the most strenuous endeavour after riches to be a worthy and an honourable employment; others think they should lessen and degrade themselves by the pursuit of them. The former have the votes of the greatest part of mankind in their favour; while the latter have, indeed, all the moralists on their side, but very few of the other descriptions of men. They are both in the wrong. The one sort attribute too much to riches; and the other ascribe to them too little value. The one turns what only is and can be a means to happiness, into happiness itself; and the other confounds riches with avarice, or with their abuse.

abuse. Mankind, in judging of the real value of riches, have generally beheld, and they still occasionally behold, riches merely in the view of possession and not in the use of them; and, then the severe moralist who totally rejects them, is undoubtedly more in the right than his opponent.

In our days the value of riches, in this respect, namely, in regard to possession and use, is otherwise and generally better estimated, than it was on the whole, twenty, or, perhaps, ten years ago*. It happens now, comparatively, but seldom, that riches are amassed merely for the sake of amassing, that men strive to be rich, only that they may be rich, accumulate, merely that they may possess much. At present all are inclined to enjoy, all make use of their property or their wealth; and in all probability, if the present taste continues, some thirty or forty years hence, very few immensely rich persons will be seen among us. At any rate, the present is the smaller error of the two. Enjoyment is better than possession. A moderate property that a man makes use of, is better than a greater unemployed. But every kind of enjoyment and use is not equally innocent; every one is not worthy; only one is the right. — And then likewise this judgement of the value of riches, however just it may be, is not therefore complete. We must consider them, not only in regard to possession and enjoyment, but also to their acqui-

* This sermon was preached about the year 1780.

sition; not barely attend to their influence on our outward circumstances, but likewise to their influence on our natural and moral perfection; and then pass judgement on them, not merely according to what they are in respect to us, but in respect to others and to the community at large. And this we will now endeavour to do. We will first accurately examine and ascertain the value of riches; and then deduce some consequences from it.

Our Saviour gives us in the text the true principle for ascertaining the value of riches. "A man's life consisteth not," says he, "in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." That is, No one will be happy merely because he is rich. And yet, such numbers of persons, perhaps the generality of mankind, think that nothing, absolutely nothing but riches is wanting to make them happy? But Jesus knew mankind and their wants much better than they commonly do themselves. To be happy, it is necessary that we should have a sound and right understanding, a well-regulated, pious, contented heart; and he that possesses such a mind and such a heart, is happy, be he poor, or be he rich; and he to whom these are wanting, can never be happy, even though he abound in all manner of plenty. We will not, however, confine ourselves at present merely to this declaration, however true and important it be, but endeavour to form perspicuous ideas of the nature and condition of the whole matter.

Riches,

Riches, considered in and of themselves, without regard to their use, have no value whatever. This is clear to every reflecting person. What would it avail me, who at the utmost can only hope to live seventy or eighty years in the world, if I could heap together and lay up in safe custody so great a stock of provisions, of raiment of every kind, of the implements of conveniency and pleasure, as in the space of two or more centuries I could neither consume, nor use, nor enjoy? Suppose now money, gold and silver, in the stead of those provisions, those cloaths, and those instruments of conveniency and pleasure; will they have acquired a greater value because I have changed them into metal? Is this metal any thing but the mark or token of my pretensions on so much provision, cloaths, and the implements of conveniency or pleasure? And is not the token as insignificant to me as the materials themselves, if I do not or cannot use them? Should I not be in the same situation as a man who would have daily an hundred dishes placed before him at table, all prepared and kept for him alone, and yet could only dine on one, and that a little one? or in the situation of a man who possessed a hundred convenient and spacious mansions of his own property, and yet could only dwell in one?—This then is a plain proof, that riches, without regard to the use of them, are nothing; deserve not the smallest estimation, nor are worth the least endeavours to obtain. And on this side must the generality of moralists, antient and modern,

modern, have considered them, when they pronounced them to be only spurious goods, and enjoined their disciples to despise them altogether, or to behold them with the utmost indifference.

But there is undoubtedly another and a better side, whereon they appear a real blessing, or as the means for procuring us true and permanent blessings; a side on which they deserve the esteem and moderate endeavours of the wise man, and even by the christian need not to be held indifferent. On this side we will now consider them, for fixing their real value. We will see what they are and may be in respect to their possessor, and what in respect to the whole community.

In regard to their possessor, riches that have been earned have a greater value than those obtained by inheritance. I pre-suppose that the man has acquired them by lawful means, without wounding his conscience, or neglecting his higher duties; and that he has procured them not by one or a few fortunate casualties, but by a regular and continued industry. He that has acquired riches by this means, cannot but have more or less promoted his real intrinsic spiritual perfection thereby; and in the very obtaining of them has found an actual and lasting benefit, without any regard to the possession or enjoyment of them. For, while thus procuring riches he unfolds and exercises his mental faculties, employs and strengthens them. The business he carries on; the plans he forms; the experiments he makes; the
connections

connections he enters into with others, and which they maintain with him; the favourable or unfavourable circumstances that arise; the various dispositions of the persons with whom he has to do; the multifarious revolutions in taste and fashion, sometimes advantageous, and sometimes adverse to him; the sudden and unexpected turns that certain things and businesses take; the dangers which threaten him; the delightful prospects that open to his view; the frequent changes of fortune, and the uncertainty of all human affairs: all these excite observation, reflection, attention, consideration, ingenuity, foresight, courage, fortitude, discernment of character, and knowledge of the world. He must compare a hundred and a hundred things of various kinds together, combine them, and never lose them from his sight. He must lay plans, execute them as time and opportunity serve, alter them, contract, extend, and leave them to their course; he must keep his eye at once on the past, the present, and the future; must now work without visible profit, now purposely suffer loss, that he may thereby assure himself of greater advantage or gain hereafter; must now retreat, and now stand still; now resolve on the spot, and then deliberate warily; now repair past errors, and then beware of fresh mistakes. And what a diversity of mental exertions does not all this require! How much more intelligent, prudent, consistent, acute, and considerate, must he be, how much greater knowledge both of men and things must he not have,

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who has been twenty, thirty, or more years in acquiring riches, and that by the more important and difficult kinds of business! I say, how much farther must not he be advanced in all these respects, than he would have been, if he had passed all this time in idleness, or had only earned a bare subsistence by an easy and slight employment! And if he be at the same time a virtuous and pious man, what opportunities and trials and exercises of sincerity, of fidelity, of equity, of philanthropy, of generosity, of beneficence, of integrity, of moderation, of constancy, of discretion, and of confidence in God, must he not have had all this time, which, in the opposite case, he could not have had; and how much must he not thus be strengthened and confirmed in all these virtues! Certainly the acquiring of his wealth must have been of great and real value to him; and if, through some unavoidable accidents, he should happen to lose the fruits of his industry, yet will his principal advantages still remain to him; he will thereby have promoted his spiritual perfection for all future times.

But if the proper acquisition of riches be an excellent means for the expansion and exercise of our mental faculties; the legitimate use and the prudent employment of riches, once acquired, is not less so, and thereby also they become of real value in regard to the possessor. What advantage, what actual and lasting advantage, may they not secure him, if he employ them in a wise and christian manner! How many

many means of instruction, and mental pleasure, may they not procure him, which otherwise he must absolutely forego! How much time may not he employ in the cultivation of his mind, in the augmentation of his knowledge, in the improvement of his taste, in the amendment of his heart, which he would be otherwise obliged to consume in hard, fatiguing, dispiriting, and servile labours! How many instructive conversations may he not have with wife and good men, to whom otherwise he probably could never gain access! How many conveniences and satisfactions of domestic and social life may he not enjoy, which otherwise he could not!

And what shall I say of the pleasures of beneficence? What a value does not that confer on riches to him who knows how to employ them aright! How much more comfort and help and life and joy may not he spread around him! How many more tears wipe away from the eyes of the poor and needy! How much oftener be sight to the blind, feet to the lame, a father to the orphan, and a support to the widow! How much more frequently may he supply the place of Jesus, the helper and saviour of men, among his brethren! How much more substantially may he encourage and support useful institutions for the public good, than if he weré necessitous himself, or confined to the supply of his own personal wants! And if he may do this, and actually does it, and has a heart to feel the charms of doing good, how dear, how estimable must not his riches be to him, as often

as he employs them to such noble purposes! What a source of felicity, of pure human and godlike joy, must not they then prove to him, whereas otherwise, if he left them unused, or even misemployed them in folly and vice, they would not have the smallest worth!

In short, my pious hearers, riches have, in another point of view, a very great value in regard of their possessor, only, however, in regard to the best and worthiest of such as have them. To them they are the means to perfect independency, and thereby to freedom of judgement concerning truth and falsehood, right and wrong, honour and shame; the means to a firm and manly behaviour towards high and low, superiors and inferiors; a means of supporting and promoting civil and religious liberty. The less a man is concerned about his own support and advancement in the world, the less his outward circumstances depend on the approbation and opinions of others; the more he can sacrifice and part with of his own fortune without becoming poor, or suffering want: so much the less temptation has he to flatter others, to debase himself before the great and mighty by any cringing deportment, implicitly to subscribe to their judgements, or court their favour by criminal compliance or servile obedience: so much the more freely may he think and determine for himself, follow his own perceptions, his own feelings, and his own inclinations; so much the more is he able to support the feeble, to comfort the weary,
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and to relieve the oppressed; so much the more boldly can he take the part of the weak, the forlorn, the oppressed; so much the more impressively defend the innocent; so much the more courageously withstand the abuse of power, the wiles of artifice, the attacks and the confederacies of the wicked; so much the less need he hesitate to controvert prevailing prejudices, abuses, and follies, and to distinguish himself from others by an inviolable love of truth and integrity, by a free and impartial estimation of men and things, and by a strict, or, if you please to call it so, an austere course of virtue. — Happy, respectable people, who thus employ their wealth, on whose principles and conduct it has this effect! To them it is a very estimable gift of Providence; to them it is assuredly of a great and never-ending value!

But riches unquestionably are of great value in respect of the whole community at large; that is, it is useful and profitable to society, that what are called the goods of fortune should not be distributed in equal parts among the members of it, but that some should possess a superfluity of them. The wealth that is not suffered to lie idle, but is either employed in acquiring more, or is dispersed abroad and kept in circulation, increases the stock of life and activity among mankind. It promotes the industry, the application and the diligence of the whole community. Here it calls forth mechanical, and there mental powers, to the advancement of the general good. To these it is an incitement and means to the disco-

very of useful and agreeable things ; while it furnishes an opportunity to those for ingenious imitations and improvements of the materials of conveniency and pleasure already discovered.

The more rich members and men of property any society has, so much the less has the husbandman, the artificer, the artist, the merchant, or the scholar, to fear lest his labour should be in vain ; so much the more encouragement have they all to pursue their works with joy, to exert their talents and dexterity to the utmost, and to carry their workmanship and commerce to the highest possible perfection.

By riches many of the pleasures and conveniences of life are rendered more common ; the taste is refined for what is beautiful, solid, and good ; the stock of useful knowledge is increased ; the roughness of manners is softened ; and all these advantages extend themselves gradually farther and wider even among those ranks and classes of men which are not rich, but are yet capable of greater improvement and a pleasanter mode of existence.

By riches various nations and countries, some near and some remote, are more closely connected together. They have more communication with each other, can mutually impart their goods and produce, the fruits of their industry, the works of art, the light of the sciences, and a thousand things which promote their perfection and happiness ; whereas otherwise every nation, every country, every individual would be confined to what his own soil, his own industry,

his own stock of talents and powers, were able to produce. By the circulation of wealth, therefore, every one works for all, and all for every one; and hence the products of the most distant regions, the works and manufactures of the remotest nations, the thoughts and perceptions of the wise and learned of countries separated by the largest continents or seas, are exchanged, bartered, propagated, multiplied, wrought up, and produce on every side, in a greater or less degree, in one manner or another, life, activity, pleasure, joy, knowledge, and the enjoyment of good.

How many difficult, but important and useful matters, in short, could neither be undertaken, nor completed, without the help of riches! matters, in the undertaking of which a man must venture much, in the prosecution of them must labour long without profit or reward, which must be both begun and executed in the bare hope of a future, far distant, and uncertain benefit! How many good establishments would never have been brought to effect, how many products of nature would never have been wrought up, how many works of art never completed, how many kinds of industry never discovered or pursued, how many branches of commerce never cultivated and rendered flourishing, if society had contained no wealthy members, who, from benevolence towards their brethren, or even from self-interest, from ambition, from an uncommon degree of activity, had not undertaken and promoted such things, and been able

to employ and devote considerable sums to the planning and commencing, the prosecution and completion of them!

Riches have therefore undeniably a real value, no less in regard of their possessor than of society at large; they are capable of promoting the benefit and advancing the happiness of both in various ways; considered in this respect, they are not a deceitful, but a substantial good; they are by no means to be despised and rejected as such, but merit the esteem and the moderate endeavours of the wise man and the christian.

But what is the consequence, if we thus estimate the value of riches, if we reckon them for exactly what they are?

It follows, that riches, to them who barely possess them, without using them, or without using them aright, have no value whatever — nothing good or desirable in them. Neither their understanding nor their heart is the better for them; they are neither more excellent, nor more happy. Some means to become so they have; by so long as they do not employ them, it is the same to them as if they had them not. Their riches, therefore, give them no real pre-eminence; and if, notwithstanding, they boast of them, they suffer themselves to be deceived by a vain appearance, and boast that they, according to their circumstances, might and ought to be wiser, better, and happier, than they really are.

It follows farther, that riches, when once earned or otherwise obtained, procure the least advantage, even to their prudent and worthy possessor, and on the other hand the greatest to the society wherein he lives; that, therefore, their advantage consists more in the honour of being the acquirer, the collector, the manager, the keeper, and the distributor of the property belonging to many of the community, than in the exclusive enjoyment of them. For the rich man can only enjoy the least part of what he has; he must always, whether he will or no, allow others to enjoy the greatest; nay, abating only his unreasonable and hurtful satisfactions, he can enjoy nothing, but what others in some way or other must profit by. He therefore, generally speaking, is not deserving of envy, nor yet to be reckon'd a noxious member of society. Esteem and thanks are much rather due to him, for the benefits he communicates to others; for the provision and assistance they generally obtain from him in penury and want.

It follows, thirdly, that a moderate income, which is well earned and properly employed, is of much greater value, as well to the man that has it, as to the society in which he lives, than the greatest possessions, which are not so acquired, or so employed. What, in the hands of sloth, ignorance, folly, gluttony, and luxury, fades, corrupts, vanishes, is poisoned, and killed; in the hands of wisdom, virtue, industry, and philanthropy, multiplies, improves, and ennobles! How much life and activity and joy

does it not produce! Let not then the man of moderate fortune complain that he is not rich; let him not delay the good employment of what he has till he become so; but do at present all that his means allow him to do, and do it with prudence and perseverance; and he will thus be as useful as if he were actually rich, and probably more so.

Lastly, it follows, from what has been observed of the value of riches, that we are not to honour the rich man, because he is rich, but only as he has acquired and employs his riches in a laudable manner.

Let none, therefore, reverence the rich man merely because he has inherited riches, till he render himself worthy of his fortune by a proper employment of it; and if he do not, let him be treated, not only in our private estimation, but in our outward behaviour, and in our public judgments, as inferior to an honest day-labourer, or any poor person, who is not poor by his vices; and let him perceive that society is justly scandalized, at seeing a member of it receiving so much and distributing so little, requiring so much service and performing hardly any, and puffing himself up with pretensions, while he is indebted only to chance, or, more justly speaking, to Providence, for what he has, and which that Providence would never have bestowed upon him, if wealth were intrinsically important or honourable, or if it were always the token and the reward of merit.

Let none honour the rich man, who, with all the means and leisure for cultivating his understanding
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and ameliorating his heart and of procuring himself more elevated pleasures, remains unimproved, ignorant, vicious, low-minded, and knows no other merit, no greater joy, than to count his money, and to heap treasure upon treasure!

Let none reverence the rich man who is rich only to himself, who keeps his riches for himself alone, is deaf to the voice of poverty and woe, and shuts his heart to compassion, his hand to charity!

Let none revere the rich man who is proud of his riches, who reckons himself, merely on their account, better than his poorer brethren; and who proportions his consideration and regard to others according to the degree of their greater or smaller income!

In short, let no man honour riches in the hands of the fool, the unjust, the haughty, the epicure, the hard-hearted, and the misanthropist! for riches can neither compensate for folly, nor injustice, nor pride, nor hardness of heart, nor inhumanity; and though they may conceal these vices and defects at times, it is only from the view of weak and silly persons, who know not how to discriminate between semblance and reality, and suffer themselves to be cheated by every imposture.

But let every man, my pious hearers, let every man esteem him, who, by his understanding, his industry, his diligence, and his prudence, by a faithful and conscientious employment of his gifts and faculties, is become rich!

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Let every one honour the rich man who makes a good and generous use of his riches, who employs them in promoting and encouraging the industry of his fellow citizens, opens channels of useful commerce, encourages arts and sciences, supports good institutions, rewards beneficial discoveries and publishes them for the general advantage, and at the same time, though in the midst of opulence, lives within the bounds of moderation and reason, and never loses sight of his higher destination !

Lastly, let every one honour the rich man who strives to be rich in good works, in works of beneficence and mercy, who is rich more for others than for himself, who heartily gives and heartily helps ; who cannot think himself rich but when he is giving and helping ; who finds his joy and bliss in it ; and, in so doing, like his heavenly Father, the fountain of good, is never discouraged or weary ! Yes, let every man revere him, as the friend and benefactor of his brethren, as the substitute of Jesus, as the image of God !

SERMON VII.

The Value of Honour.

O GOD! when we meditate on thee, on thy greatness and majesty, and contrast ourselves with thee, the Eternal and Infinite, the Omniscient, the Almighty, the All-gracious; then we cannot humble ourselves sufficiently before thee: then we most sensibly feel our imbecility and emptiness; then whatever among mortals is called honour, prerogative, grandeur, dignity, vanishes entirely from our sight; then we clearly discern how much humility and meekness become us, and how much pride and vanity are at variance with our nature and with our condition! And yet, o merciful God, thou hast elevated us far above all the other creatures of this globe, endowed us with many talents and powers, made us capable of great things, given us the most cogent impulses to extend our activity and to strive
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after a higher, an ever progressive perfection ; and it can never be contrary to thy design, if we esteem and honour what is good and excellent that we find in one another, if we strive in a proper manner to acquire the esteem and approbation of our brethren, if we strive to excell each other in knowledge and virtue and general utility. Our nature and all its capacities and appetites proceed from thee, and what proceeds from thee is right and good. May we but rightly acknowledge the value of thy gifts, and constantly so use them as is conformable to thy will and our true benefit. Teach us also to act thus in regard to the desire of excelling, which thou hast implanted in us. Keep us from all wrong and devious paths into which we are liable to be misled by it. Let it be in us a pure and fruitful source of good and generous actions : and grant that we may always prefer thy approbation far, far beyond all other, and strive after it far, far more zealously than after all other distinctions and possessions. To this end bless the reflections that we shall now direct to these objects, and cause them to have a powerful influence on all our future judgements and behaviour. For these blessings we pray thee, as votaries of thy son Jesus ; in whose name, and as far as we are able, in whose spirit, we farther call upon thee as, our father which art in heaven, &c.

ROMANS xiii. 7.

Render therefore to all their dues—honour to whom honour.

EMULATION is natural to all men; and nothing but a high degree of insensibility, or of levity, or of vice, can render us wholly indifferent to honour and shame. Indeed this sentiment is not equally active and strong in all. The degree of its strength and activity in each person is determined by his natural disposition, his education, his manner of life, his company, his connections, and frequently by peculiar accidents; but in none is it totally idle or inactive. It must be confessed that this sentiment is the cause of much harm to mankind—is the parent of many follies, many vices, and much misery. But it likewise occasions not less, it causes far more good, and is the fertile source of much wisdom, many virtues, and much happiness. All depends upon the proper direction of it, upon the choice of its objects, and its being guided in its aims by reason and religion.

If we would have this to be the case with us, we must acquire a right conception of honour, and the value of it, of the grounds whereon it is desirable; and on these several articles the generality of men fall

fall into gross mistakes. Honour, no less than wealth, has an outward glare, a certain gloss, that plays round its real and essential condition: and dazzled by this, few men think of examining and considering what may lie hid behind it. Hence such different, such opposite judgements are passed on the value of honour, as well as of wealth; hence the excessive esteem and admiration of it by some, and the absolute contempt of it by others; hence the ardent, unabated endeavours of some after every thing that is called honour, and the careless, and even scornful indifference of others towards it: hence, in short, that manifest variance, or that seeming contradiction between the maxims of the world, and those of morality and religion. — Mere error, prejudice, disorder and extravagance, arising from a deficiency of reflection and consideration. Happy shall I think myself, my dear brethren, if by my present attempt I can contribute any thing towards lessening these failings and mistakes of the mind and heart; if I can guide you to any impartial and satisfactory reflections on this matter, so as to enable you to deem rightly of it!

My design is, to lay before you clearer and juster notions of the value of honour. Afford me then your customary seriousness and continued attention.

When the apostle, in our text, exhorts the christians at Rome to “give to all their dues, honour to whom honour is due,” he plainly shews, that honour is not in opposition to christianity; that it has a certain value, is due to certain persons, may be justly
demanded

demande'd by them, and that to testify it is a duty incumbent on us. On the same principle, he admonishes the christians, on other occasions, to prefer one another in honour; that they should all endeavour after what is of good report, laudable and honourable; that the elders of the congregations, who were not yet teachers, should by a faithful discharge of their office prepare their way to superior stations. — Christianity neither absolutely condemns honour nor the striving to obtain it; but requires of its confessors, in this article likewise, prudence and moderation, to direct their ambition towards the most important and most excellent objects, and to look upon honour not as an end, but only as a means. — And if our Saviour in forbidding his disciples to allow themselves to be called master or rabbi, and ordering that the greatest among them shall be as the least, and the chief of them as the servant of all; if, I say, he thus appears utterly to discard all honour, every mark of distinction, and every token of reverence; yet the attentive reader of these precepts will easily perceive that his design in giving them was no other than to free his disciples from the idle expectation of eminent dignities and conspicuous stations in the kingdom of the Messiah; and to shew them that they were not to be guided by a party-spirit, not to set themselves up for leaders of the people, but to direct all men to him, as the sole head and lord of his congregation. The thing itself then is innocent and good, even according to the doctrine of christianity; and all we
have

have to do is so to regard and so to use it as is becoming the true nature and condition of it. In this design we will first examine and ascertain the value of honour; and then draw from it a few rules for our conduct.

By honour, we are to understand all tokens of consideration and respect shewn us by society in preference to others, all outward precedence it grants or allows us, whether it consists in dominion and authority, or in rank and titles, or in posts and dignities, or in an exemption from certain burdens and restraints, or in other privileges of the like kind. Now, for rightly adjusting the worth of these things, we must in the first place discriminate between hereditary honours, and such as are acquired.

Hereditary honours, privileges derivèd to us from our parents and ancestors, and on account of which others shew us respect, have no solid intrinsic value on our account, and bear the name of honours in regard to us in but a very improper signification. This will immediately be perceived by any one that is not dazzled by mere outside show. For, in what manner has it been owing to me, that my forefathers, in antient or modern times, by mental abilities, by virtues, by praise-worthy deeds, or by bodily strength, have distinguished themselves from others; or that it happened to them, probably by some fortunate accident, probably by some service they performed, though slight in itself, yet done in favourable circumstances; probably even by base and low intrigues,
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by the arts of flattery, procured the good-will of some superior, or bought a title and precedence with money? What had I to do in all that; I, who then was not in being; I, who probably, had I been or were I now in their situation, would not, or could not have done as my forefathers did? Have I, therefore, the smallest merit in it? Am I become the better, or the more honourable, because some of my ancestors raised themselves above their contemporaries as real heroes, or as savage warriors, or as highway robbers, or as court sycophants; that they acquired distinctions either by some truly good, or by some downright wicked act, or were raised above others by some fortunate event? Probably, it is true, probably I may have had the happiness of a better education on this account than I should have had in other circumstances. But is a good education, then, a merit in me, for which I am to be honoured by others? Is it not merely a benefaction, for which I stand indebted to others, and which none can reckon meritorious in me, till I have shewn the worthy uses I make of it?

Hereditary honours and privileges, or privileges of birth and descent, are therefore only so far valuable, as they incite me to render myself worthy of them, and to repay the community by good, generous, and useful actions; so much the more cautiously to avoid every thing sordid and disgraceful; and to raise myself as much above others by my sentiments and behaviour as I am their superior in rank and titles.

He on whom it has not this influence, he who does the reverse, if he have otherwise a sound understanding, and is capable of reflection, must feel himself ashamed as often as he thinks upon his outward distinctions; they must be burdensome to him, like a load of debt which he has not discharged; he must, in those moments of self-investigation and self-abhorrence, wish that he had been born in an humbler station! Reflect on this particularly, ye youths who bear the style of honourable! If ye be not honourably minded and honourably mannered, no wise, no intelligent man, will reverence you merely on account of your name; and every base, every degrading action you commit, will load you with tenfold disgrace!

Acquired, lawfully acquired honour, on the other hand, is a true substantial honour, and has great value, both in regard to the possessor, and to the whole society.

In regard to the possessor, its value consists in the manner by which it is obtained, by which it is supported, and how it is used or applied. In all these respects it promotes his real spiritual perfection.

This is done principally by the legitimate acquisition of honour; the due acquisition of honour, not the honour that is bought, not that obtained by flattery, not extorted by arrogance, presumption, or impudence; but is grounded on superior talents, on good and public spirited actions, on real benefits done to society. He that acquires honour in this manner, must thereby become better and more excellent.

cellent. For, what will it not generally demand to raise oneself above the great bulk of mankind, to get distinguished from them, to surpass them, to excel them in a remarkable, striking, and universally approved manner! What does it not require to reach a certain mark which we have proposed, frequently very distant, and often not clearly discernible; to be getting constantly nearer it, and to pursue it with constancy till it be attained! How many impediments have we not to get over, how many trips to avoid, and how many competitors to outrun! How difficult, how complicated, how prolix is frequently the matter itself by which this honour is to be acquired: I mean the art, science, military service, civil or mercantile affairs, the rural œconomy, wherein we seek distinction! And how much harder still do not all these things become by circumstances not dependent on ourselves, by the poverty wherein we may be born, by the little instruction we have probably had in our younger years, by the opposition all men have to encounter, by the jealousies and envy we excite, by the unavoidable mistakes we commit! What struggles, what various exertions of our mental faculties does it not require, to force a passage through all these difficulties, to combat and conquer them all! But is not this the way that leads to greater excellence, to wisdom, and to virtue?

No more can we worthily maintain our honour so acquired, without thereby promoting our perfection. Would we secure the prize after which we strive,

from being ravished from us? Then we must never stand idle—much less retreat—must constantly stretch forwards, always labour to make farther advances in what is amiable and praise-worthy. Wise, good, and generally useful actions, which are not followed by similar actions, merits which are not augmented by new ones, soon sink into forgetfulness, soon become a burden to us, then render us less respectable, and at length contemptible. What does it not require for this respected man to preserve the good opinion, the esteem, and the confidence of society; if he would not have them repent the precedence they have granted him, the honour they have shewn him! What attention to all his actions, even the least of them; what circumspection and prudence in whatever he does, and whatever he declines; what sacrifices of his conveniences, his pleasures, and his profits; what practice of the virtues; what an active and busy life; what indefatigable efforts does it not demand after higher excellence.

In short, we cannot possess and enjoy honour in a rational and worthy manner, without thereby becoming better, happier, and more useful to mankind. What a mighty incitement to the faithful discharge of our duty, to the most unshaken integrity, must it not be to such a one who feels its value and the obligations it lays him under! How much easier is it in general for men to act uprightly and justly, generously and nobly, in the light of an universal esteem, by the splendor of renown, than when they have to

act in obscurity, without witnesses, without spectators, and without judges!

Again, honour procures us access to the wisest and the best persons; it furnishes us with the opportunity for procuring their esteem, their confidence, and their friendship; and how much may we not then learn of them, how much strengthen our mind, how warm our heart, and how much happiness enjoy in their conversation!

By honour and esteem we far more readily find help and encouragement in our greater and more difficult undertakings, and more surely complete our designs, than when we are unhonoured and unknown. Mankind have already a good opinion of us; have great confidence in our understanding and our heart; think us more responsible on account of our privileges, or at least forbear to make public opposition to us, and directly to put obstacles in our way. We may, therefore, undertake greater matters, operate farther and wider about us, have more influence on others, and thereby perform and promote more good. Our opinions meet with greater approbation; our designs go more glibly on; are more willingly supported; and far more heads and hands unite in their execution. Oh what is there that a man, who stands in great and merited esteem, cannot undertake for the good of his brethren! What may not a man possessed of eminent precedence, of high rank, invested with an exalted charge, and is wise and virtuous withal, what may he not perform for their advantage!

vantage! What a benefactor to the present and to many future generations may he be! — And what a pure and godlike pleasure must he procure himself in such a use of his honour! How vastly must he thereby display his fitness for still higher dignities, for still greater activity in a better world!

But, if honour and pre-eminence, properly acquired, worthily maintained, and duly employed, have a certain value in regard of their possessor; they assuredly have as great, and even still greater, in respect of the whole society. They promote its advantage in various ways.

It is of advantage in general, when there are certain persons who may serve as an example to others, in a society, and indeed among all classes and orders of men; and this they are able the better to do, when they stand higher than others, when they are distinguished from others by their outward privileges, when they are known and respected by every man in their sphere, when every one's eyes are directed towards them, when whatever they say and do quickly comes to every man's knowledge. The judgment, the approbation, the testimony, the example of one who stands high in esteem and deserved respect, has indisputably far more weight, far more influence and efficacy, than the judgment, the approbation, the testimony, and the example of another, though as wise and virtuous, who lives in obscurity, and is lost in the crowd. Indeed, if all men had sound principles, and acted upon them, if they all were penetrated

trated and actuated by the spirit of religion and christianity, they would not be in need of this comparatively feeble support. But since, in the present state of things, this is not to be expected, it is of infinite service to the world, that the light which enlightens respectable persons, the splendour that surrounds them, the esteem that is paid them by all, should, in some degree, supply the place of those principles, those nobler motives.

Honour rightly acquired, and worthily maintained, is, farther, a powerful incentive to others to strive after honour, by the same laudable means. All men cannot, perhaps only a few can, dispense with these incitements to eminently good and great enterprises, at least, in the beginning. First, must the prize, the crown, that sparkles at the end of their course, awaken them from their sloth; call them to commence the glorious career, and help them to surmount the primary obstacles in it. By degrees these allurements refine, give place to nobler views and more generous motives. They find, that truth, virtue, integrity, public utility, are in themselves excellent and desirable things; they employ themselves wholly in them, indefatigably pursue their progress, strait forward to the mark, without seeing farther on it, or descrying a more exalted and grander mark beyond it; do whatever is laudable and honourable, without thinking at all on praise and honour; do, from a hearty love towards God and man, what they at first proposed to do out of cupidity and am-

bition: and all this they probably would not have done, would never have exerted their capacities and abilities, would never have exerted them to that degree; if they had not been roused and animated by the view of more honourable, more respectable persons, or by the report of their deeds, and by the desire to do like them or to go beyond them; if the first sparks of this active life, this greater utility, these nobler sentiments, these endeavours after extension and activity which lay smouldering in their breasts, had not been thus blown up into a flame. And, if this were not the case, how many noble powers would probably never have been set in motion, how many seeds of good actions would never have come to maturity, how many useful labours would never have been undertaken!

Honour, rightly acquired, and worthily maintained, receives, lastly, a great value in regard of the whole community, as by means of it many very important matters are brought to effect, which otherwise would not be done, or far seldomer, and not without the greatest labour and perseverance. Without the influence of honour, how could the contradictory opinions, and the opposite means and aims of the great multitude of mankind, be brought into unison, and made to tend to one and the same object; how would any patriotic and arduous undertaking be maturely weighed, wisely planned, and resolutely accomplished? Whose counsel would be hearkened to in times of scarcity or distress; who could acquire the

the confidence needful in times of danger ; who could, in such circumstances, inspire the ignorant, the feeble, the timid, and the narrow-minded, the greatest part of society, with courage and obedience, when a man cannot explain to them the reasons for what he does and what he expects, or, if he could not make them understood ? In short, how can the prince, the magistrate, the judge, the teacher, the father of a family, the chieftain, the inspector, discharge the duties of his office or his calling with good effect, unless the honour he enjoys, the respect in which he stands, gives a peculiar weight to what he says and does, to whatever he commands and advises and desires ?

It therefore cannot be denied, that the honour which is duly obtained and properly employed, has a true and lasting value, both in regard of its possessor, and of society at large, inasmuch as it furthers and promotes in various ways the perfection and happiness of both. — Let me now conclude, with pointing out to you a few short practical rules in respect to your opinion of honour, and your endeavours after it.

First, learn to distinguish between true and false, personal and borrowed honour ; prize the former according to its worth, but never let the latter blind you. All titles, rank, and pre-eminence, which we owe merely to our birth, to our ancestors, or to our hereditary station, is borrowed, is accidental honour ; it bespeaks no merit, but is an obligation and incitement to acquire merit, and thereby to acquire a just claim to that precedence.

All honour acquired by undue and base means, which is founded on artifice, on treachery, on the oppression and circumvention of the simple, on extortion, or on mere impudence, or sordid and iniquitous acts of any kind; all honour that is abused to the purposes of pride and arrogance, to acts of violence, to the overthrowing or diminishing of human and civil liberty, to the enforcing of unlawful purposes and schemes; all honour that is sought for by sinister, dissolute, or profligate means, in pomp and luxury, or in vice; is false honour—it is real disgrace.

Let no man, therefore, degrade himself by testifying towards him who only shines by adventitious honour, that reverence which is only due to the man of real merit, who has procured it to himself, or has rendered himself worthy of it! Let no man dishonour himself so far as to foster the pride of the wretched being who is proud of spurious honour, or afford the least respect to vice, though invested with the richest robe of dignity! But let every man be zealous to shew honour to whom honour is due; let every man confess and respect and revere whatever he perceives of good and useful and honourable in his brethren, let their station be what it may! This is the duty of the man, the duty of the citizen, the duty of the christian!

Secondly, let not your emulation degenerate into ambition. The former is allowable, is natural, is the germ of virtue, the other is a criminal and shameful

ful vice, a corrupt passion, and the death of all real virtue. When once a man makes honour the ultimate, the highest aim of his endeavours; when he resolves at any rate to distinguish himself from others, to force himself above them, to gain reverence, authority and power, approbation and applause, let it cost what it will: he immediately runs the risk of losing the path to real honour, and of entangling himself in the labyrinth of artifice and falsehood—will be capable of every vice, of every wicked deed, even the lowest and most disgraceful actions, if by their means he can but further his designs. Beware of this tyrannical passion! It is a scourge to human society, and always, sooner or later, rewards its votaries with shame and misery!

Thirdly, give your emulation the best, the noblest direction. Prefer the pre-eminences of mind and heart to all the pre-eminences of rank and station; wisdom and virtue to all titles and dignities; the silent acts of humanity and beneficence to all noisy but less useful deeds!

Strive not so much after the esteem of the multitude, as after that of the wisest and best of them. Let the approbation of one wise, one virtuous, one real christian, be of more value to you than the applause of thousands, whose judgment depends on accident and humour!

Go still farther; purify and exalt your emulation yet more. Seek not honour from men, but aim at the honour which only God can give. The approbation

bation of the Omniscient and Omnipresent, who seeth in secret — seeth what is good as well as what is bad, and what is bad equally with what is good, the intention as well as the performance, the will as well as the deed, the motive as well as the effect. — To procure his approbation, to become ever more capable and more deserving of it, let this, let this be the ultimate aim of your emulation!

Fourthly, strive not so much after honour, as after that which conduces to honour, that which is truly honourable; not after praise, but what is praiseworthy; not after renown, but after that which is worthy of good report; not after approbation and applause, but what merits approbation and applause. From him who seeks honour with anxiety, from him it commonly flies. He who does that which is attended by honour, and does it in honest simplicity of heart, because it is right and good, he will, for the most part, find honour and approbation, even though he did not seek it. Restless, anxious ambition, a nice and delicate adaptation of every word, every step, every action to the severest rules of honour, cannot by any means consist with the character of a truly great and noble soul, with a truly christian-minded christian. The noble soul, the great man, the real christian, are so employed in effectual practice, in better and more perfect exercise of what is fair and great and christian — are ever seeing before them so many and still greater and weightier things to do — are so pre-occupied with truth and virtue and

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the public benefit, so penetrated with the love of God and of their brethren, that they forget themselves, and find sufficient impulse and reward in acts of justice and beneficence, and prize not the honour they receive from men as their end and aim, but at most as instruments and means. This, my dear brethren, is true greatness, true nobility of spirit, the ground and capacity for everlasting honour! .

Fifthly, pursue the path of duty and honour, endeavour to make the best, the most beneficial use of your gifts and faculties, and though still no outward distinctions should fall to your share, and your merits should be unacknowledged by society: oh, let not this lead you into mistake, confidently pursue the path you have begun; the end of it will bring you to greater perfection and bliss. Complain not of injustice and ingratitude, if unfavourable and adverse circumstances withhold from you the honour you have deserved. It cannot constantly be conferred according to desert. Its judges, its distributors, are men, fallible, mistaking, passionate men! Numbers are likewise frequently running at the same mark with you, come to the full as near, and yet only one can gain the prize. But let this serve you as a caution, not to make honour your ultimate aim, or you may easily miss of it without your fault. Only the approbation of our conscience, the approbation of God, is what no man can deprive us of without our fault. After these let us strive, and we shall never labour in vain, nor fail in our attempt.

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Lastly, herein conduct yourselves, as christians, by the example of Christ; let him be your model. He sought not honour from men; he reckoned that which most glitters and glares in their eyes as of little import; he never boasted of his pre-eminence; he suffered neither praise nor blame to turn him aside from the path of rectitude and truth: but all that was honourable and good, that did he, and that without remission. All his discourses, all his actions, were consistent with his dignity; all tended to the promotion of the greatest possible human felicity. He neither said nor did any thing that could weaken his influence or enervate his doctrine or frustrate his benevolent labours. The good pleasure of his heavenly father, he prized above all things, and strove with unabated ardour after the honour of being the helper, the saviour, the deliverer of many, of all mankind. And in this way he attained to the highest glory, was exalted above all, and received a dignity above all dignities; that at his name every knee should bow, and all mankind obey and acknowledge him for their Lord. Him, my dear brethren, him let us follow, become constantly more like him in sentiments and actions. The way which he has trod before us is the way that leads to the highest honour.

SERMON VIII.

The Value of Sensual Pleasure.

O GOD! our most kind and merciful father, willingly dost thou vouchsafe us, thy children, pleasure; pleasure of various kinds; sensual, spiritual, domestic, social pleasures, — pleasures of the present and of the future life! Thou thyself hast made us susceptible of pleasure, taught us to strive after and to obtain it, and hast opened to us various and abundant sources of it within us and without us. Fain wouldst thou remove from us all pain, all affliction, all displeasure, — fain wouldst thou let our whole life be one uninterrupted series of agreeable sensations if it might be consistent with our nature and with our conduct. Praised be thy fatherly kindness, o God, for having so richly and so unremittedly provided for our pleasure and for our happiness! — Praised be thy wise parental kindness even for absolutely forbidding us hurtful pleasures, for enjoining

us only moderate enjoyment even of innocent pleasures, for requiring of us abstinence and renunciations! For thus also thou promotest our welfare, keepest us from numberless pains and evils, and desirest to lead us to superior joys and blessings. Yes, thou art our father—the most gracious and beneficent father, in all that thou orderest and doest, in what thou commandest us and in what thou forbiddest! We rejoice therefore in thy presence, and implore thee that this sentiment may constantly live and prevail in our souls, elevate and dignify all our pleasures, preserve us from every abuse of them, and be the main spring of our whole behaviour! Imprint deeply in our hearts this comfortable, this pious sentiment; teach us to acknowledge and to feel thee and thy goodness in all things and at all times; let all lead us to thee, and every pleasure that thou grantest awaken us to thy love and to a truly cheerful obedience to thy commands. Bless likewise in this respect the considerations in which we are now to be employed. Give us to discern the truth and so to follow its dictates as never to abuse them to sin. These and all other our petitions we conclude, as the votaries of thy son Jesus, in his name and words, referring the issue of all our desires and views ultimately to the direction of thy supreme controul, eternal, everlasting king, enshrined in glory that cannot be approached, invested with wisdom and power which no arm can resist, no tongue express, no thought conceive. — Our father, &c.

I. TIM. iv. 4.

Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving.

HAVING in the two preceding discourses spoken of the value of riches and of the value of honour, I shall to-day address you with considerations on the value of pleasure; and particularly of what is called sensual pleasure. Falsely and partially as men have been and still are apt to judge of the value of riches and of honour, so falsely and partially have they deemed of the value of sensual pleasure. But too frequently has it been absolutely condemned as unworthy of rational and immortal beings, of christians called to a superior virtue; and to sanction this condemnation of it appeals have been made to religion and christianity. And how lamentably have both religion and christianity been by this means discredited in the minds of many! What numbers have been thus deterred from the love and practice of them! How often have these best friends and comforters of man been shewn us under a gloomy and joyless aspect! But how much have not religion and christianity been misrepresented and injured thereby! What an abuse of their most sacred names! How far are they from interdicting us any

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innocent pleasures, any harmless joys of whatever kind, and from rendering the draught of life more bitter and unpleasant than it should be by the arrangements and dispositions which God has established in nature: how far, I say, are they from this; they, who have nothing in view but to lighten the load of life, to inspire us with a firm and chearful courage, and to make us know and feel the goodness of our heavenly Father, in all that furrounds and befalls us; and to render us, not only in the future, but likewise in the present world, as happy as it is possible for us to be!

No; as religion and christianity neither forbid us from striving to acquire riches by lawful means, nor from endeavouring after true honour by the way of wisdom and virtue; so neither do they forbid us to yield our sensitive organs to the agreeable impressions made upon them by external objects, and therefore to enjoy sensual pleasure. Indeed they admonish us not to hurt ourselves and others by their improper use, not to be intemperate in their enjoyment, and not to indulge an excessive fondness for them. But even in so doing they provide for our pleasure, for its higher relish, for its longer duration, for its compatibility with the pleasures of the mind and heart, of which we are as susceptible as of the former, and which are still more desirable. We must only, according to their dictates, so use the world, and the good things thereof, as not abusing them. We must only take heed that while God
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never leaves himself without a witness in us that he sends us so much good from heaven, and fills our hearts with food and gladness, that we do not suffer it to bear us from him, but to lead and bring us nearer to him. We may enjoy, without scruple, all that God has made, and whatever he has offered to our enjoyment by his constitution of the world; but enjoy all with prayer and thanksgiving from a sensibility to the kindness of our supreme benefactor, and thus to sanctify it to us. This the apostle declares in the words of our text. "Every creature of God," says he, every thing that God has created, every pleasure of which he has made us capable, "is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving;" we may enjoy them all without sin, if only at the same time we do not forget God, and withdraw our hearts from him. Admitting these premises as undeniable, we will now proceed to investigate the matter itself more closely, and so endeavour to get a complete conception of it. In this design we shall, first, make a few observations on pleasure in general, and on the various kinds of it; then state the value of sensual pleasure in particular; and, lastly, lay down some rules for our conduct in relation to it.

Every pleasure, even sensual pleasure, has in and of itself, a certain value. In this respect it is essentially different from riches and honour. They receive their whole value from the use a man makes of them, from the effects they produce, from the

good wrought by them. But pleasure is in and of itself, without regard to effects and consequences, something agreeable, something good ; an agreeable sensation, an agreeable display of our abilities, an agreeable sentiment of our existence and of our present condition.

It must however be confessed, that every pleasure is not desirable in like manner ; but neither is every real good absolutely so, and in the same degree. The possession of one good often militates with the possession of another ; the enjoyment of one pleasure may often not consist with the enjoyment of another. One pleasure is always purer, nobler, greater than another : one pleasure even remains a pleasure in its consequences ; another soon ceases to be a pleasure, and changes into pain or disgust. There are pleasures which are bought much too dear, and do not repay the trouble a man has bestowed upon them, though they do not therefore cease to be pleasures : there are others which are worth every toil, every preparation, every endeavour, and always perform more than they promise. We should therefore chuse from among our pleasures ; they cannot all be alike enjoyed, they may not all be enjoyed at any time ; many must be denied and dismissed, that we may be capable and partakers of others. Every pleasure is good, is desirable ; but each in its proper time, in its due degree, according to its kind. Even the meanest, the lowest sort of them have the preference, at certain times and in certain places, to the noblest
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and the most exalted. Thus we may, we should not unfrequently prefer the satisfaction of a craving animal appetite, or the rest and inactivity necessary to the recreation of our frail body, to the purest and sublimest joys of devotion. In general, they are all either ennobled or debased, either weakened or invigorated, according to the temper of mind, the intentions in which they are enjoyed, and the use that is made of them.

Farther, every pleasure, even of what are called sensual pleasures, is properly an intellectual pleasure : that is, our mind has the sentiment, the consciousness of the agreeable alterations externally produced in the body, or in the visible world, as well as the agreeable representations, which, independent on all externals, it raises and prosecutes in itself by its own energies. Pleasure and displeasure, delight and disgust, are no more than different circumstances of our mind, different ways wherein it feels its existence and its relation to other things, whether the ground and the occasions of them be within it or without it.

We distinguish them only in regard to the means whereby these revolutions and representations arise in us ; or in regard to the sources from whence we draw these agreeable sensations.

Whether it be our organs of sense that present them to us ; whether beautiful images that enter the mind by the eyes, melodious sounds by the ear, delightful smells by the nostrils, delicious impressions by the palate and tongue, or agreeable thrilling emotions

tions and sensations by sensibility; they are all called sensual pleasures, though it is always our spirit that has and enjoys them. They may even sometimes in a purer, higher, nay, in the peculiar signification of the word become spiritual; when, by the consideration and sentiment of the true, the beautiful, and the good in nature, we are thence led to the still more elevated contemplation and adoration of their great author and his goodness; or, in general, when we reflect on them, compare them together and with former sentiments and ideas, draw conclusions from them, and ascend from particulars and individuals to generals and universals, and at length, as far as our comprehension allows, survey the whole, and thus use and exercise all our mental faculties, and this without laborious exertions, and with beneficial effects.

And it is just in this that consist spiritual pleasures in the strictest sense of the term, and in contradistinction to such as are called sensual. We term them spiritual, inasmuch as they do not arise by present impressions on our sensual organs, but chiefly, or entirely by the peculiar operation of our mind, and are a fruit of its reflections, its considerations and researches — relate more to invisible than to visible things, and are grounded on the knowledge and contemplation of truth, on the sensations of moral beauty and harmony, on the sentiment of our own, inward, ever-increasing perfection, on adoration of God, on joy in him and cheerful prospects in futurity.

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These, the more spiritual, or entirely spiritual pleasures, have undoubtedly, of all others, the greatest value. They are of their own nature inexhaustible. No man can ever enjoy all the pleasures of this kind of which he is capable; and never can he so completely enjoy as that he may not still more completely enjoy them. One pleasure is continually springing out of another; and even that which we have the most frequently enjoyed loses nothing of its value thereby, never becomes insipid, is continually acquiring new charms, ever fresh delights, ever shews itself on new sides and in new combinations. — The materials of these pleasures are as immense as the kingdom of truth, as unbounded as the world, and as infinite as divine perfection. — These pleasures are for the same reasons far more durable than all others. They vanish not with the light of the day; they disappear not with the outward aspect of things, turn not to corruption with our bodies in the grave. They remain with us as long as we remain. They abide by us under all the changes and revolutions, however great, of our present and future condition. They supply the want of the whole visible world in the darkness of the night, and the absence of all society in the loneliness of the grave. — — — On this very account are they likewise pleasures which bring us nearer to the end for which we were made. They transplant us from the class of merely animal, to that of spiritual beings. They connect themselves immediately with the pleasures we expect in a better

life, render us fitter for the enjoyment of them, and those become the foundation of these and these a continuance of those.

But, certain as all this is, my pious hearers, so certain is it likewise, that sensual pleasures have nevertheless their real value, that we are not by any means to despise and reject them, that we are much rather to prize, to seek, and to enjoy them. — And wherein then peculiarly consists the value of sensual pleasure?

That it consists in an agreeable sensation, in a pleasant mode of existence, and thereby, like every other pleasure, has an intrinsic value, inseparable from the enjoyment of it, is what we have already remarked, and is not capable of any farther definition, as a matter entirely belonging to the province of sentiment and experience. But when it is innocent and legitimate, it receives a still greater value by the good consequences it produces, by its effects on the whole of our outward state.

The moderate and chearful enjoyment of sensual pleasure supports our life, and promotes our health. By giving a stronger stimulus to the solids, and a quicker circulation to the fluids of our body; by the number and diversity of the movements occasioned thereby; by the cessation of all toilsome and fatiguing exertions, of particular vessels and nerves either devoted to fixed and earnest reflection, or adapted to hard mechanical labour; by the relaxation of muscles and vessels too strongly agitated, and the moderate employment of those that have lain too
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long inactive ; by the freer inhaling and exhaling of the outward air, by the consequent relief from pressing cares, by the view of brighter objects, the incitement and enjoyment of agreeable sensations : by all these means the slighter disorders of the body are removed, their farther progress stopped, the order, harmony, and equipoise of its various parts and their movements are restored, and new life and new powers inspired. And this is frequently better effected by walking abroad, recreating journies, company, conversation, diversions, dancing, festivities, and the like, than by merely mental pleasures ; under which our bodies would sink, at least in their present state, if they were not relieved by such alternatives, as much as under the oppression of too full a meal.

But if our bodies stand in need of refreshments and recreations, our mind no less requires and finds them in the innocent and moderate enjoyment of sensual pleasures. Its attention is thereby directed to other matters less serious and austere ; its faculties are as it were relaxed, act more freely ; are no longer confined to the prosecution of one particular design ; employ themselves on new ones, on lighter successions of ideas and sentiments, or rove more easily from one to another, without remaining on any so long as to feel fatigue ; and thus our mind acquires fresh life, fresh strength, fresh capacities, fresh aptitude, when our duty and vocation, and our thirst after higher excellence summon it to any new exertions,

exertions, and to pursue them with satisfaction and with success.

Innocent sensual pleasures contribute likewise to the more closely connecting mankind with each other, and the improvement of social life. Social pleasure draws all within the sphere of its operation to it; brings all the parts of it nearer together. All mutually give and take, receive and enjoy; every one contributes more or less to the pleasures of the rest; and this must render them all sensible of their mutual dependence, their mutual wants, and thereby make them more valuable and more dear to each other.

Innocent sensual pleasure, and the social enjoyment of it, also mitigates all asperity and extravagance in the judgments and manners of men; causes them to perceive more goodness, more pleasant and amiable qualities in each other; gives even virtue a brighter aspect, devotion a more chearful mien, thus gains more proselytes to both, and procures them both a larger and more unimpeded operation.

Innocent sensual pleasure expands the heart with benevolence towards all men, causes us to take greater interest in every thing about us, makes us more sensible to the wants of others, and may frequently excite us to many beneficent and generous actions. No man that is worthy of that name, that has sentiments of humanity about him, but is more ready to help his brethren, and to do them good, when he feels his own good fortune and prosperity, and is pleased and chearful in the enjoyment of it.

Innocent

Innocent sensual pleasure is properly obtained by honest persevering industry in our calling, and is, at the same time, the due reward of it: a reward of which persons even in the lowest stations of life are capable, and probably are most in want of; a reward that supports them by its expectation in their most laborious toils, and renders easy to them the most disagreeable and the most painful employments.

And how adapted is the enjoyment of innocent sensual pleasure to raise the heart of the rational man, the true christian, to God, the author and giver of pleasure; to penetrate him throughly with the sentiment of his goodness; to inspire him with inward love and gratitude towards his beneficent creator and father; to awaken in him a pure, exalted, cheerful piety; to allow him to hope for more and larger portions of the divine bounty; and open to him the brightest prospects of higher, nobler kinds of pleasure, in a more perfect state.

All these consequences and effects, which attend on innocent and temperate sensual pleasure, must certainly give it a manifold real value; and we should be ignorant both of man and his wants, were we to refuse it him altogether, or account it to him for a sin, that as a sensual being he should enjoy sensual pleasure. No; "every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving."

Permit me now, my pious hearers, to lay down a few rules which may be of service to you in the
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use and enjoyment of sensual pleasure, and secure you from mistakes.

Think not, that because I pronounce all pleasures to be really pleasures, and do not, as usual, condemn them altogether, that you are therefore to pursue every pleasure without scruple, and enjoy it at all times, and in every way at will. All pleasures are really and actually so; they produce in us all agreeable sensations. But all pleasures are not lawful; all are not harmless; all are not noble; all may not be enjoyed at all times, in all circumstances, and in the same proportion. The generality of sensual pleasures are deceitful; that is, they promise more than they perform; they but seldom come up to our expectations; they excite agreeable sensations within us, but not such agreeable, not such delightful sensations, as we perhaps concluded they would; they commonly are far less durable than we expected. — Every, even the most innocent pleasure, may change into pain, and does actually change into pain, by too frequent, too long, and too continued enjoyment; if we bring it on by compulsion, and endeavour to prolong its continuance by force, when it is not the simple exigence of nature, but an artificial requisite of our heated imagination. — Several kinds of pleasure are absolutely interdicted; as all those that are destructive to the body or to the mind; all that are injurious to our neighbour, in his health, his honour, his property, his reasonable pleasures, or in his circumstances; all that render us unfit or indisposed
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for the social duties and services we are bound to perform. — Others are allowable, but only as they are enjoyed at proper seasons, in due degree, and are not disqualifying or detrimental to the relish of more pure and exalted pleasures.

Be, therefore — this is my second rule — be prudent, careful, and conscientious in the choice of your pleasures. Do not imagine the first that solicits you to be the best. This is to do like children, who are yet defective in that which generally distinguishes men from the inferior animals, I mean judgment, and who yet, like the brutes, act more from instinct than from consideration and reflection. Men must distinguish themselves from children in the choice of their pleasures. Suffer no pleasure, which you yourself do not approve, to impose upon you, to persuade or beguile you; or which, at the time, and in the present temper of your mind, you had rather change for another, perhaps some nobler pleasure. Examine the pleasure that presents itself to you, by the rules of wisdom, of prudence, of religion, and of christianity; by your present wants and circumstances. Ask yourself: By this pleasure shall I do no injustice to any one, hurt none, neglect no necessary, indispensable duty towards my parents, my children, my family, my fellow-citizens, my fellow-creatures? Will not my worldly affairs be injured by it? Will it be prejudicial or serviceable to my health? Will it wound my peace of mind or promote it? Will it administer temptation and charms to sin and vice, or afford

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encouragement and incitement to virtue? Will it tend to fit or to unfit me for the discharge of my duty, to make me more slothful or more active? Will it lead me off from God; or, by a rational and discreet enjoyment of his bounty, connect me closer to him? Will it deprive me of my taste for serious occupations, for sublimer pleasures, of all relish for the worship of God and the exercises of devotion, or inspire me with fresh eagerness and powers thereto? Am I sure that it will never cause me remorse and pain; that I shall always recollect it with satisfaction and with thankfulness to God who vouchsafed it to me? Shall I not lay a stumbling block in the way of any one, or needlessly give him pain by the indulgence of this gratification? Shall I not probably thereby induce others of the same station with myself, but not in such good circumstances, to follow my example, and so prejudice themselves and others?— And am I, in short, actually in want of this pleasure? have I first deserved it by any good and useful actions, by a faithful and diligent observance of my duty? Have I really so consumed my strength by labouring in my vocation, or by any other laudable means, that I must provide for its recreation? For, as it is said, He that will not work, neither should he eat; it may be full as truly said, he who has not worked, is not authorised to take any pleasure, neither can he completely enjoy it.— Whoever frequently and seriously makes these reflections, will certainly indulge himself in no pleasures that are not

permitted, or that may be manifestly detrimental to himself or to others, will seldom err in the choice of his pleasures, and never transgress the bounds of moderation; and to him they will constantly be what they were intended to be in the gracious designs of our creator — not the business, not the main concern, not the end and aim — but the support, the recreation, the animation, encouragement, and incentive to duty, the path to superior excellence.

A third rule, that may assist us in the choice of our pleasures, is this: always prefer those pleasures and diversions which are at the same time profitable, to such as are simply pleasures and diversions, or the advantage whereof is very remote and almost imperceptible. In this view, the more mental pleasures have a manifest preference to the more sensual or the barely sensual. When I please my palate by favourite meats, or charm it by generous and racy wine; when I flatter my olfactory nerves by aromatic and delicious odours; when I delight myself in the sensations of a genial warmth, a refreshing breeze, or other gentle impressions on the organs of feeling; when I beguile the tediousness of time by honest diversion; when I totally unbend, and yield alternately to the sweet impressions of outward things: all this is real pleasure; but it is merely pleasure, nothing but pleasure, that is sometimes advantageous in its consequences, but never of itself. As often, on the other hand, as I engage in serious or lively, instructive or witty conversation, or frequent sensible company,

company, as often as I contemplate the beauties of nature, or the harmony of sounds, or the works of art, with earnestness and sentiment; as often as I administer wholesome food to my mind, my sagacity and my sensibility, by reading or hearing the performances of genius; as often as I employ myself in reflection or in exercises of devotion, or in works of beneficence: so often I enjoy pleasure, actual pleasure, and yet not merely pleasure, but, at the same time, during the enjoyment, I promote a useful exercise of my mental powers, of my taste, my sensibility, my talents and ingenuity, and in so doing immediately forward my perfection and happiness. Therefore continue no labour to absolute fatigue, till you feel quite weakened and exhausted, and require a total relaxation, and so force yourself to seek mere pleasure, or rather a not disagreeable inactivity and repose, in attending to your health or your life; whenever the choice of your pleasures depends on yourself, and you may enjoy one as well as another without detriment, prefer that which by a moderate employment affords you recreation and exercise at once, to that which barely gives you rest, or barely pleasure, or inspires you with new strength and vigour only in its consequences.

Fourthly, let no sensual pleasure become a passion, if you would not run the hazard of losing your liberty, and of falling into the most lamentable bondage. He that indulges himself as frequently in sensual pleasure as he has the means and opportunities
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for 't, will soon find that he cannot forego it without uneasiness and reluctance: and he who cannot deprive himself of it, without thinking himself unhappy, will soon find it become a passion; that is, he will no longer be able to withstand the calls and allurements of it — will prefer it to all other kinds of pleasure, sacrifice them all to that one, and think himself happy only while in the enjoyment of it. And when matters are come to this pass, how can the man still preserve his freedom? How will he be able to do that which reason and conscience in all events enjoin him as the fittest and best? How often will he not neglect the most urgent affairs and violate the most sacred duties, for running after this pleasure which is every thing to him! How often will the bare want of this, or the impossibility of enjoying it, render him indisposed, unqualified, too languid for any other exertion of his faculties, for any serious business, for any useful occupation!—And how can a man in this situation be happy? Nay, the oftener he must deny himself the pleasure he so passionately pursues (and neither his own nature, nor the nature of other things and other men, will allow him so frequently to enjoy it as he would wish) the oftener therefore he must deny himself to it, so much the oftener must he, more or less, be miserable. Would you avoid this thralldom and this misery, my pious hearers; then suffer not the propensity to sensual pleasure to get the command over you; allow it not to become so violent as that you cannot withstand it. To this

end, accustom yourselves to abstinence from this kind of pleasures. Enjoy them not so frequently as circumstances and time permit; not so frequently as you have opportunities and inclination thereto. Break off from them at times, on purpose, that you may learn to be deprived of them without anxiety or vexation; merely that you may maintain the command over yourself, and the rights of your reason and liberty; merely that you may not become the slaves to such things, as you probably must, one time or other, relinquish whether you will or no, and the privation of which would render you unhappy, if you had not previously accustomed yourself to it. Hard as the observance of this rule may appear, it is absolutely necessary for every man who would be wise and virtuous, and capable of lasting peace and a solid felicity.

Lastly, for the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, however innocent they may be, neglect not the loftier and purer pleasures of the mind. Let them not render you unfit for these. Let these ever have the precedence over them. They are deceitful, transient, of short duration; these are altogether what they seem; perform all that they promise, and even more; are incorruptible and eternal. The former we can only enjoy so long as we have these organs of sense; with the death of our body they fall totally away. The latter abide with us after we have past the grave, and gate of death; we can enjoy them as long as our spirit exists and lives and acts. The
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knowledge of truth will rejoice us for ever, yield us inexhaustible materials for reflection and pleasure, and raise us continually to higher knowledge. Goodness, virtuous sentiments, actions and dispositions, will never cease from blessing us with the delightful consciousness of excellence and intrinsic worth. Communion with God will be to us an inexhaustible source of the most elevated pleasure and joy. But these spiritual pleasures can only then be so, after we have known and loved and sought and enjoyed them here, and preferred them to every other kind of pleasure. He that has confined himself here to merely sensual pleasures, must necessarily be miserable in the future state. He brings with him the eager appetite for pleasure, and all the means of gratifying it are gone. Can you represent to yourselves a state of greater torment than this?

Beware, my dear brethren, of this; purify and exalt you taste, frequently reflect on your future lot; say often to yourselves: No, I am not wholly dust, not totally subject to corruption; I am not merely an animal man. There is a spirit within me, a rational, immortal spirit, capable of greater perfection, of a higher felicity; a spirit, whose life and nutriment consists not in meat and drink, not in sensual lusts, but in knowledge and virtue, and love towards God and man; a spirit, whose future portion depends on my present behaviour, whose future pleasures will be determined by those which I at present most seek, most prize, most love! Mere sensual pleasures can-

not satisfy it; they follow it not into its higher state; it cannot transport them with it into a better world. No; I will even now endeavour to secure to myself those nobler pleasures, those purer joys, to which I am invited as a man and a christian; will at present exercise myself in every thing that can render me capable of that hope! Then, let all sensual earthly pleasures be as short, as imperfect, and transient as they may, however soon to be torn from me, I still know, that quite other satisfactions await me, celestial, divine, eternal, which will immensely compensate the loss of them.

SERMON IX.

The Value of Intellectual Pleasures.

O GOD, the father of all mankind, of all spirits, — eternal source of all that is and lives and thinks! Even us thou hast raised to the rank of thinking, intelligent, spiritual beings, to the rank of thy children, of thy eminently favoured children, who know thee as their father, and can have communion with thee! If thou have made us like to the inhabitants of the dust and connected us with an earthly body, yet is there within us a spiritual life, a spiritual energy which lifts us far above dust and earth, and tells us, that we are formed after thy image, that we are thy offspring! And how much has not thy fatherly goodness provided for the sustenance, the gratification, the ever increasing excellence of our mind! With what abilities and capacities furnished it! What sources of the purest, most

exalted pleasure opened to it! And how chearful, how happy might we not already be in this state of our infancy, if we knew how to prize and to employ our advantages aright! Oh that we never forgot our superior origin, our proximate connection with thee, our near affinity with thy son Jesus and our glorious appointment hereafter, — never thought and acted as merely sensual creatures, but continually as intelligent, spiritual, immortal men! Teach us then thyself to understand and to feel our dignity, to prefer before all things that which connects us with higher beings, and with thee, the Most High, ever better and better to use and to exercise our noble faculties and abilities, and thus ever to render ourselves more worthy of being called thy children and brethren of thy son Jesus, who is highly exalted over all! — Let the knowledge of truth, the love and practice of virtue, benevolence and beneficence, the endeavour after perfection, and the sublime prerogative of raising ourselves to thee, and of having communion with thee, be ever more important, ever dearer to us; and grant, that we may seek and find therein that pure pleasure, that permanent felicity which every where else we should seek in vain. Bless to this end the doctrines that are now to be delivered to us. Let our propensity to pleasure be thereby purified and elevated. These our petitions we humbly offer up to thee in the name of our lord and saviour Jesus Christ, and call upon thee farther in his words: Our father, &c.

EPHES. V. 18.

Be filled with the spirit.

FREQUENTLY have I already recommended to you intellectual pleasures, as the purest, the noblest, the most durable of all others; already often told you that they are the most worthy of us, both as men and as christians, the most conformable with our high vocation, and the fittest preparation for our entrance on the future state; often have I encouraged and exhorted you to give them the preference to all other kinds of pleasure, with the assurance that you will never repent of your choice. Even in my last discourse in treating of the value of sensual pleasure, I recommended those of the mind as far more excellent. And this they certainly are; as certainly and indisputably as our spirit is of a nobler nature and frame than our body; as certainly as things undecaying are better than things transitory, infinite greater than finite, eternity of more consequence than time; as certainly as that our affinity with the angels, with Jesus, with God himself, is more glorious and desirable than our relationship with the plants and the beasts of the field. He that is acquainted with these pleasures of the mind, who knows them by experience, has often enjoyed them, can never more do without them; they

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will be as urgently necessary to him as eating and drinking to the sensual man; and he runs so little risk of losing his relish for them, that, on the contrary, he will have cause to beware lest for them he should utterly despise and neglect all other pleasures of an inferior order, the enjoyment of which is not only allowed, but is often needful and salutary.

And yet there are comparatively but a small number of persons who are of this opinion. Sensual pleasures are in general far higher prized, far more ardently sought after, far more stedfastly pursued than intellectual. The former will find a hundred admirers and encomiasts, where the latter will scarcely have one. The former make a hundred times the subject and solace of social conversations; while the latter are scarcely mentioned, I mean mentioned with truth and sentiment. Every one praises the former, whether young or old, whether he partakes of them or not; while the latter are but seldom noticed, and declared to be what they really are.

And whence does this arise? Does it not, partly at least, proceed hence, that these pleasures are not sufficiently known; that we do not rightly understand what they are, what they produce, what they insure to us, and wherein their proper value consists? Indeed the essence of pleasure, of whatever kind, or that which causes pleasure to be so, is not easy to be described, not strictly to be defined. Pleasure is sensation. He that would properly know it, he that would taste its sweets, must himself experience, must
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himself enjoy it. The sources of these pleasures however, may be ascertained, some of their fruits and effects may be illustrated; something, at least, may be said of their nature and quality. Probably a greater attention may be excited towards them, some appetite after them, perhaps a resolution may be produced to become better acquainted with them by a diligent examination of their merits.

And this is what I am desirous of doing at present in regard of intellectual pleasures. I may, perhaps, contribute either to render such to whom they are strange, or not sufficiently familiar, more attentive to them, or to strengthen and confirm the avidity and love for them in such as have already directed their taste that way.

This is, if not the only, at least one indispensable means of obeying the apostle's injunction in our text, where he says to christians, Be ye filled with the spirit. Be thoroughly impressed with the spirit of religion and of christianity; open your understanding and your heart to their influence; let that which makes you wise and sincere christians, which inspires you with pious and virtuous dispositions, which will give you a spiritual life, spiritual faculties, and spiritual joys, be much dearer to you, much more earnestly sought after than the gratification of the sensual appetites. Seek them with infinitely greater ardour than such as degrade your spirit, and may easily lead you to licentiousness and profligacy. We shall not therefore de-

part from the purport of the apostolical exhortation, in admonishing you concerning intellectual pleasures, and their pre-eminent value. To this end, I shall, first, make some general observations on intellectual pleasures; and then go through the principal kinds of them in particular, and point out their value.

You know, from my last discourse, what we are to understand by intellectual pleasures; namely, pleasures which our mind procures to itself, which are produced more by its own activity than by the impressions made externally on our senses. Our senses indeed furnish us with the materials, they give our mind the first ideas of them, and the stock is increased by their ministration. But our mind works up these materials, modifies this fund; arranges, separates, combines them; it reflects upon what we have learnt and experienced by our sight, by our hearing, by our feeling, and the like, of outward objects; proceeds from particulars to generals, from visible to invisible: and whenever it discovers order, truth, beauty, goodness, perfection, it forms mental representations of them, more or less lively and apparent, and withal looks back on itself and its powers with consciousness — or when ever it can only exert and apply its proper faculties easily and effectually in a manner adapted to its views and desires — let the things wherein it is employed be either true or not true, good or evil — it then enjoys what we term intellectual pleasure. It has an agreeable sensation of its existence, of its present condition, which is
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founded on this sentiment and display of its capacities and powers, and its relation to the whole material and intellectual world.

These intellectual pleasures are frequently divided into pleasures of the mind and pleasures of the heart. The pleasures of the mind are founded on knowledge, on clear perceptions, on plain or comprehensive conceptions, and luminous excursions into the unbounded realms of truth; on the great variety of ideas, and as various, though not common connection between them; on easy, quick, and happy turns of wit, of sagacity, of fancy, of argument: The pleasures of the heart consist more in the lively sensation, representation and display of what is true, beautiful, good, generous, or great and extraordinary; but principally in benevolence and beneficence. — In fact, they are not easily to be discriminated, being all operations of one and the same intellectual faculty, the mind and heart having generally an equal share in each, and they need not be farther distinguished. We will just add a few more general remarks on the natural and moral frame of these pleasures, before we proceed to their particular kinds.

Every intellectual, as well as every sensual pleasure, is real pleasure, is, for the time, a really agreeable sensation, whether morally good or evil, innocent or criminal. When the envious and malevolent man discloses any secret infirmity of his brother, drags into view his imperfections and failings, recalls them on every occasion to his mind, and delights himself

in dwelling on them; when the revengeful man represents to himself in lively colours the misfortune of an enemy, with all its dismal consequences, and rejoices in the idea; they both receive a real pleasure, they actually feel agreeable sensations. But this pleasure is so far from being enviable, that it is detestable, shocking—diabolical pleasure; a pleasure that disturbs, debases and disgraces the man; a pleasure, that sooner or later repays him with pain and remorse, deprives him of a thousand nobler pleasures, and renders him at length incapable of them.

Hence it follows, that there are likewise unlawful and criminal intellectual pleasures. Not all and each are harmless; not all and each are noble, not all worthy of the man and the christian. To devise extensive, complicated, artful schemes for compassing the hurt of another, and to bring them to effect, notwithstanding all the obstacles and difficulties a man meets with in his crooked, dark, and perilous way; to employ his sagacity in raising difficulties and perplexing doubts on matters indispensable to religion—to injure the innocent by his wit, to obscure the merit of the deserving, to make venerable subjects ridiculous, to give free scope to humour in writings or discourse, whether it may wound or please; all this is intellectual pleasure, but low, disgraceful, guilty pleasure; pleasure that can excite agreeable sensations only in the heart of the ungenerous, the evil-minded and vicious man.

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Still farther. Even harmless, exalted intellectual pleasures may become hurtful when immoderately enjoyed, when continued till they exhaust the faculties, destroy the health, or even shorten life. Even innocent, noble intellectual pleasures may become criminal, if by our inflexible attachment to them we are prevented from discharging the duties of our station, our office, or our vocation; if they deprive us of the society and conversation of our fellow-creatures; if, by too strictly avoiding all sensual or social pleasures, we bring wisdom, virtue, and piety into disrepute. Thus will even the pleasure of devotion be a pernicious and criminal pleasure in respect of a man, who for them should neglect the affairs of his calling, or omit his duty towards his parents, his children, or his family. — — These observations, my pious hearers, will suffice for rectifying your ideas on what intellectual pleasures are in general — and cautioning you against misapplying these corrected notions of them. Let us now briefly run over the principal kinds of these intellectual pleasures, and point out their nature and value.

Every application of our intellectual powers that is performed without violence, or wearisome efforts, with ease and effect, procures us intellectual pleasure, be the object what it may, important or unimportant, great or small, whether it relate to religion, or to sciences, or arts, or the common affairs of life. Whenever we frame in our minds clear ideas of things, discriminate them more or less by our sagacity,

city, discover their principle and connection by our reason — or, by our imagination, make what is absent to be present to us, render the invisible visible, give a reality in our minds to what is barely possible; and thus, as it were, create new worlds of our own: whenever we exert our faculties in this or any similar manner, and are conscious of it to ourselves, we immediately experience a pleasing sentiment of existence, and of our actual condition; we are rejoiced to feel that we have these faculties, that we employ them, that we are able to employ them in such various ways, and with such good effects, that we can perform these or other matters by them. And this sentiment of our faculties must be the more pleasing to us, must communicate so much greater value to our pleasure, the more clearly we perceive that they essentially belong to our Self, and are a far more solid, more durable ground of our perfection and happiness, than all outwards things that we possess and esteem.

We therefore farther enjoy intellectual pleasure when we labour at the augmentation and rectification of our knowledge, and are employed to this end in reading or reflection, or in both of them at once. And, in fact, what a pleasure must it not procure us when we contemplate the works of nature; when we investigate the plants, the animals, man, their various qualities, abilities, views, connections, operations, and objects; when we contemplate the diversity, the grandeur, the order, the beauty,

beauty, the harmony of all the Creator's works! every where life, activity, action — every where design, principles, means of felicity and joy, or actual enjoyment, infinitely diversified enjoyment of happiness and joy; on all sides so great and such various powers arising, expanding, and operating in their allotted sphere; operating in such various, in such opposite directions, and ever contributing to the support and advantage of the whole! What a pleasure, when we raise ourselves in thought from earth to heaven, and there lose ourselves among the numberless multitudes of suns and worlds, of sources of existence and life, of new theatres of the majesty and glory of God, and soar from one part of his immense dominion to another, and no where discover either term or limits to his power or wisdom; when we find the Creator of the world every where equally great, immensely great, in every part as in the whole, in a grain of sand as in the fabric of the world immensely great, and immensely good! What a delightful, what a ravishing sentiment of our powers, of our existence, of our relationship with the world and its author, must not these contemplations, these prospects yield us! With what pure intellectual pleasure flow through all our faculties! And this, in a greater or a less degree, does every enlargement of our perceptions, every addition to our knowledge, every not totally successful investigation of nature and the design of things, every step whereby we approach to the discovery of truth, or which gives us a plainer

plainer and clearer conception of the truths we already know. This in particular does the meditation on the doctrines of religion, as God himself has revealed them to us in his word and principally by Jesus. The purer, the richer, the more authentic these sources of knowledge be, the more must they satisfy our thirst after light and truth and certainty; the more true and lasting pleasure must we acquire from them.

A third source of intellectual pleasure lies particularly in reflection on ourselves, on our nature, our powers and abilities, our present and future appointment. Certainly, a spacious and fruitful field of meditation, which, if we love goodness, with all our imperfections and frailties, opens to us far more pleasant than unpleasant prospects, supplies us with far more materials for agreeable than disagreeable sensations. What man but must rejoice in his existence, when he is studying and feeling and conjecturing what he is, and what hereafter he will be and become; when, with all his abasement and weakness, he discovers in himself evident lineaments of the image of God, the germ of future elevation and grandeur; when he sees how much he may grow, from everlasting to everlasting, in knowledge, in virtue, in activity, in bliss; when he considers what God has already done for man by Jesus, and how much greater things he may hope for from him in futurity. What prolific dispositions, what great, and as yet almost unopened abilities, what ac-
tive,

tive, what effective powers, but at present circumscribed and limited on all sides, and restricted faculties, does he not find within him, when he at times succeeds in being absorbed, as it were into himself, and is able to observe the action and process of his own mind! Then how much must he not rejoice in his destination, and how much greater and nobler must this joy be than all sensible and transient things can give him!

Fourthly, it is intellectual pleasure, or procures us intellectual pleasure, when we labour at our moral improvement, and find our labour attended by happy effects. What agreeable sensations we feel when we have avoided one temptation to sin, or happily conquered another; when we form a good purpose and carry it into execution; now, no more to commit a fault that used so often and so suddenly to surprize us, no longer to submit to its strong attractions, then to perform with readiness and joy some good and generous action, which used to seem so hard, to which we were much averse, and must be urged to it by compulsion! What a pleasure, when we perceive a constantly increasing degree of truth, order, and harmony prevailing between our perceptions, sentiments, dispositions, and actions, that we are ever seldomer liable to errors and sins, seldomer deceived by sensual desires, or driven about by inordinate passions; that our love of goodness is always improving in strength and activity; that we are constantly advancing towards christian liberty

and perfection, and thereby to a nearer resemblance with Jesus, our leader and lord, and even with God himself! To conquer ourself and the world; to be able to pass from bondage to freedom, and to enjoy this freedom constantly more entire; to feel new life, new strength within; to be proceeding on the way of wisdom and virtue; to be constantly advancing nearer to the mark of our high calling,—what intrinsic, what pure delights must this not procure the man who feels his own dignity, and strives after perfection! And how much more value must not these pleasures have in his eyes, than all such as may procure him riches and honour, improve his outward circumstances, and soothe his sensual appetites!

We enjoy, fifthly, intellectual pleasure, when we engage in profitable and instructive discourse with others; when we reciprocally impart our perceptions, our observations, our doubts, our experiences to each other; confirm one another in our good and christian dispositions; mutually consult one another on our most important affairs and prospects in the present and in the future world; and this in the spirit of love, in the language of confidence, and in the abundance of our heart. Then one thought begets and unfolds another; one sentiment excites and corroborates another; one heart warms and rejoices another. One helps another forward in the way of knowledge, of wisdom, of virtue and of happiness. Each partakes of the light, of the warmth, of the life, of the powers of the rest. And what is more
blessed,

bleſſed, than in this manner to give and to receive, and thereby to unite more cloſely with wiſe and good men! How far muſt not this noble intellectual pleaſure, which is never exhausted and never inſipid, which brings after it neither vexation nor remorse, how far muſt it excel every other leſs intellectual kind of ſocial pleaſure!

A ſixth ſource of intellectual pleaſure, not leſs rich and ſtill richer than the former, is a general hearty benevolence towards all mankind. How agreeably muſt this not employ the mind of the man, of the chriſtian! What mild and bliſſful ſenſations muſt it not excite and ſupport! He ſees his brethren and ſiſters in all the human race, creatures and children of his heavenly Father; ſharers in his immortality and the glories of everlaſting life. How pleaſant then muſt their countenances be to him! How much beauty, goodneſs, and amiableneſs, muſt he ſee in them, which is and remains inviſible to the eyes of the envious, the malicious, the thoughtleſs man! How great a ſhare, how agreeable and delightful a ſhare does he not take in their fortunes, their merits, their ſucceſſes, and their advances on the path to perfection! How heartily does he rejoice in it all! How bleſſed in them and with them; while all is indifferent to the unfeeling man, who finds nothing in it for his thoughts or his ſenſations!

And when he can act conſiſtently with his benevolence, can be actually beneficent towards his brethren, when he can ſerve and help them, can com-

fort and relieve them, lessen their misery, advance their happiness; when he can in general lead a useful life and effect goodness far around him : how happy is he then ! What pleasures stream into his heart, and what still richer, never-failing sources of pleasure has he not to hope for in futurity, in the prospect of all the good consequences of his beneficent deeds !

Lastly, the noblest, the most exalted kind of intellectual pleasure, is undoubtedly the pleasure of devotion. Represent to yourselves, my dear brethren, that at least you may acquire some conceptions of this pleasure, represent to yourselves a man, who raises himself with his whole mind to God ; whose soul is entirely penetrated with thoughts of God, who feels the presence of him with stronger vivacity than ordinary, perceives his power, his wisdom, his goodness on all sides wherever he turns his eyes and his thoughts, in the clearest light, feels that in this God he lives, and moves, and has his being, that this God is his creator, his preserver, his father, his benefactor, and will be so for ever ; that through him he subsists and thinks and acts and is happy ; a man who rejoices in his God, and enjoys a close and intimate connection with him ; experiences the highest, and constantly efficient benevolence of this God towards him ; recollects all the bounties he has received from him, and expects, in perfect confidence, still larger supplies of bounty from him : a man that prostrates himself in sentiments of reverence and love, before

before the great parent of the world, addressees him as the Being from whom all things proceed, and to whom all things belong; loses himself in reflections on his majesty and glory; reposes entirely on his will, in perfect confidence surrenders to him the guidance and direction of his life, lays all his thoughts, his sentiments, his desires, his wants, his cares, his hopes, without hesitation or reserve, before him; and from the fulness of divine power and love imbibes and enjoys whatever can strengthen and comfort and improve and bless him: a man who represents this God to himself, as he has revealed himself to us by Jesus; feels the entire felicity of his near connection and relationship with the only-begotten of the Father, with the saviour and deliverer of mankind, the entire felicity of being a redeemed of the Lord, a member of his spiritual body, a christian, and of thus having fellowship with the Father and with his son Jesus: a man, who, in these blessed moments of such inward sentiments of the deity, unites himself with all his brethren upon earth in the presence of their common father, who embraces them all, like him, with benevolence and love, who strives to bring them all with himself nearer to him, to render them more well-pleasing in his sight and more susceptible of his grace and goodness: a man, in short, who loses from his sight what is terrestrial and transitory, already transports himself in spirit into his future and better state, joins the society of just men made

perfect, soars to the blissful abodes of superior spirits, already tastes something of their purer felicity, and enjoys beforehand the pleasures he is hereafter to receive: represent to yourselves, I say, such a man, such a christian, and tell me whether such exercises of devotion do not render him happy in a high degree; whether the pleasure, the satisfaction, the joy they procure him, must not be the greatest, the most exalted, the most covetable of all the pleasures whereof he is capable.

Behold then so many abundant sources of intellectual pleasure that stand open to you! You may all draw water out of these wells of salvation!—draw joy and felicity from them!—Intellectual pleasures are not reserved exclusively for the scholar or the divine. No; they are for you all! None are deficient in the capacities and means for the enjoyment of them; none can neglect them without manifestly injuring his happiness. But indeed they are not alike copious to all, equally lively, equally agreeable and satisfactory. Indeed they must be almost wholly unknown and foreign to you, if you do not exercise your intellectual powers, if you do not elevate them above sensible things, if you do not accustom yourselves to reflect upon what you see, what you hear, what you do, and what you experience; if you studiously avoid retirement and silence, the parent of most and the purest of intellectual pleasures; or if you regard knowledge and wisdom and virtue as indifferent things.

Avoid

Avoid these mistakes, my pious hearers, if you would understand what spiritual pleasures are, and enjoy them when understood, and be happy in their enjoyment. Exercise yourselves in whatever may procure you such pleasures, though at first it should seem hard or disagreeable to you. As there are various kinds of sensual pleasures of which we cannot partake, unless we have studied and been trained to them; so likewise must our capacities be drawn forth and trained to intellectual pleasures, our taste must be formed to them, we must know them, must use the proper means to acquire them, must study to enjoy and to enjoy them more completely.

Learn to reflect, to think with consciousness and consideration, think on what you have already thought of, again and again, till it be clear and plain to your understanding, and truly important to your heart. Study to read, to hear, to feel, to observe, with attention, reflection, and interest; learn to collect your thoughts from dispersion; frequently call them off from outward things, and direct them to yourself, to your present condition, and your future state; learn particularly to converse with God, in all situations to think of him and to look towards him, to rejoice in his existence, his presence, and his bounties. Learn to pray, and thereby to have communion with him. Do this, though never so imperfectly at first, in never so short, so abrupt and irksome a way, as may reasonably be expected from your infirmity and want of practice. But do it frequently;

frequently; devote to it certain hours and seasons; return to it again; let not the first difficulties deter you from it; require not to reap before you have sown. The oftener, the more sedulously you do this, so much the easier and the more cheerfully will you do it, so much the more pleasure will it procure you, so much the higher relish will you find in this kind of pleasure; and soon you will not be able to do without it, — you will prefer it infinitely beyond all others.

I mean not to say, that you must relinquish all sensual pleasures, that you must seek and enjoy only such as are merely intellectual. No; you may enjoy them both: but these are much purer, nobler, and more lasting than the others; these are able to render you far more excellent and happy than they can do; these must be of infinitely greater value to you, if you would be what you are ordained to be and capable of becoming as men and as christians.

And herein, my christian friends, you may and should take for your pattern Jesus, our great captain and leader on the path of wisdom and bliss. He enjoyed also sensual pleasures; sat down to feasts; associated with men of various kinds; ate and drank, as he says himself, like other folks, without distinguishing himself from them by any particular austerity. But spiritual pleasures had infinitely the preference with him. To accomplish the will of him that sent him, and to be useful to his brethren, was his food, his pleafantest, his darling business. The
pleasure

pleasure of doing good he preferred to all the accommodations of life, to sleep, to rest, and to every other comfort. He past whole nights in exercises of devotion and prayer; not from compulsion, not because it was his duty, but because it was his delight, his real life. He took part in all that happened around him; but always so that his mind was employed in reflecting upon it, and seeking to apply it by some means or other to the instruction and advantage of such as were present. God, futurity, his mission from the Father, his return to him, his grand, beneficent work on earth, were ever before his eyes, and ever in his heart. Love towards God, his heavenly Father, and love towards man, directing and blessing him at every step, were the soul of all his sentiments and actions, the source of his sublimest joy. Endeavour to resemble him in this, all of you who endeavour after christian perfection and happiness! Consider yourselves not barely as sensual but also as spiritual beings; not merely as mortal, but also as immortal men; not merely as strangers and pilgrims on the earth, but likewise as the denizens of heaven; as such, look not merely to things visible and transitory, but likewise and still more to the invisible and eternal; strive to fulfill your whole vocation, and so enjoy every real satisfaction, every kind of felicity which God has prepared for you, both in this and in the future world.

SERMON X.

The Value of Devotion.

O GOD! father of all spirits, the life and joy of all thinking rational beings in heaven and on earth; how precious to us is the thought of thee! How it elevates our mind! How it enlarges our heart! What light it sheds over all thy works and ways, over all our fortunes, over our present and future appointment! Yes; when we think on thee, we do what man alone, of all the creatures of the earth, can do, and what all superior beings esteem, with us, their highest honour, their purest pleasure! When we solemnly approach thee and feel thy more immediate presence, then sorrow and trouble and anxious cares are put to flight; then are we in the presence of our kind and gracious parent, and feel ourselves surrounded entirely with the effects of eternal love! When we have communion with thee,
then

then no want, no danger, no distress alarms us; then can we find all things with thee and draw from thy fullness light and power and bliss. How happy then are we, that we know thee, and can raise ourselves to thee and have communion with thee! And how much happier should we be were we enabled duly to prize the value of this privilege, and to use it in its whole extent; if we kept ourselves continually nigh thee, sought and found thee every where, and constantly walked in the light of thy countenance! Do thou thyself sustain and strengthen our spirit when it strives to rise to thee; draw thou thyself our hearts entirely to thee; grant us ever better to understand our blessed connection with thee, ever more intimately to feel it and ever to think and act more conformably to it! In the furtherance of this design bless the considerations that are now to employ us. Teach us to perceive and feel the dignity and the blessedness of devotion so that we may learn to revere and love it and become ever more capable of enjoying its delights. For this we pray thee in the name of our lord Jesus Christ, and, as his votaries, sum up our petitions in his words: Our father, &c.

EPHES. V. 18.

Be filled with the spirit.

DEVOTION that noblest of all intellectual pleasures, devotion undergoes the reproach, not only of confessedly wicked men, but at times likewise of better disposed persons, as promising more than it performs, as being more cried up than its merits deserve. The principles, however, on which these judgments are founded are very different. The former, the vicious man, has no sentiment, no feeling for refined intellectual pleasures. God and religion and silent meditation upon them, are matters never of any importance to him; often, perhaps, irksome or frightful to him: accordingly he rejects every thing he hears said and reported of the joys of this nature, as the effects of fancy and self-deceit. — The latter, the better disposed man, does not proceed so far. The exercises of religion are not indifferent to him. He has suggestions and prepossessions in their favour, that they may be useful and agreeable. He has observed these exercises not absolutely without pleasure. But prejudices, want of experience, imperfect examinations of the subject, prevent him from taking them for what they really are, from enjoying what

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others

others pretend to enjoy in them ; and the suspicion of their being less important, and less productive, is continually increasing upon him. — I have frequently, says he to himself, I have frequently heard of the value, the excellency, and the utility of devotion. Devotion, it is said, diffuses the clearest light over the understanding of man ; warms his heart with the noblest sentiments, with the most delightful sensations of the love of God and man ; is his best comforter in all the cares and troubles of life ; procures him the purest, the sublimest joys ; and brings him constantly nearer to the deity. I will believe it, says the mistaken or the feeble christian, since people say so, whose testimony is of great weight with me. But my experience, I must confess, is not in correspondence with it. I pray ; I read too ; I attend the church service ; and I do all this with attention, and in the view of becoming better and happier. But the alertness, the pleasure, the joy, which others boast, I feel nothing of. On the contrary, the performance of these duties is frequently burdensome to me, I am often forced to do violence to myself, if I would avoid distraction on such occasions ; and, after these exercises, I commonly find myself neither better, nor more at rest, nor more satisfied than I was before. Let a strong temptation to sin present itself, I fall as directly under it ; if any misfortune befalls me, it as quickly oversets me ; if I suffer any considerable loss, I can scarcely support it ; am I to make any sacrifice to virtue, to forego all thoughts of revenge,

venge, or to do good to my enemy ; I am as deficient in power and inclination to it ; if I fall into danger, I no more know what part to take, or whom to trust. Where then is the mighty advantage, the great blessing of devotion ? Is it not all, perhaps, fanaticism and fancy ? — — No ; that it is not, my christian brother, my christian sifter ! It is truth and reason ; it is really and truly what such as understand and revere it, give out that it is. The deficiency of thy experience cannot prove the contrary. It only proves, that thy devotion is not what it might and what it ought to be.

Every thing that passes for devotion is not truly such. No term perhaps is more lavished, misapplied, and prophaned than this. One while it is made to signify outward, solemn usages and ceremonies ; at another, the merely being present at the public worship ; sometimes a cold reading or repetition of certain forms of prayer ; sometimes every reflection, however erroneous, on God or religion, is honoured with this venerable name.—But all this is not devotion ; at most is only something like devotion, or something that may excite us to devotion. — It cannot therefore have the value, produce the advantages, nor afford the joys which devotion confers upon us.—No ; this is not what the words of the apostle in our text imply, the being filled with the spirit. The signification of this is much larger. It means a heart thoroughly impressed with the doctrines of religion and christianity, and a perfect confidence in them. To
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fettle your notions on this matter, to warn you against misconceptions about it, and to give you some suggestions to worthy and fruitful devotion, is the design of my discourse to-day. To this end I shall do two things: first, point out to you what devotion is, wherein its value consists, what benefit it procures to mankind; and then, what is required of a man, what he must do, wherein he must exercise himself, of what he must beware, for obtaining the advantages of it; and in particular for enjoying the pure pleasure we are promised from devotion, and for constantly heightening that enjoyment.

Devotion is not so much a duty, as a privilege and the reward of duty. It is not to be commanded; not to be extorted; all men are not capable of it; all cannot enjoy it in the same manner, and to the same degree. It is the property rather of the confirmed and trained than of the weak and unsettled christian. It bespeaks an enlightened mind, a good, well-regulated heart, an innocent conduct, free from all intentional transgressions and iniquities, a certain exercise and skill in reflecting on spiritual matters, a confirmed taste for these matters and these reflections; in short, a certain disposition for retirement, and for self-investigation. When the man, the christian, in possession of these, collects himself from distraction, retires to solitude, and there turns his thoughts on God and sacred things, the attention he bestows on them is devotion. These things are to him of extreme importance; his heart takes the
greatest

greatest, the strongest interest in them; there arise in him sentiments of reverence, of love, of gratitude towards God, of confidence in him, of entire resignation to his will, sentiments of joy, of hope, of assurance, of aspirations after purer and more exalted virtue and happiness, after a closer communion with God; a more intimate union with Jesus, as the delegate of God and the head of the christian fold; and then he enjoys the benefit of devotion, the advantages and the pleasures she procures her friends and votaries. And how great are not these advantages! how diversified these benefits and these pleasures!

Nothing elevates and fortifies the spirit of a man more than devotion. When the devout man lifts up himself to God, and adores his greatness and glory, he exalts himself to the Father of spirits, to the eternal source of light, of power, of truth, of beauty, and perfection; feels his connection, his intimate, indissoluble, his blessed connection with this first and greatest and best of beings; he sees and considers all things around him, as the work of his hands, as the objects of his providence and complacency; sees and considers himself as his creature, as his rational subject, as his eminently favoured child; as the object of his loving-kindness and mercy, as an instrument of his all-quickenng spirit, his ever-operating power; and when he thus approaches his Creator and Father, and has such a communion with him, how much more justly, generously, and nobly does he not learn to think, to judge, to feel! How strikingly

ingly does he perceive the wretchedness of all human grandeur! How far does he soar above the thousands of little terrestrial concerns, so many insignificant objects of the envy, the jealousy, and the dissensions of mankind! How many more and much loftier things comprehend with close participation, with complacency and love! And what strength must not this impart to his mind! How infinitely must it enlarge his visible horizon and the comprehension of his understanding, how much the sensibility of his heart! What a much more noble, more heavenly, more godlike frame of mind, must it not give him!

For these reasons, nothing carries a man farther on his progress in virtue than devotion. It makes him better acquainted with God, the original of all that is beautiful and good and venerable and amiable; it renders him more intimate with Jesus, the visible image of his Father, the compendium of all human perfection; discovers to him on all sides greater displays of truth and order and goodness in every part of the immense kingdom of God, in all the dispensations of the providence and government of the Most High; causes him to feel the dignity of his nature and the grandeur of his vocation; kindles, inflames his avidity to be and become entirely what he may and should be and become; transports him beyond the borders of death and the grave, and there gives him a glimpse of the glorious consequences of his endeavours, to think and to act aright and to do

the will of God : and must not this make virtue ever the dearer to him, the practice of it constantly easier, every sacrifice that it may require of him ever more agreeable? Will this ever suffer him to abate of his zeal to acquire a nearer and nearer resemblance to Christ, to imitate God, his heavenly Father, and to fit himself for that future life in which his faculties will be improved and his virtues exalted?

Nothing at the same time is a surer refuge to the pious against the troubles and vexations of life than devotion. In the solemn hours of devotion, he sees every thing in quite another light, in combinations totally different. Then many evils cease to be evils in his sight, and are transformed into benefits. Many a gloomy period of his life then brightens up, and that which appeared to him a rough and devious way, becomes a straight and even path. He then learns to understand his appointment, though not in its entire consistency, yet he sees and understands that it has a consistency, and that the wisest and best. Then he approaches with filial freedom to his Father in heaven, opens his heart before him, casts all his cares upon him, reposes himself entirely on the will of him, who constantly wills and does the best. In his presence he fears no evil; under his protection he apprehends no danger; his gracious and paternal countenance has nothing terrible and revengeful in it to him even when he stumbles and falls; he sees in it, as well as in the impression of it, the countenance of Jesus, nothing but commiseration and
grace;

grace; nay, when he looks up to him, even death lays by its terrors; how can it tear him from the hands, from the heart of his Father, whose love he so intimately feels, and whose love is as everlasting as himself.

Nothing, in short, yields purer and sublimer joys to the pious than devotion. When, my dear brethren, when should a man more rejoice in his existence, when give fuller scope to his joy, than when he thinks most fervently on his intimate connection with his Creator and Father, and feels most intimately his being present with him? When has he more cause to rejoice in his life, and to be satisfied with his lot, than when he is sensible to the dignity and happiness of a creature formed after the image of God, of a christian called to a blessed immortality; than when the loveliest prospects in a better world lie open to his view; when he is animated by the infallible hope of being more closely united with Jesus and of always approaching nearer to God; when he feels what perfection he is capable of, and what blessedness awaits him? And what pleasures can be more desirable or more pure than these, which I may enjoy in the most lonely solitude, and in the most adverse circumstances; which I may even then enjoy when I am abandoned of all that is without me, of all that surrounds me, when every creature refuses me its comfort, its help, its support, when I am surrounded by darkness and the shadow of death? And all this I may promise myself from the pleasures of

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devotion.

devotion. On this the pious man may securely rely. It will never refuse him its support and assistance. This sanctuary stands always open to him, and never will he flee to it in vain. So great is the value, so manifold are the advantages of devotion.

Would you now enjoy these benefits, these advantages, these pleasures of devotion? It is then by no means indifferent in what manner you proceed. A man may facilitate the business; and he may likewise render it difficult. Herein his own experience will be the best instructor. We may, however, preserve you from many mistakes and deviations; we may afford you a few helps; we may call your attention to the best way of treating the matter. And to this end, I should hope, the following admonitions and rules will be of some service to you.

The devotion which is to procure us pleasure and joy must, in the first place, be founded on a right knowledge, on just conceptions of God. If thou art weak and unhappy enough, o man, to imagine God to be a fullen being, unconnected with the world and his creatures, who has once given them certain powers, prescribed them certain laws, assigned them a certain place in the territory of his immense dominion, and then stands in no farther connection with them, has no influence over them, and takes no concern about them; — or, if thou conceivest of God only as the Almighty, high above all as Creator and Monarch, before whom all worlds and all mankind are nothing, and whose power no creature is able to resist;

resist ; — or, if thou conceivest of him as a severe, inexorable, implacable being, who holds every sin to be an infinite affront to his majesty, which can never be repaired, never remitted, never forgiven, which he must necessarily punish, and is continually ready to punish ; as a being that requires more of us than we are able to perform, who has consigned the greatest part of his rational offspring to everlasting perdition, and in whose dominion more evil than good, more misery than happiness prevails ; if thou makest to thyself these and the like representations of God : then certainly thy exercises of devotion can have no pleasure, no joy, for thee. The sentiment of God must be a terror to thee, and the more deeply it is imprinted on thy soul, the longer thou dwellest upon it, the more disquietude and torment must come upon thee. Thou wilt tremble before God as thy sovereign and judge, thou wilt feel his authority over thee, and thy dependence on him ; but thou canst not rejoice in them. — — Wouldst thou do so, thou must form more just, more honourable conceptions of this awful being. Thou must be acquainted with God as thy Father ; revere him as love itself, as him who intends the welfare of all his creatures, who has designed them all for happiness, who governs them with patience and forbearance ; who is not only righteous towards them, but long-suffering, gracious, and merciful, and leads all to perfection that are capable of it, though by various ways. Thou must know and revere him, as he has discovered himself

to us by Jesus, as a God who requires not a servile dread but a filial affection of us, who allows us all free access to him; who receives and blesses us as sons, and does not treat us like bondsmen; who forgives all men their sins, and will remember them no more, so soon as they lament and forsake them; as a God, who cannot be better and more worthily honoured than by entirely relying on him, by placing our whole confidence in him, and by expecting real advantages, pure goodness from him. Only then, o christian; when thou hast thus learnt to think of God; and makest thyself familiar with these reflections; only then will they console and rejoice thee; then will every elevation of thy heart to God, every exercise of devotion be a comfort and a happiness to thee!

Would we, farther, enjoy frequently the advantages and pleasures of devotion, and enjoy them in a higher degree; then must religion and virtue be the constant companions and guides of our life; they must animate us at all times, in all places, in all our businesses and in all our pleasures; never totally cease from acting upon us. The pious man has the Lord always before him. The sentiment of God is never strange to him, never absent from him; he has so interwoven it with the whole texture of his mind, and in such various ways, that every thing reminds him of it, every thing calls him back to it, so that this sentiment sheds a living light around him, where persons with whom it is less habitual and im-
portant,

portant, perceive not the least occasion for it; where they will even think it a folly to be occupied in it. This sentiment thus generally edifies him in the moments of sacred silence, and of internal elevation of his heart to God, amidst the tumult of society, in the affairs of his calling, ever teaching him to enjoy social pleasures with more cheerfulness and innocency, and to fulfil more faithfully the duties of a busy life. Thus often does he feel the intimate presence of his God, comprehend the language of his wisdom and goodness in every plant, in every tree, in every animal, in every region, in the vernal morn, in the summer's day, in the sequestered bower, on the bank of the placid stream, in the awful gloom of the forest; and there erects altars to the God whom he has not seen, but has intensely thought of and sensibly felt, monuments in his heart which on a thousand similar occasions, excite in him similar reflections and sensations. Thus he sees and hears, as it were, his Maker, in the rushing of the torrent, in the howling of the winds, in the murmurs of the breeze, in the approach of the stormy cloud, in the flash of the vivid lightning, and the majestic peals of thunder, in the mild refreshing shower, and in the more copious falls of rain! He sees and hears him with still greater energy in mankind, his image, when he discovers truth and goodness and benevolence and beneficence and generous sentiments and cordial love in the features, in the looks, in the discourses, in the actions of his brethren. — And thus never is God far from him. He

seeks and he finds him, and rejoices in him, be he where he may, busied how he will, alone or in company, surrounded by animate or inanimate creatures. He is and lives and moves in God. And, when he collects his scattered thoughts, and directs his whole attention to him whom his soul loves and whose favour is its life, and can do this without interruption from external things, how blessed must these hours, these moments be to him! How much more will these sentiments expand and warm his heart! What a loftier flight give to his spirit, what livelier sensations to his heart! How much nearer bring him to the prime source of light and felicity!

Wouldst thou therefore learn to understand and enjoy the pleasures of devotion, my christian brother who complainest of the want of them; then make the thoughts of God more familiar to thee. Dismiss them not when they present themselves to thy mind; they can assimilate with all thy other thoughts, sensations, occupations, and pleasures, if they be but lawful and innocent. Solace thyself much rather in these meditations; cherish and support them as often as thou canst; imprint them deeply on thine heart, if thou canst but in some sort enjoy them as they pass. — Do so likewise with every thing that relates to religion, with every doctrine, every command, every promise, and every example of christianity. Do so particularly with the thoughts that arise on Jesus, our leader and deliverer, the similitude and the vicerent of God, our lord and king. Let his image,
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the image of his wisdom, his sublime and exalted piety, his generous philanthropy, his beneficent disposition and behaviour, frequently glide before thine eyes, be often present and as it were visible to thee. Make thyself constantly more and more familiar with these thoughts and sensations; bind them still closer and closer with all that thou thinkest and feelest besides, with whatever is in any way important to thee. Thus, when thou undertakest any peculiar exercise of devotion, it will not be a business that is foreign to thee; thou wilt not be going into unknown regions, but entering thy own possessions; persevere in that which at first thou canst only endure for a moment, and enjoy in a greater degree, in completer freedom, that pleasure which daily sweetens to thee so many though perhaps but short moments of thy life.

Would you, in the third place, enjoy the advantages and the pleasures of devotion, and not be deceived in your expectations from it, then do not require to enjoy them always in the same measure or degree. By so doing, you would endeavour after what is impossible, what is contrary to the nature of man, and of devotion itself, and thus your hopes would often fail you. Our ideas, even of the most important subjects, cannot always possess the same degree of perspicuity; our sensations cannot at all times have the same degree of vivacity and force. Light and warmth have their various changes, their alternate, sometimes regular vicissitudes in the moral as well as

in the natural world, and in every particular person, as in human society at large. So when we turn our thoughts on God and religion, consequently on the most important and most exalted objects, how much depends on our temperament at that particular time, on our outward circumstances, on the affairs we have been pursuing, on the persons we have seen and conversed with, on the books we have read, or are then employed in reading! How different are even the doctrines of religion which we make the subject of our meditations or our exercises of devotions! how various the sides on which they may be seen, and how different therefore the impressions they must make upon us! All of them cannot affect us alike; all of them cannot charm us; all of them cannot draw from us the tears of grief, of tenderness, or of joy. One while our understanding is most employed; at another, our heart; and sometimes both at once and in a higher degree. Now, the sentiment of our transgressions and failings bows us down to the abyss, covers us with shame and remorse: at another time, we as sincerely confess and abhor and condemn them, but without the same painful sensation. Now, the thoughts of God, of his majesty and greatness, so fully possess us, make all the conceptions and sentiments that belong thereto at once so predominant and active, set all that is connected with it in our whole system of thought and sentiment so much in motion, that we are totally lost in astonishment and adoration: at another time our sight admits less copious

pious rays of the divine glory, we consider them with more composure, can distinguish them with greater facility and clearness; and this, though not with transporting, yet with pure and real joy. One while we are more disposed to reflect on the doctrines of religion with a sedate and quiet mind, to rectify our conceptions of them, to penetrate deeper into their principles and connections, and then it is not usual for vehement sensations to arise: at another, we make a more immediate use of these doctrines, apply them directly to our composure, to our comfort, or our encouragement, consider and treat them so, as if they were promulgated merely for us, and were only to be applied to the present event, taste and enjoy therefore their sweetness and efficacy the more, and are warmed and cheered by livelier sensations. — — —

But are not the one sort as profitable and as needful as the other? Can we ever represent to ourselves clearly and plainly what is true and good, ever approve it with consideration or feeling: can we ever think on God and his presence with a quiet mind, or feel it more intimately, without being the better, the more tranquil, and the more happy for it? Or does pleasure cease to deserve that name because it does not produce transports in us? Are cheerfulness and serenity not an agreeable and desirable state, because they do not break out in the raptures of joy? — And if our exercises of devotion are at times unfruitful, and neither our mind nor our heart are strongly and extraordinarily interested in them, will they

they not then and always be good and profitable to us, for the renewal of certain important, salutary representations, principles, and conclusions, and for rendering us thereby less unmindful of them?

If this happen to you at times, however sincerely you may wish to glow with the ardours of devotion, would fain enjoy the sublimest pleasures of it, or have actually enjoyed them at other times: then afflict not yourselves at this casual want of them; think it not a criminal hardness of your heart; let it not render you dejected and dismayed. The very disquietude it causes you, the uneasiness you discover about it, are evident proofs that this kind of insensibility, or of less acute sensibility, is no consequence of your faulty behaviour, but the effect of outward accidental causes, or of the infirmity and limited powers of human nature. Therefore, expect not more of devotion than it promises. It promises you advantage, pleasure, joy; but not always the most manifest immediate advantage, not always the most lively pleasure, not always a transporting joy. As various as are the natural dispositions, capacities, and abilities, the constitution and temper, and the outward circumstances of the devout; so different likewise are, not the essentials of devotion, but the force and degree of its effects upon them.

This leads me to a fourth consideration, which is neither less true nor of less importance. It is this; variation, relaxation, and freedom, contribute much to the advancement of devotion. We must not slavishly

flavishly bind ourselves to any prescriptions ; not be scrupulous followers of any pattern ; not impose on ourselves any unnecessary laws ; not require that the sentiments and sensations should follow each other in a certain predetermined order ; not with an intentional solicitude, or with a mistaken conscientiousness, determine to undertake and to do first this and next that act of devotion, and not leave it till we have reached our aim and completed our design, or are forced to leave off by languor and fatigue. No, every human intellect has its own course, its own train of thought ; no other human intellect can serve it altogether for director and guide. And even the course our mind pursues of its own election, is not always the same. At one time it is more disposed to one way, and then to another, of exerting its powers : now more disposed to reflection and investigation, then more to contemplation and sentiment : now these, then those religious doctrines, prospects, dispositions, or hopes, are of most importance : at one time it can more readily comprehend a greater number of objects at once, than at another : at one time can take a loftier flight above visible things than it can at another.

The devout man has a wide field before him, no less delightful than fertile. In which are numerous pleasant walks that invite his steps, various beauties that he may contemplate, exquisite fruits that he may enjoy. He cannot pursue, enjoy, or profit by them all at once, nor all indiscriminately at every time.

time. He now strikes into this, then into that pleasant path; now surveys one beautiful prospect, and then another: now the enjoyment of one sort of well-flavoured fruit refreshes and strengthens him, at another time another. To speak without a figure: the devout man betakes himself to retirement. Here he may propose various exercises of religion. He may employ himself in reading, or in meditation, or alternately in both: he can dwell more on his past conduct than on his present condition: he can resign himself more to the admiration of the divine greatness, or to sentiments of the goodness and bounties of God; indulge himself more in adoration and praise, or in thanksgiving; more in laying open his own desires and views with filial freedom, or employ himself in affectionate intercession for his brethren: can exalt himself more in spirit to the invisible God, or acquaint himself with his son and delegate Jesus, our lord and king: can dispose himself more to exercises of repentance, or faith, or love. The devout man cannot perform them all at once. To do them all in regular succession, in a certain appointed series, is a sort of violence that is at variance both with the nature of man and the nature of devotion. He therefore does that to which his heart, or the sentiment of any particular want, or a particular occasion, induces and impels him; he likewise quickly passes from one to another; by no means endeavours to force any sentiment; but rather gives free scope to his pious aspirations and thoughts; and at
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all times enjoys that pleasure which solicits him, and in the manner wherein it offers; and thus the pleasure of devotion ever retains its value, receives new charms, multiplies to infinity, and never allows enjoyment to turn into disgust.

Let such of you as are desirous of experiencing this, observe the rules I have now delivered. Learn to form just and worthy representations of God and your relation towards him; learn to know and to revere him as love itself; render these reflections familiar to you; let them continually be present with you; assimilate them ever closer and closer with whatever you see and hear, whatever you think and do, whatever you suffer and enjoy; — require not always the supreme degree of spiritual pleasure and of pious joy; afflict not yourselves at the imperfection and infirmities and limitations of your faculties, which you have in common with all mankind, even the best of men; — lay no unnecessary restraint upon yourselves; introduce a greater variety into your exercises of devotion; and avail yourselves therein of every kind of christian freedom: so will devotion most certainly be to you what it is to all its votaries and friends; the noblest application of our superior faculties; the firmest ground of a chearful temper and a virtuous conduct; the strength and sustenance of our spirit; the joy of our solitary and the comfort of our gloomy hours; the immediate and blessed means of having communion with God and with his son Jesus; the
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nearest way, the best preparative, to higher perfection; the sweetest foretaste of our better and happier life hereafter! This is the true christian devotion; and such may it be to you and ever more efficient and complete from day to day! Amen.

SERMON XI.

The Value of Sensibility.

O GOD, creator of our mind and heart, eternal fountain of all being, of all sensation, of all thought, with what capacities and powers hast thou not endowed our mind and our heart! What sources of knowledge and pleasure, of perfection and happiness hast thou not opened to us in both! In what a profitable and blessed connection with the visible and the invisible world placed us by both! In imparting to us light for discovering the truth and for discriminating it from semblance and deceit; thou givest us also life and vigour to seize and to retain it and willingly to follow its precepts. When thou shewest us, by our understanding, the way we should go for attaining the end of our being; thou dost also warm and thro' our heart to enter on that way and to pursue it to the mark. Happy we, in being that which

thy wise providence has made us; that we are sensible and thinking beings; that, though related on one side with the beasts of the field, yet we have affinity with the angels, with thy son and express image Jesus Christ! Oh then may we so regard and use all the capacities and powers of our nature, as is conformable to thy will and to their appointment, never neglecting or abusing the one to the detriment of the other; and, by the best use of them all, become as perfect and as happy as it is possible for mankind to be! May our mind and our heart be ever in unison together and with the rules of truth and order, and both glorify thee, their creator and preserver! To the furtherance of this view, bless our meditations on those lessons of wisdom that are now to be delivered to us. Strengthen our attention on them; cause us to feel their importance and their truth and to make them the guide of our judgments and the rule of our conduct. Incline us to look up to the complete pattern of thy beloved son, that we may arrive at some faint resemblance of the deity, by aspiring at the perfection of humanity. Accept this humble act of duty and obedience, which we offer in the most holy name of Jesus our lord and saviour, concluding, with filial confidence as his followers, in the words which he himself prescribed us: Our father, &c.

GEN. xlv. 3, 4.

And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph. Doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him: for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you; and they came near; and he said: I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Ægypt.

THE teacher of religion should, like all other teachers, apply himself to the wants of his hearers and disciples. He should discourse to them in that language which is most intelligible to them; should rectify such of their opinions as stand most in need of it; and touch upon such faults as most frequently and most easily gain the ascendancy over them. And when it happens that more is thought and spoken of certain matters than usual, and this in words or expressions, the signification whereof is yet fluctuating and unsettled, he ought not to let it escape his attention, nor exclude it from his discourses and lessons, whenever the subject is of the moral kind, and has or may have an influence on the conduct and the happiness of his hearers. I take this to be the case with sensibility; a subject greatly talked of at present, and a word much oftener used

than rightly understood. And, as this is a matter which may produce much good and much harm, occasion much happiness and much misery, I think I need no farther apology for attempting to admonish you on this matter, and to caution you against the abuse of it.

In this design I have read to you a passage from the history of Joseph, wherein his character is depicted as abounding in sensibility. The strongest sentiments of love, of tenderness, of the noblest generosity, so possess and overwhelm his soul, that he bursts into tears, on discovering himself to his brethren. The vast eminence and authority with which he was invested, as the deliverer of Ægypt, and the viceroy of its king, could neither suppress nor weaken in him the warmest emotions of filial and fraternal love, nor prevent the natural demonstrations of them. He felt in all its force the pure and innocent delight a man enjoys in the bosom of his family, the uncommon happiness of finding lost friends again, and the still greater felicity of forgiving the injurious, of comforting the afflicted, and of reviving the dispirited; and preferred this pleasure, and this happiness, to all the splendour and all the festivity accompanying his present elevated condition. “I am Joseph, your brother. Doth my father yet live? Come near to me. And now, be not uneasy; nor think me angry that ye sold me hither, for it is God’s doing, and he doth all things well. I esteem myself happy, that I am able to preserve and provide for

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you and yours!" Who can here mistake the language of the heart, the most generous, the most sentimental heart!

But we are not to stop here. Our design is to consider the matter itself in all its latitude; and, as far as may be done in such a discourse, set it in a clearer light. In this view we shall have three questions to discuss. The first is, What is sensibility? The second, What is true, generous, laudable sensibility? And the third, What is false and blameable sensibility?

For acquiring a just idea of sensibility, we must take care not to confound it with irritability*, or hold them absolutely for one and the same. When we are easily affected by the things we see and hear and feel; or by the ideas we form of absent, visible, intellectual subjects; or by the images which our fancy or inventive faculty holds up to us, of mere possibilities or of actual existences; when the agreeable or disagreeable impressions which either of them make upon us sink deep, and easily and suddenly

* I am well aware that the word *irritability* principally and almost exclusively is used of the character of a man who is very easily offended, quickly and deeply resenting every affront by calling the real or supposed aggressor to a severe account. I here employ the term in a much larger sense, for denoting that feature of the human character which is frequently confounded with sensibility, as coming nearest to it, and yet is not real sensibility. As we are in want of a word for marking this distinction, and knowing of no one more suitable; I was under the necessity of using it in a rather unusual signification. Indeed *irascible* seems as proper in the former case.

seize upon our whole sensitive faculty, easily and suddenly move us to joy or to sorrow, to weeping or to laughter, to love or to hatred, to zeal or to anger, to transports of delight, or to the deepest dejection; we are then acutely sensitive: and, when this irritability is ennobled and exalted; when it chiefly displays itself in regard to moral objects, to more refined beauties, and to sublimer pleasures; whenever it sharpens our sentiments of what is right and wrong, what is good and bad, becoming and unbecoming, generous and ungenerous; and makes us readily observe and acutely feel this difference in such things, persons, actions, and occurrences, wherein the generality of mankind will not perceive and feel it, — then are we sensible. A few antithetical exemplifications will set this matter in a more perspicuous light. The merely irritable man is rather moved by the surface and the exterior of things; the man of sensibility more by their intrinsic qualities and real excellency: the former is in particular easily moved to displeasure and to anger; the other is capable of all, and chiefly the gentler, nobler kinds of feelings: the former is more agitated by strong and violent impressions; the latter more susceptible of the milder and more gentle: the former is more sensible to the grand, the extraordinary, and the striking; the latter, more to the delicate, the noble, the unobserved and despised beautiful and good. The irritable quickly takes fire at the injury he receives or is offered; the man of sensibility is troubled likewise on account of the injury his enemy is doing to himself,
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and the stings he is preparing, sooner or later, for his own heart. The irritable man is more frequently moved to compassion by the loud complaints and the copious tears of the unhappy; the man of sensibility also takes part in the silent expressions of pain, trouble and want which he perceives in any creature. The irritable man is fond rather of vehement and noisy pleasures and diversions; the man of sensibility seeks most the charms of quiet, domestic, gentle joys. The irritable man rejoices in the good actions of the philanthropist and the patriot; the man of sensibility is likewise delighted in the tears that stand in the eyes of the child, when hearing of noble deeds, which he wishes to have done himself. The irritable man is full of feeling towards whatever has a visible and intimate influence on the welfare of himself and his; the man of sensibility is also affected by the remoter and more occult consequences of things; and nothing is totally foreign to him, nothing indifferent, that relates to any living being capable of feeling and of happiness. In short, sensibility is enlarged, refined and generous irritability; it is either a higher degree, or a peculiar direction and tendency, or a nobler application and exertion of it.

Now, if irritability be in and of itself a real and desirable prerogative of men, then sensibility must be as much so and more. But, as the former may be sometimes rightly employed, sometimes abused, and therefore sometimes useful, and at others hurtful, to

mankind, so likewise it fares with the latter. There is a genuine and a false, a laudable and a blameable, an innocent and a dangerous sensibility. Let us see wherein they both consist, and whereby they may be discriminated from each other.

Our sensibility is, in the first place, of the right kind, it is generous and respectable, when directed to the best and worthiest objects. There are undoubtedly certain objects that never can make too strong an impression on us, never too much affect us, in regard to which we can never too deeply feel: and these are God, truth, innocence, virtue, human perfection and happiness; all that is beautiful and great and good and honourable and amiable and endureth for ever. Therefore, if thou never thinkest, o man, without profound reverence and filial love, on God, thy creator and father; if thou never considerest his works without a cheerful astonishment, a genial enlargement of thy heart, and admirest the traces of his wisdom and goodness in the smaller as well as the larger works of his creation; if never without transport, thou liftest up thine eyes to his magnificent heavens, or beholdest the numberless beauties of the earth, which he has allotted thee for thy dwelling; if, never without inward delight, thou enjoyest his benefactions and blessings, or reflectest on his bounties and blessings; if, when thou seest thy fellow-creatures, thy brethren, and walkest and conversest with them, thou art never without a real interest in them; if thou art never destitute of inward satisfaction when thou art the witness of a good and generous

generous deed, or observe the victory of truth over error, and of virtue over vice; nor see the triumph of unrighteousness and iniquity without emotion, nor tyranny of any kind without the liveliest displeasure; nor suffering or corrupted innocence without deep concern; nor the ruin and misery of thy fellow-creatures without actual sorrow; if, thou never hearest the voice of nature, of truth, and of noble simplicity, without pleasure and delight, never the cry of the indigent without hearty compassion, never the sighs of the destitute and afflicted without pain and grief; in short, when thou performest every act of private and public worship with a heart full of sentiment, prayest with real ardour, feelest the whole value and the whole dignity of thy connection with God and with his son Jesus Christ, art thoroughly warmed and penetrated with love towards thy saviour, and thy exercises of devotion fill and bless thee with feelings which thy heart is scarcely able to contain: then is thy sensibility directed to objects and employed on objects that are worthy of it. Then is it of the noblest kind, then does it turn to thy highest advantage, and is the source of perfection and happiness to thyself and to others, for the present and for the future world.

Our sensibility is, farther, of the proper kind; it is blameless, and a real prerogative of man, when constantly under the dominion and guidance of reason. Sentiment, and therefore likewise sensibility, my pious hearers, cannot be a safe guide to us on all occasions.

occasions. It is apt to bias us too easily and too violently for or against a matter or a person; frequently softens us too much where we ought to be firm and immovable; it disposes us too often, from indulgence and favour, to be unjust towards one person; and too severe against another; too often makes us prepossessed from compassion in behalf of the distressed, and hard against the prosperous. It judges too frequently with partiality; abides too obstinately by the first impressions made upon the heart; and allows itself too easily to be cheated by the appearances of the beautiful and good, by engaging forms, by moving words and gestures. And, besides, how many men are there who, regarding this respectable quality as a weakness, treat it accordingly, and are expert in taking advantage of it by a thousand different means, and artfully contrive to make it serve their dishonest purposes! How necessary is it, then, that it should be constantly under the controul of reason, that it should have a clear well-regulated understanding for its guide, if we would not be continually falling into error, if we would have it not more hurtful than profitable to ourselves and to others! How many persons of sensibility have brought misery on themselves and others, or plunged themselves into no small straits and difficulties, by not hearkening to the admonitions and remonstrances of this conductor, and scornfully discarding reason as too cold, too tedious, too interested a counsellor and guide! No; this must be the ruler of our mind,

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the director of our conduct; to this end the creator bestowed it on us, and it is the true, the great prerogative of man, as a rational creature. It is this that must discriminate semblance from truth, that must teach us to sacrifice even our best propensities to the performance of duty, to act, not by fortuitous and transient sensations, but upon firm and immutable principles, and to controul and govern ourselves, though the conflict cost never so much trouble to our heart. Happy the man, who is thus taught of reason; with whom light and warmth are in due proportion, whose understanding is as unclouded as his heart is sensible!

In short, our sensibility is of the proper cast, it is innocent and respectable, when it powerfully incites us to do good, to the best and most generous actions. To feel, to feel acutely, and not to act consistently with our feelings, in general betrays weakness and effeminacy. To be sensible to goodness, and yet not perform that good, when we can and ought, is inconsistency and hypocrisy. To be satisfied with having good sentiments, instead of doing good actions, is imposture and self-deceit. Few of our emotions are ultimate objects; the generality are and should be no more than means, inducements, and incitements, to put us in motion, to facilitate the application and exertion of our faculties, and thus to assist us in overcoming many concomitant difficulties and dangers. What is the most enraptured admiration of the beautiful and the good, if it do

do not rouse us to the imitation of it? What is the most poignant compassion, if it do not excite us to effectual and timely relief? What is the most extreme displeasure, the most righteous zeal, if it do not prompt us to the prevention of injustice, to the defence of the oppressed, to a steadfast support of the cause of truth, and to impart courage and strength to the innocent? Of what use are sighs and tears and lamentations, if, when we ought to be acting and working, assisting others by counsel or deeds, they leave us irresolute and motionless? What is the most passionate and tender affection, unless it shew itself by actions? No; if we would have our sensibility of the proper kind, laudable and such as will encourage and embellish virtue; then we must never so far submit to it, as to let it exhaust our faculties, and deprive us of the power to act. No; it should much rather impel us by an irresistible force to all good and generous exploits; remove all considerations which might detain us from them; secure us from any hurtful delay; bear down every objection from indolence and ease; fortify us against every dread of difficulty and danger; and urge us to well-doing with as much zeal, as we have deeply felt the propriety of it; and the more active it renders us in these respects, the more respectable and honourable it is.

And this, my pious hearers, this is true, irproachable, virtuous sensibility; which no man, who has a right turn of mind, and whose heart is not to-
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tally hardened, will venture to blame or to despise; which every man, who knows the value of things, must revere as a precious boon of the Most High, as a real prerogative of man. The case is quite otherwise with false sensibility. We need only to examine it a little for discovering it to be blameable and hurtful.

Sensibility is, in the first place, false, and blameable, when it is not natural, but forced; when a man expresses and pretends to feelings which he has not, or strives to appear to have them in a far higher degree than he actually has: thus playing the part of a desponding, a perfectly inconsolable man, while he is no more than moderately troubled and grieved; or falsely pretending to enjoy celestial transports and rapturous delights, when he only enjoys an ordinary pleasure and a calm satisfaction in any particular thing. Since our sensations do not always depend upon ourselves, are not always in our power; since no man, in every instant of his life, and in every temperament of his body, is alike susceptible of the same degree of sensibility; since neither mind nor body is always able to endure an equally strong tension and vibration: so none need be ashamed either of a deficiency of these stronger sensations, or of the accidental relaxation of them. Indeed, he that is always insensible, always unfeeling, whom nothing can move, is in no desirable condition; and is criminal, if he have brought himself into it by folly and vice. But even the most sentimental man is not always in a like mood; even the greatest admirer of
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the works of nature has not his view always struck by them in the same manner; even upon the tenderest heart, representations of the indigence and misery of a fellow-creature do not always make the same impression. Whoever but approves the true, the beautiful, the good, and does that which he reckons his duty, need never be grieved if he approve and perform it at times, even without any remarkably strong sensation, with serenity and diligence. Whereas he that will exhibit the same sensations in every event, and is resolved to feel in one circumstance in the same manner and degree as in another, for the sake of being reckoned a man of extraordinary sensibility, among those with whom he is intimately connected by a uniformity of sentiments and pursuits, must frequently act the hypocrite, must often lie, must often speak and act in an unnatural manner: and no kind of dissimulation and constraint more easily betrays itself, none makes a more disagreeable impression on those that see it and hear it, than this. Sensations totally incompatible will frequently be exhibited at the same time; sometimes the aid of the most incoherent gesticulations and motions of the body will be called in; frequently all the energetical and moving expressions of language will be heaped on one another without judgement or choice; and many performances of this nature end in the sneers and derision of the spectators.

Farther, sensibility is false and blameable, when it is overstrained or excessive; when it is disproportionate

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ate to the value of the object; when it is more displayed in trifles than in matters of importance. Many will hear the account of the demolition of a whole city by the horrors of an earthquake, of a fleet dashed to pieces upon rocks, of an army destroyed by fire and sword, with all the indifferency imaginable, who can shed tears over a comparatively insignificant creature of the classes of plants or animals. On numbers, a whole life spent in toilsome, virtuous actions, but performed in silence, without any rumour or ostentation, makes no impression, who will fall into transports and extasy at an act of humanity or beneficence, accidentally perhaps performed by another, but done with great show, and displayed with much ostentation. Many are scarcely moved, or even not at all, by indications of courage, fortitude of mind, resolution, invincible patience and firmness; while, at any thing that shews tenderness or love, even though it be not perfectly innocent, they find reason to be moved in the highest degree. The man of sensibility, in the best and noblest sense of the word, finds indeed matter for his sensibility to work upon in a thousand events and subjects where others would be absolutely cold, which to their eyes would be insignificant trifles; and it is by no means deserving of reproach if a flower or a little insect moves him, if he observe any expression of exultation or suffering in any sensitive creature that he be affected by it, and partake in it all with a sentimental heart: but he does not therefore overlook
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great and important concernments, is not cold towards them, takes still more interest in them, will be still more strongly affected by them, does not fall into the ridiculous, but constantly preserves the dignity of a thinking, rational, and self-possessing man; and this is a proof that his way of thinking and feeling is not artificial sentimentality, but true and generous sensibility.

Sensibility is, in the third place, spurious and blameable, when it is injurious or dangerous to ourselves and others; hinders us in our actual duties, or renders the performance of them disagreeable and difficult; when it deprives us of the desire and the ability to do what is right and good. He that suffers himself to be moved and overcome by the expression of violent pain, by the sight of sufferings and misery, so as to be put beside himself, to lose his power of reflection and presence of mind, and is incapable of attending to the means, and to the application of the means by which that pain may be eased, those sufferings mitigated, that misery removed or assuaged; he that weeps and laments, where he can and should relieve: his sensibility is hurtful, is blameable; and, though it be never so natural, is a sickness of soul, an infirmity of mind, which can never redound to the praise of the man, which he ought not to cherish, but should strive and guard against with all possible care.

Sensibility is again noxious and consequently criminal when it renders us negligent in regard to
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others and forgetful of the duties we owe them; when it deprives us of the relish for our ordinary affairs, takes us off from the prosecution of them, or induces us to go about them with dislike and aversion. It is therefore hurtful, when a mistress of a family allows it to be an impediment to her in the careful management of her domestic affairs, in the maintenance of regularity and order in all the parts of her household, in her diligent endeavours to promote the welfare and satisfaction of her family, in her attention to small things as well as to great; when she chuses rather to indulge her sensibility in reading, or in conversing with sentimental acquaintances, than addict herself to domestic and œconomical affairs; or will only extend her influence and inspection in general over the whole, as if that could subsist without its parts, and the greater without the less.

Sensibility is pernicious and criminal, when the young man, or the man of business, is induced by it to think the concerns of his trade or vocation unworthy of him, and which perhaps are not very elegant and important in themselves, or not highly entertaining, and thereupon to despise and neglect them, and to imagine that he degrades himself by paying attention to them, and by doing only such things as thousands of others of less delicate sentiments and of a less elevated mind, can perform as well as he. It is pernicious, when the disciple of wisdom, seduced by this propensity of his heart, neglects the due cultivation

tivation of his understanding and reason, and refuses himself to serious and dry studies, though of the highest importance for acquiring the knowledge and the sciences, which are indispensably necessary to his future profession or station in life.

Sensibility is hurtful and criminal when it leads a man to refrain from associating with others, to deny them the duties of conversation, affability, friendly esteem and affection, because they are not so sentimental as himself; nature having probably formed them of coarser materials, or designed them more for cool and temperate reflection, more for calm consideration, and disposed them more to action than to sentiment.

Lastly, sensibility is hurtful and dangerous, when, beguiled by its inspirations and impulses, we dream of a world, and live and float in a world, which has hardly any thing in common with the actual state of things, which exists only in our imagination, or in certain poems and works of fancy; when beguiled by such representations and images, we look for perfection in others, and expect matters from them, which are either nowhere, or very rarely, to be found; and then trouble and afflict ourselves at this natural defect, and keep ourselves at a distance from them, as if we missed some essential qualities in them. How many has this prevented from making the most suitable and most advantageous connections; how many has it misled to pass their days in a state of celibacy! How many have thereby become bad husbands,

husbands, selfish and austere companions hard to be pleased, and downright misanthropists! No; the wise man sees, accepts, and uses the things of this world as they are, and looks for no angels among mankind, no paradise upon the earth, no virtue free from alloy among frail and sinful creatures, no perfection there, where it is not to be found.

No; in all these cases where we have pronounced sensibility to be hurtful and criminal, we sacrifice duty to pleasure; render ourselves averse and unfit for the performance of our duty; perform it negligently; destroy the harmony and welfare of social life; act against the designs of God and our own nature, by which we are ordained, not only to feel, but also to think and still more to act; we enervate our taste and our heart; weaken our faculties; become fastidious in the enjoyment of the beautiful and the good; seldom satisfied with what is and what happens; and prepare for ourselves and others a thousand sufferings and a thousand woes, from which in the contrary case we should be totally exempt.

Guard yourselves, therefore, my dear brethren, from this false, excessive, and pernicious sensibility. Suffer me to recommend to you in this respect moderation and self-command. And, as you are christians, look likewise here to Jesus, your leader and guide, the great pattern of all human perfection. How sensible was his heart; and how generous, how busied, was his sensibility; how fruitful in

good works! Whose soul was ever so thoroughly imbued with love towards God and man, with the love of truth and virtue, as his; and what harmony in all, mind and heart, words and works! He pitied the people, he compassionated their spiritual and personal wants; but at the same time he gave them effectual relief; he fed and taught them. He wept when he saw his friend Lazarus in the grave; but he awakened him from the dead. He felt and suffered the sickness and pains of the wretched, and healed them. He caressed the little children that were brought to him, and blessed them. He viewed the young man who wanted to follow him, with affection and love, though his wishes were not brought to effect. He shed tears over Jerusalem, while it was watching his motions with a murderous intent. He prayed for pardon for his tormentors; and neglected himself whenever he had an opportunity of serving and helping others. And what a concern did he not take in the welfare of his relations in the most calamitous moment of his life! "Behold," said he from the cross to his favourite disciple, "behold thy mother!" And to Mary, "Behold thy son!" — But how active was not his whole life in all these respects! How unremitted his zeal in righteousness and beneficence, in finishing the work that was given him to do! How clear and unclouded his intellect! How impartial his judgement! How intrepid his fortitude! How just and firm his principles! How great his indulgence to his disciples and scholars,

scholars, who were so much less sensible than he, who at times were almost totally insensible! How manly in short was not his language and his whole behaviour! How far from all constraint, all artifice, and all ostentation! How suitable to his character, his vocation, and to temporary circumstances! What noiseless, tranquil dignity appeared in all he uttered, and in all he did!

Oh imitate him likewise in this, all ye who have the happiness and the honour to be his confessors. Strive after the perfection of your nature with all the faculties of your soul. Attend to your mind as well as to your heart; cultivate the one with no less care than the other; learn to think as justly as you feel forcibly. Let reason and sensibility go hand in hand with you along the path of life, let this be governed and directed by that, and that be encouraged and animated by this, that you may never want light, for avoiding all deviation and error, nor warmth and energy, for pursuing resolutely and indefatigably the right way.

SERMON XII.

The Value of Virtue.

O GOD! our creator and our father, thou hast incised thy law, the law of truth and order on all our hearts, endowed us all with an inward sentiment of what is right and good; thus willing to lead us to virtue, and by virtue to happiness. O God! of what perfection, of what joy, of what bliss hast thou not made us susceptible, by having called and ordained us to virtue, and having rendered it so venerable to us, and by having given and still continuing to give us the capacity of becoming, from sensual, corrupted creatures, wise and virtuous men, and of ever becoming more completely such! O that we were all what thou wouldst have us to be—that we all sought our greatest advantage, our highest dignity in virtue—submitted ourselves entirely to her gentle sway, suffered ourselves to be entirely

tirely animated and governed by her, and thereby ever brought ourselves nearer to thee, the eternal fount of goodness and perfection! How blessed should we not then be even here, and how much more blessed hereafter! and with what complacency couldst thou not then look down upon us, thy children, and take thy pleasure in us! Oh then let virtue present herself to our mind in all her beauty, in all her irresistible attractions; cause us thoroughly to feel her precedence above all that we else esteem and revere, and so take possession of our whole heart our most cordial attachment! Enlighten us then, o God! with thy light, and quicken us with thy good spirit, that we may judge rightly of the value of things and learn wisely to chuse between them. To this end accompany with thy blessing the discourse that is now intended to conduct and encourage us thereto. Let not the preacher recommend and extol virtue to us in vain, cause him to feel her worth himself, and so impart to us those feelings, that the number and the zeal of her votaries may be augmented among us. We implore it of thee as the disciples of thy son Jesus, and address thee farther in his name and words: Our father, &c.

PROV. viii. 11.

Wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.

TO despise virtue, and not to prize it enough, are two very different things. The former is a fault, of which but few are guilty; the latter an error which great numbers of persons fall into. Virtue, my pious hearers, is of so harmless, so venerable, and so captivating an aspect; she leaves us so little to fear, and allows us to hope for so much from those with whom we perceive her, and by whom we see her act and operate; her sentiments and her conduct are so just, so harmonious, so natural and simple; her connection with our happiness and with the welfare of the whole community, is in most cases, at least in many, so apparent; she is frequently so indispensably necessary; is constantly so beautiful; holds out so much indulgence and patience to the frail and feeble: that neither great sagacity, nor erudition, nor habitual reflection, nor a superior degree of personal excellence, are requisite for allowing her a certain value, for acknowledging her to be something good and respectable, and for shewing her more or less esteem. The wise and the ignorant,
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the good and the bad, the virtuous and the vicious, the considerate man and the volatile youth, are all agreed in this general judgment on the value of virtue; and none will venture, unless he be under the deceitful influence of some headstrong passion, plainly and in direct terms to despise her. Wherever conscience, wherever the sentiment of truth and goodness still remains in man, there virtue finds an advocate in the hearts of her enemies as well as of her friends, which dares not venture plainly to condemn her.

But, certain as this is, it is no less certain, that all men do not, that probably only the least part of mankind acknowledge the whole value of virtue, and so highly prize, and so inwardly revere her, as she deserves. The reverence shewn to virtue is with great numbers more prejudice, or obscure sensation, than vital reflected knowledge, real sentiment, or firm internal conviction. They have a respect for virtue at large and in general; but not as it appears in every particular incident, and every particular person. They hold it, indeed, to be something good and desirable; but they seldom, upon mature consideration and in a decided manner, give it the preference to all other good and desirable things. But seldom are we thoroughly persuaded by sincere conviction, that we must not part with it on any account, that we can never purchase it at too dear a rate, nor make too great sacrifices to it; that with it we possess all things, and without it nothing; that it is infinitely better to be poor and mean and unlearned and despised, but
virtuous,

virtuous, than to be rich and mighty and respected and learned, but not virtuous. And yet all our pretences to real virtue are idle and baseless, so long as we do not believe and confess this truth, so long as we do not prefer it before every other advantage of life, however estimable and excellent.

To settle your judgment on this matter, and to increase your reverence for virtue, is the design of my present discourse. In several foregoing discourses we have laid before you the value of riches, of honour, of sensual pleasure, and of intellectual pleasures; pronounced them all, as they really are, to be actual goods, to be objects which, in a certain degree, deserve to be esteemed, admired, sought after, and enjoyed; to be things, which, according to the use we make of them, may contribute more or less to our perfection and happiness. Useful and valuable, however, as all these things unquestionably are, virtue is still far preferable to them, as far as the end is to the means, and as a stately edifice is preferable to the scaffoldings and implements that are necessary to its construction.

Wisdom, says the wise king in our text, wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it. Wisdom, in this passage, is not barely that which men usually call understanding, knowledge, erudition, or profound penetration. It is the proper use of the understanding in all the affairs and transactions of mankind; the right application of the knowledge and sagacity

we possess, to the promoting of our felicity; it is an intelligent conduct in harmony with truth and order; in short, it is, in signification, exactly the same as what in our language we call Virtue. This wisdom, this virtue, is more precious than rubies; all that we can possibly desire is not to be compared to it: that is, its value is superior to the value of all other things which it is usual for mankind most passionately to desire, and most earnestly strive to obtain. And this is the matter we intend now circumstantially to illustrate and prove.

In this design we have two questions to answer. The first, What is Virtue? The second, Whence does it acquire its pre-eminent value?

Virtue does not consist in particular good actions. Neither temperance, nor chastity, nor justice, nor beneficence, give us the idea of what virtue is, and what it implies. These are no more than the several ways in which it is displayed, the effects of its operation. It is the foundation, the source of these and all other good actions. That the eye sees without obstruction, that the ear without difficulty hears, that every organ of sense receives the impression of outward things, that every limb and member of the body performs its functions with regularity and ease, does not constitute the essence of health: they are only the various effects and indications of it. Health consists in the just and proper relation of all the parts, all the vessels and juices of our whole body with one another, and in the unabated freedom of
action

action in the vital powers which pervade and cherish and set them all in motion.

Virtue, in like manner, consists not in particular good dispositions. That we find a pleasure in beneficence; that we are prompt to reflect on serious subjects, on the doctrines of religion; that we heartily love and are apt to promote peace and concord; that we are more disposed to think well than ill of our fellow-creatures: these are all good dispositions, in which the virtuous person cannot be deficient; but none of these dispositions alone, nor even several of them together, render us truly virtuous, or constitute the distinctive essence of true virtue.

No; virtue is an aggregate, an indivisible whole. It is not so much action, as principle of action; not so much sentiment, as principle of sentiment; it impels us to those good actions, and inspires us with these good sentiments. Animated and governed by it, we will and do what is good and all kinds of good; will it with energy and decision, and practise it heartily and firmly. It is, in effect, the frame of our mind, the direction and application of its faculties, causing us constantly to think, to be inclined, and to act, in conformity to truth, to order, and to the will of God. It consists in a general, prevalent, effective inclination to whatever is true and right and good, suitable to our nature and our relative situations, and the nature and relations of other things, in the constant readiness to do or not to do, to suffer or to bear, to be and to have, or not to be and
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not to have, what God will have us to do or not to do, to bear or to suffer, to be and to have, or not to be or not to have. It consists in the truth of our reflections, our feelings, our desires, our words and works, in the harmony of all the parts of our inward and outward conduct, among themselves, and with the law of God. It is therefore precisely what we commonly term the love and practice of goodness, a ready and unlimited obedience towards God and his commandments, or, in one word, integrity. It is the health and the true life of the soul, the state in which our mind is and does what it ought to be and to do, according to its proper ordination; the energy which constantly impels us to all that is fair and good and generous and useful, to whatever is agreeable to God, and promotes the perfection and happiness of man,—replenishes us with good-will to all mankind, and induces us to live and act more for others than for ourselves, and to employ whatever we are and have in the most useful manner.

Now, such a virtue, we repeat it, is of more value than all the other goods, the value whereof we have hitherto been weighing and ascertaining in several discourses; of more value than riches, than honour, than sensual pleasure, more than all the advantages and pleasures of the mind, in so far as they are at variance with virtue, or independent thereon. The following remarks will set this in its proper light, and render it evident.

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First, Virtue is absolutely and without all limitation good, absolutely and without all limitation or exception useful and desirable. This we cannot pronounce of any other good, though in itself and under certain conditions never so estimable. Riches may be a snare to us, honours a burden, sensual pleasure a source of trouble and pain; they all may lead us into sin and vice, and thereby plunge us into misery. Even the distinctions of the mind, knowledge and science, wit and sagacity, and the superior pleasure they produce, may be misapplied in a thousand ways, in a thousand ways become hurtful and ruinous to ourselves and others. Neither outward wealth nor internal energy of mind can shield the unwise from folly, or the vicious from misery. Virtue alone can never be misapplied, can never be criminal: for a man can never be too virtuous; never too faithful, too just, or think and act too well; never enjoy the pleasure of virtue too often and too constantly, never neglect duties for the enjoyment of it. No one virtue militates against another; none is an impediment to the practice of another; none lessens our desire or weakens our abilities for another. Properly, as I have already observed, there is but one virtue, and that is, the predominant unchangeable readiness to do that which is lawful and right, and is the best in every case, whatever is in conformity with nature, with the will of God, with our relations towards him and other things; and wherever this readiness and aptitude is, there no contention,

tention, no inherent contradiction can find place, no duty to be observed to the disadvantage or neglect of another, no kind of moral good to be sought and practised at the expence of another.

The value of virtue is likewise, in the second place, far more unchangeable than the value of all other goods and advantages. The value of riches is regulated by our wants and the wants of the society in which we live. We may suppose cases, where they would be absolutely useless and become a mere burden to us. The value of honour changes according to the opinions, the usages, and the political institutions of mankind; it rises and falls, and becomes in itself more or less desirable, according as the outward tokens of general estimation are more rare or more numerous, are distributed with discreet selection, or indiscriminately conferred: and out of social life, in the silence of retirement, they almost cease to be advantages. The value of sensual pleasure is not more fixed and permanent: how much of it depends on accidents, on derived and received opinions, and tacit contrivances: how much on the constitution and frame of our body, the irritability of our nerves, the state of our health, our age, and other circumstances! How various and how different the aspects under which it appears and is agreeable in different times and different places! How often is it insipid, how often fulsome, how often does it cease from being pleasure, and how frequently does it change into pain! Even the advantages of the mind, erudition,

science, and art, are liable to numberless alterations. Their value changes according to the prevailing taste; as this or the other kind of science or mental exertions are more or less esteemed, admired, and preferred.

The value of virtue alone is always immutably the same; at all times, among all nations, in all circumstances, amidst the manifold changes and chances of life, alone unchangeable. Indeed, not that which we call particular virtues, which may be differently estimated in different times and in different places, may be sometimes of greater and sometimes of smaller worth. But the way of thinking and acting, the disposition of mind, the character, the state of the rational mind, which we term virtue, and which alone deserves that name, is and remains for ever the same, always and every where retains its value. Truth, order, goodness, integrity, can never cease from being truth, order, goodness, and integrity, though we live in this place or in that, are connected with these or with other men, in solitude or in society, in prosperity or in adversity, in health or in sickness. Even after our terrestrial life, they are and remain exactly what they were in themselves. Riches, honour, sensual pleasure, are totally lost to us in death. We cannot even rescue all intellectual pleasures from destruction. Who knows how much or how little of our knowledge, our science, or our art, and therefore of the pleasure that arises from them, we shall be able to take with us into the other world?

world? All that we now reckon for such we certainly shall not retain. — But nothing, my dear brethren, nothing can injure our virtue; nothing diminish its value. The regularity that once prevails in our mind, the good habits it has once acquired, its love towards all that is true and good, its love to God and all mankind, remain with it after the death of the body, as certainly as it retains them till that death arrive. They will have just the same value in the future state as they had here, — will be there just as perfect, just as blessed, and render the soul far more perfect and more blessed, than they could do here.

The value of virtue is, in the third place, much more universal and independent on station and connection than that of all other, and particularly of outward things; or, it is more generally useful than all others, and therefore possesses a greater worth than they. Riches would utterly cease to be riches, if all men lived in abundance. Honour would lose much of its value, at least in the present state of things, if it gave us no precedence over others; if every man could make the same pretensions to it, and produce his authentic claims. Many kinds of sensual pleasure would lose their title to that name, if all men could partake in the enjoyment of them; many others would be far less prized and sought after, if they were not, in some degree, the property of certain states and conditions of men. Society in general could not subsist, if the enjoyment of every,

even innocent sensual pleasure, and all the means and opportunities of it, were alike free to every man. Neither could human society subsist, if all the members of it pursued only mental pleasures, if they were only to exercise themselves in scientific attainments, or in agreeable and amusing knowledge; and a great proportion of the value of these things would presently be reduced to nothing, if every man possessed them, and every man in the same degree.

Quite otherwise is the case with virtue. That is, and remains, among all classes and conditions of men, the same. It accommodates itself to every rank, to every calling, and to every occupation of life. It elevates every rank, dignifies every calling, and alleviates every occupation of life. It adapts itself to both high and low, to the rich and the poor, to the learned and the unlearned, to every age, to both sexes, to all societies. It is profitable and honourable to all. It loosens no band of social life; but knits them all closer together. No man loses any thing by it, if another be virtuous likewise: but if all were virtuous, all would profit, infinitely profit thereby. Neither can virtue be too prevalent, too common, have too much influence on the dispositions and conduct of mankind. The more virtue, the less discord and misery: the more virtue, the more peace and felicity!

Virtue has, fourthly, a pre-eminent value, by the excellent effects it produces in us; by the extraordinary influence it has on our perfection and happiness.

ness. It makes us much better, much more useful to our fellow-creatures, much fitter for a superior life, much more godlike, than any other privilege or advantage we possess.

Virtue renders us much better. Riches, honour, sensual and intellectual pleasures, may ameliorate our outward condition, procure us agreeable sensations; may furnish us with incitements, means, opportunity for acquiring sound knowledge, for the practice of good works, and for promoting our moral improvement. Virtue is that which is performed by all these means, the end and aim to which they all conduce; it brings this improvement to effect, and makes us actually as perfect as our nature allows. Or, what is perfection but the harmony and full consent of all the parts to one ultimate end and aim, the best state to which any thing is capable of being brought? And is not virtue this? Does not the most beautiful order and harmony prevail in the soul of the virtuous man? Are not all his inclinations and abilities directed to what is true and good? Is he not continually aiming at the self-same mark? Has he not the same unalterable view in all he thinks and wills and does?

Virtue makes us far more generally useful than the possession of any other prerogative. Riches, honour, science, and knowledge, are certainly means of diversified beneficence; means of becoming useful to our fellow-creatures in an eminent degree. But so long as virtue does not accompany and guide us

in the application of these means, so long shall we comparatively perform but little by them; we shall be often weary of employing them to that end; shall frequently do harm by them instead of good. It is virtue alone that teaches us rightly to use all these advantages, to employ them in the best and noblest manner. Riches, honour, art, and science, are commonly hurtful without virtue; are very often the food and implements of the most destructive passions. But virtue, without riches, without honour, without art and sciences, is and remains still useful; still performs much good, much pure and unalloyed good. How many acts of kindness may not even the poorest, the lowest, the most unlearned man, if he have but virtue, perform according to the extent of the sphere in which he moves, by advice, by deed, by consolation, and by example! And how much more extensively, how much more powerfully, may he not operate, if he be adorned and embellished by those advantages, and still retain his virtue!

Virtue likewise renders us more happy than any thing else can do. Riches and honour certainly procure us advantage; sensual and mental pleasures afford us agreeable sensations. But neither the one nor the other can we enjoy so frequently, and but seldom in so high a degree, as we could desire. Both the one and the other may become useless and prejudicial to us in a greater or less degree; may turn more to our disquiet than to our joy. Virtue alone can never become burdensome, never be useless,
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never unprofitable to us. It blesses us for ever; solaces, comforts, and rejoices us for ever; ever gives us the best counsel; ever guides us the surest way; ever brings us nearer to our mark. Wherever truth and order are, there are serenity and satisfaction; where pure and generous love prevails, there happiness has fixt her throne. The man who feels and maintains his intrinsic dignity, can generally see himself stripped of all outward appendages, without becoming unhappy: the man whose will is in perfect subordination to the will of God, has and can do what he will, since he wills and does nothing but what God calls him to will and to do!

For the very same reason, virtue renders us much fitter for a better and a higher life, than all other possessions; nay, that alone can render us capable of it. It passes for as much in heaven as it does upon earth, and much more. We are there as little liable to be deprived of it, as here: it is there the dignity and the life of our spirit, as well as here. Nay, there it is all in all; the complete compensation for all the outward goods and advantages we lose by death, the foundation of all greater and nobler activity, of all superior honour and power, the band of union between the inhabitants of the better world. It is that which all the wise and good subjects of God, in the whole of his immeasurable domain, have in common with each other; what indissolubly binds them together, and ever brings them nearer to him, their Creator and Father.

Nay, virtue gives us a far greater resemblance to God than any advantage beside. What we call riches, my dear brethren, is poverty with God. Our exaltation and power is the weakness and imbecillity of an infant in his eyes. Our very knowledge and erudition is, for the most part, error and obscurity in his pure light. By such advantages we can acquire no likeness to him, or only in an infinitely remote degree, never properly become like him. But, to will what God wills; to love truth and order, as God loves them; to wish well and to do good to all mankind, as God is benevolent and beneficent; to seek and find our satisfaction in the best employment of our faculties and the most useful activity, as God finds his therein: by these means we are ever approaching nearer to God — very near — are continually becoming more like him, and ever fitter for nearer communion with him. And it is virtue that exalts us to this, and virtue alone.

Who then can still entertain a doubt, that of all advantages it is the greatest, the most exalted, of all goods the best and most desirable, — that it is of more value than riches and honour, than elevation and power, than all sensual voluptuousness, than knowledge and science — more than transient, quickly rising and quickly evaporating, devotion — more than health and life; virtue, which is the health of the mind, and the life of the spirit?

Virtue, that fair progeny of heaven, is of more account with God, the centre and source of virtue,
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than all things else can be. It is the fairest lineament of his image in man; the sole means whereby he can please him; the only advantage which God, by his messengers, has honoured with his express and sovereign approbation; the rule by which he will hereafter dispense his glorious rewards. If unaccompanied by virtue, he rejects the most costly offerings and oblations, the most solemn rites, the most rigorous exercises. With it, he favourably accepts every good wish of the heart, every sincere inclination, every honest endeavour. — It was virtue that exalted an Abraham to be his peculiar friend: it was she that affixed the mark of the offspring of God on all the wise and good of every age and clime. It was she that distinguished Jesus with the stamp of the only-begotten and beloved of the Father, as the sublime exemplar of all human perfection, rendered him capable of the closest and most intimate communion with God, his Father, and exalted him to be Lord over all!

And canst thou refuse her thy esteem, thy reverence, o man, o christian, who hast yet any sentiment of what is venerable and excellent? No; beware of stifling this sentiment of truth in thy heart! Let virtue be the object of thy esteem and reverence, more than any thing else that lays claim to thy esteem and reverence. In honouring virtue, thou honourest God. Esteem and revere her, then, wherever thou find her, under whatever aspect, in whatever garb she appears, in what language soever she speaks to

thee, by what actions soever she makes herself known! Do justice to her, not only in general, but in every particular person whom she animates and governs. Virtue, in the general, is no more than an idea, a representation of our mind: she actually exists only in particular beings. In these we must esteem and revere her. He that despises any poor and low but virtuous man, despises virtue herself; and, if thou despise virtue, o man! thou despisest all that is beautiful, that is great, that is venerable; thou despisest God, the fountain of all perfection.

But dost thou esteem her as she deserves? Oh then hesitate not a moment, on what thou hast to do, which thou hast to chuse, when thou art to determine between her and riches, between her and the honour of men, between her and sensual or intellectual delights. Rather let them all be lost to thee, than forsake or violate her. Dost thou still refuse to sacrifice all that militates with her disposition and inclinations? dost thou still make anxious efforts to lose nothing on either hand? does every trifling loss, thou sufferest for her sake, still give thee pain? Oh then, say not that thou art virtuous!

No; wilt thou be so? Be so without reserve. Think not to put asunder what God and the nature of things have joined in close indissoluble bands. Here it may be said with propriety, All or nothing! Here no compromise can be made! — So long as thou endeavourest to compare and to connect virtue

tue with vice — the two most contradictory and incompatible things in nature — with one another, thou art doubly wretched. Thou enjoyest not the blifs of virtue, and only in part even the fleeting and transient pleasures of vice, not with a tranquil mind, not without secret anguish and remorse. Wouldst thou be happy, and continue happy, and be ever improving thy happiness? Oh then decide totally and firmly and irrevocably for Virtue! Let her inform and animate thy soul, convert thee as it were into a new creature, let her accompany and guide thee in all times and in all places; be the moving spirit of thy whole behaviour! Then wilt thou perceive and experience how great, how unspeakably great, her value is; what dignity and strength she imparts to man, what serenity and blifs she procures him; and then wilt thou secure to thyself the possession of her for ever and ever!

SERMON XIII.

The Superior Value of Christian Virtue.

O GOD! who art the creator and father of us and of all mankind, how eminently hast thou favoured us, thy children, by having called us to christianity! Though thou hast left none of thy rational creatures entirely destitute of all means and incitements to become wise and good and happy, leading them all gradually to the perfection of which they are capable: yet hast thou granted us the best means, the most powerful incentives thereto, by pointing out to us the straightest, the surest, the nearest way to perfection. By thy son Jesus thou hast plainly and authentically discovered to us thy will; in him given us the best, the truest guide and precursor on the path of virtue, the most exalted pattern for our imitation; by him opened to us the fairest, the most glorious prospects in a better world, in a superior,
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an everlasting life! Yes, thou hast amply offered to us all, and dost amply still offer to us all that we want for life and godliness, all that can render us virtuous and godly in a superior degree. Praise be to thee for thy kind and liberal bounty, o merciful father! Oh that it might inspire us all with pure gratitude and joy! Oh that we could all think of it without shame and confusion! Oh that we were all as wise, as good, as devout, as christians might and ought to be! But perhaps only few of us are so! Perhaps christian virtue and christian happiness are too rare and strange even among christians! Do thou, alas, have pity on us, o gracious father! Let us no longer merely bear the name of christians, but really be and constantly more completely become so. Enlarge and confirm among us the kingdom of thy son Jesus, our lord and king, by the farther and farther revelation of the divine energy of his doctrine among us. To that end, let us now so convincingly perceive and feel the true nature of christian virtue and the excellency of it, that we may sincerely revere it, cordially imbibe it, and be entirely ruled and governed by it. This unspeakable blessing we ask of thee as the votaries and followers of Jesus, addressing thee farther, in firm reliance on his promises, as, Our father, &c.

2 PETER i. 3.

According as his diviné power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godlinefs, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.

VIRTUE has, and ever retains, a certain value, be it as defective and imperfect as it may, in whatever person it is exhibited, and in whatever manner it is displayed. Truth will ever be truth, and order be always order : and he that thinks and acts consistently with the relations in which he stands towards God and his connection with all within his sphere, thinks and acts consistently with truth and the order of things ; and this, in all times and places, must be right and good. Indeed, the principles on which a man performs what is right and good, and the views wherein he does so, may weaken and obscure the value of these actions, the value of virtue ; but even this cannot wholly destroy it. The gold that is not yet purified from its dross, does not on that account cease to be gold. We should therefore be afraid of incurring the just imputation of an insult upon virtue, were we to pronounce, with some anti-christian teachers, all the virtues of the heathens, or such as were not christians, to be splendid sins. Many of their famous exploits may well have been
 so ;

fo; as, at present, fo many feemingly good — very good — actions of christians are in reality nothing lefs than good. But, we are not, on that account, to condemn them all, and declare all the truly great, noble, public-fpirited actions they performed, to be merely the fruit of mean self-interest and the basest passions. No man is altogether insensible to truth, or totally incapable of thinking and acting in conformity to it; and whoever can do fo, can be also more or lefs virtuous, and act accordingly. The stronger and more prevalent this sensibility is, the more univerfal and active will virtue be. If, then, sensibility be not exclusively the peculiar property of any nation, or of any man, fo neither can virtue be.

But it is with christian virtue as with a hundred other matters. Mankind are prone to extol some one thing of undoubted excellence, and then to think they cannot do better than to vilify not only what is at variance, but likewise whatever has most resemblance and most affinity with it, what comes the nearest to it, in such a manner as to allow it no value at all. So one virtue is often extolled at the expence of another; and fo, in particular, the christian virtue at the expence of the not-christian. But may not, then, two things be good or excellent, and yet one be better and more excellent than the other? Leave then the not-christian virtue all the value it has; revere goodness of every kind, and revere goodness wherever you find it; do justice to every man,
whether

whether he be a christian or not. Christian virtue can lose nothing by it; she ever remains what she is, and ever retains a great superiority over every other kind of virtue. Of this my present discourse shall give you complete conviction.

We have already investigated the value of several things that have an influence on human happiness; the value of riches, of honour, of sensual pleasure, of intellectual pleasure, of piety, of sensibility, and virtue; we have shewn you that virtue far excels all the former: we propose to-day to endeavour at convincing you of the excellency or the superior value of christian virtue, when compared with all other virtue, and thereby to increase your reverence for it. These reflections will convince us how true that is which the apostle Peter affirms in our text: God has imparted to us christians, by the knowledge of Jesus Christ, or by the christian religion, as much of his divine energy as we had need of for leading a prudent and a godly life. That is: by the christian doctrine, and its divine influence upon us, the leading of such a life is rendered much easier to us, and we may advance farther in virtue and piety, than we could do otherwise. And this we now will take upon us circumstantially to explain and demonstrate.

You know what it is we understand by virtue in general. We mean the disposition of our mind, the direction and adaptation of its faculties in such a manner as that we constantly think, will, and act, consistently with truth, order, and the will of God; the

the univerfal, predominant, operative inclination to every thing that is true and right and good, in conformity to our nature and our relations, and to the nature and relations of other things: the constant readinefs to do or not to do, to fuffer or to bear, to be and to have, or not to be and not to have, what God wills us to do or not to do, to bear or fuffer, to be and to have, or not to be and not to have: the truth and harmony of all the parts of our inward and outward conduct between themfelves and with the law of God. In this, undoubtedly, confifts the effence of all virtue.

Now, if it be the doctrines of christianity which give this direction and adaptation to our mind and its faculties; if it be the doctrines of christianity that produce in us thefe predominant difpofitions to truth and order, to whatever is right and good and in every cafe the beft; if it be the doctrines of christianity which fo abfolutely fubdue our inclinations to the will of God; if it be gratitude for the benefits which God has conferred upon us by his fon Jefus, and for the hopes to which he has elevated us by him; if it be an intimate and cordial love to God, and love to our Lord and Saviour, which impel us to fuch a difpofition, and to fuch a conduct, which produce in us fo beautiful a harmony between all our thoughts, inclinations, propenfities, and actions; if it be the precepts and the example of Jefus which conduct and lead us to it; if it be his fpirit, his mind, which lives and governs in us, and appears
through

through us: then is our virtue christian virtue. It has arisen in us by christianity; it is nourished and strengthened in us by christianity; it is framed upon the doctrines and commands of christianity; it is nothing else but vital christianity, put in action and reduced to practice.

Now, to such a christian virtue we ascribe a pre-eminent value; and this it actually possesses, whether we consider it in regard to its sources, or its rule, or its motives, or its extent, or its views. In all these particulars it is purer, greater, firmer, more active, more beneficial, more blessed, than it would be without the help of christianity; in all these particulars it therefore excels every other virtue which is destitute of this help. Not to dwell now upon the several comparisons necessary for the demonstration of this, we shall only examine what christian virtue more peculiarly is, and then leave you to draw your own conclusions of its excellency.

The sources, then, from whence it springs are the purest; the grounds on which it rests the firmest, and both the most adapted to the nature of man. It is the fruit of a heart altered, ameliorated, and, as it were, new-formed by the doctrines of christianity: or, if it have taken early possession of it, ere vice could have struck root therein, then is it the frame and condition of a mind thoroughly impregnated with these doctrines and formed upon them. Their roots therefore lie deep; take fast hold; extend themselves through all the faculties and all the conduct

duct of the man; and interweave, insinuate, and assimilate themselves with his whole nature. Christian virtue is not an accidental, transient effect of particular thoughts and emotions, but the effect and result of the whole thinking and sensitive system. Its force and duration is not dependent on this or that particular idea, but on an entire inseparable consequence of the most important ideas, of the grandest and most exalted truths. It grounds itself on all that christianity tells us of God; his attributes, his providence, his relation towards us, and particularly of his love and clemency to weak, sinful, guilty creatures; on all that it discovers to us of our nature, our origin, our vocation, of the final judgment and the future retribution; on all that it teaches us concerning Jesus, concerning his great business upon earth, of his assistance afforded to mankind, of his holy life and beneficial death, of his connection with us, of his dominion over us, of his love towards us, and of his spirit in us. If these doctrines present themselves to a man, as undeniable sacred truths; if he feel their truth, their certainty, their importance, feel how intimately they are connected with his present and future happiness; if they stream their radiant light upon his mind, and operate in their whole force upon his heart; if the love of God and of his son Jesus deeply affect him, penetrate him, fill him with sincere remorse for his sins and iniquities, excite him to gratitude, inspire him with mutual affection; if he have learnt to use and enjoy the profered assistance

from on high; if he perceive and feel that his all depends on the favour of God, how wretched he should be and continue to be without it, how blessed he is become by it, and how much more he may be and become; if he feel the happiness of being a christian, pardoned, absolved from guilt and punishment, called to a blessed immortality, constantly strive to render himself more capable and worthy of this happiness, to draw nigher to his God and to his Saviour; and all these dispositions and feelings be predominant in him: then he obtains, as it were, a new spirit and a new heart, is a new creature, — is virtuous, and christianly virtuous. And who sees not how pure, how rich, how inexhaustible, this source of virtue must be in him; on what solid foundations the edifice of such a virtue rests? How differently must all these doctrines, and the blessed alteration effected by them in his whole frame, act on him; how much more life and power to goodness impart to him, than the bare representation, however otherwise just and true, of the fitness or unfitness of things, of their natural relations, ends, and energies! How much more are they not adapted to the nature and capacities of man, of all mankind and every person, however different the size of their capacity and their sensitive powers!

The rule of christian virtue, and this is its second advantage, the rule of christian virtue is more fixed, more sure, more infallible, and more useful than any other. God has, indeed, inscribed all his laws upon
our

our hearts ; but how much have not prejudices, errors, the lusts, and the passions, obscured this heavenly writing, with the generality of men, with how many is it not thus rendered illegible and almost effaced ! — God has indeed made us all capable of a lively sentiment, a quick and safe judgment of what is good and bad, right and wrong : but how seldom is this capacity so unfolded and cultivated, how seldom this judgment so exercised and sharpened, as to be a safe and certain guide to us in all cases ! How often, on the contrary, is this sentiment stifled by the multitude of opposite practices, customs, and examples, and this judgment perverted by the artifices of self-love ! How often, therefore, must even the well-intentioned man, the friend of virtue, who has no other guide than these, be deficient in necessary certainty and resolution ! How often, where his path divides in two, must he be liable to perplexity !

A perplexity, which the friend of christian virtue far less frequently experiences, which he may totally avoid, if he adhere firmly to the directions given him. His path is pointed out before him : he finds in every part of it the footsteps of his leader and precursor Jesus. Here are the express precepts and commands of God, his lawgiver and father. 'This is the way thou shalt go ; thou shalt not turn aside to the right hand or to the left !' There is the example of Jesus, our captain and lord. As he was disposed, so must thou, his disciple and follower, be disposed ; as he walked, so must thou also walk. How can I

stand hesitating there, how fall into error, how wander from my mark? As a christian, I believe in God, and believe in Jesus; I confidently trust myself to God, my heavenly father, and to his son, my favour and lord; — I know that God loves me; I know that Jesus loves me; I know that my creator and my redeemer intend nothing but my happiness, — I therefore do, what God bids me to do; abstain from what he bids me avoid; endure what he bids me to undergo; — follow as Jesus leads, tread confidently in his footsteps, form myself upon his spirit, think and act as he thought and acted: frequently ask myself, 'what would he have done, or not have done, in my circumstances and condition? — and while I do thus, how can I — I repeat my interrogation — how can I stand hesitating, how go astray, how wander from my mark? My guides are infallible; their precepts are divine truth. My path is luminous; shews itself distinctly from all by-paths and devious ways; never loses itself in gloomy labyrinths; leads strait forward to the mark; grows ever smoother and plainer, the nearer it brings me to it. — With what comfortable assurance, then, may I not walk therein! how securely pursue my course! To what a certainty and firmness will it bring me in the practice of virtue!

The sphere of christian virtue is likewise far more wide, its activity greater than the sphere and activity of any other virtue. Christianity, and christianity alone, teaches us to consider all things, the small as well

well as the great, the seemingly insignificant as well as the more important, so much in their dependance upon God; connects all so closely with his will; unites the whole of our present life, with all its affairs, its pleasures, and its occurrences, so intimately and indissolubly with our future superior life; calls us to look so stedfastly to God and to Jesus, that, with the man who is totally animated by the spirit of christianity, all is virtue, — all, even his most trifling actions, are the fruits and exertions of virtue. “Whether, therefore,” as it is written, “he eateth or drinketh, or whatsoever he doth, he doth all to the glory of God.” “Whatsoever he doth in word or deed, he doth all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” To the christian nothing is in some sense indifferent, nothing unimportant: the spirit which lives and governs in him, ennobles all he thinks and does. His meditations on God, his joyfulness in him, his eager desires to please him, his prospects in futurity, give more life, more dignity, more consequence, to every thing that befalls him, and every thing he is employed in. He considers, judges, does, enjoys, and endures all things in the light of divine truth — all as a christian. Every business of his calling is to him a commission from God; every insurmountable difficulty he meets with in it, is a prohibition of God; every favourable circumstance, the assistance and the blessing of God; every pleasure, every success, a benefaction of God; every misfortune, a dispensation of God; every good,

every wicked man, an instrument in the hand of God. His whole life, therefore, is one continued obedience, a constant resignation to the divine will, and a filial reverence to the good pleasure of God. His virtue, then, comprehends and embraces all things, acts in all and by all, sanctifies all, completes all, combines all with each other and with God; forsakes him in no place, at no time, in no condition; and the sphere of his activity is as large as the sphere of his thoughts, his sensations, his affairs, his pleasures, the combinations of his comforts and his afflictions!

And no wonder, my pious hearers, that the virtue of the christian comprehends so much, and operates so far. The incitements, the motives he acts upon as a christian, are far more various and forcible than any others. They touch his heart while they employ his understanding. They take possession of his desires, and captivate his sensibility, at the very time that they convince his reason. Christianity is ordained for all mankind, and still more for the man of sensibility than for the man of cold abstracted reflection. What the philosopher calls, and justly calls, truth, order, and the fitness of things, is here at the same time the command of God, our creator and lawgiver; the express will of our supreme benefactor; the precept and admonition and example of a saviour and redeemer who died out of love to us; it is the only means of pleasing this gracious God, of delighting this generous redeemer, and of sharing in his power and glory; it is the way that leads to a
blessed

bleſſed immortality, to the poſſeſſion of the moſt exalted prerogatives, to the fruition of the pureſt joys in a better world. Here all the ſprings of action in man are ſet in motion, whatever uſually incites him to the uſe of his faculties, and renders him ſteady in the exertions of them: reverence, gratitude, love, reſignation, joy, hope; deſire of applauſe, thirſt of pleaſure, of perfection, of happineſs. And what effects muſt not this produce in the human heart! What power of habit, of error, of bad example, of ſenſuality, is able to reſiſt their united force?

How can I not love God, the God who loved me ſo much, ſo inexpressibly, as to ordain Jeſus to be my ſaviour; who, through him, has exalted me to the dignity of being his ſon, and called me to ſupreme felicity? And how love him, this God, without keeping all his commandments, and conforming myſelf entirely to his will? — How can I revere Jeſus, the only begotten of the father, who humbled himſelf ſo far for mankind, did and ſuffered for them ſo much, imparted to them ſo much light, comfort, freedom, hope, and happineſs; how ſee him dying on the croſs, and thereby depriving death of all terrors for me; how be enabled to connect myſelf ſo intimately with him; how revere him as my lord and king, without devoting myſelf wholly to him, without being ready to do and to ſuffer, to hazard and to ſacrifice every thing for him who dared and ſacrificed ſo much for me, who even laid down his life for my ſake? — — How can I expect his laſt ad-

vent to judgment and to remuneration and rejoice in it, without constantly preparing myself for it by a holy conduct and a godly life? How transport myself in spirit into the abode of the blessed, which he has opened and prepared for me, and here not think and live as that higher state requires? — And if I love God, if I love Jesus; if I look to futurity; if I feel how much, how infinitely much, I owe to God and to his son Jesus, how blessed I am already in the enjoyment of these benefits, and how much more blessed I shall be hereafter — what duty will then be too hard for me, what sacrifice, that God may require of me, too costly; what sin will not be hateful to me; what opportunity for doing good, and for becoming useful to my brethren, like Jesus, will not be right welcome to me? Certainly he who so thinks — and so must the christian think, who is a christian in deed and in truth — can never be wanting in incitements, in desire and ability to do good; has more and stronger motives to be virtuous, and constantly to improve in virtue, than any other man who has not the happiness to be a christian.

And how much more noble and grand are not, lastly, the views of christian virtue! How much superior and more excellent the mark at which it aims! All virtue has in view the promoting of what is true, what is beautiful and good; all virtue aims at order, at perfection, at happiness. But not as christian virtue does. The greater and juster the knowledge is which the christian has of God, of Jesus, of

of the chief end of man, and of futurity; so much the nobler must be his sentiments, so much the more comprehensive his views, so much the more exalted the purpose he pursues!—The whole human race is but one large family to him, and that the family of God, his heavenly father; a family which he embraces with his benevolence, and visits with his love; and his affectionate activity is circumscribed by no false patriotism, is weakened by no prejudices of rank or nation—Jesus is to him, Jesus that is highly exalted over all, is to him the lord and king of men; truth and virtue and freedom and happiness, are the privileges and distinctions of his kingdom; and every word, every deed, every sacrifice, every suffering whereby the christian can bring one man from error to truth, from vice to virtue, from bondage into freedom, whereby he can amend, console, or rejoice him, is to him an enlargement and confirmation of the glorious kingdom of Jesus, an actual participation in his great work on earth. To him this life is the porch or vestibule of the future, the preparation to it: and all that he does and operates here, and occasions others to do and effect; all the harm that he here prevents; all the good he here performs; all the seed he here sows; all the blossoms he brings to fruit; are to him causes that infinitely extend in effects. This is to him the seed-time, of which he may expect hereafter to reap a harvest of a thousand-fold. What prospects, my dear brethren! what extensive, what comprehensive views does the virtue of
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the christian open before him! He promotes the gracious purposes of God with regard to man, and labours in fellowship with him, his heavenly father, for the benefit of his children: espouses the cause of truth, of integrity, of freedom, the cause of God, according to the utmost of his power: prosecutes the work that Jesus began on earth, and enlarges the borders of his kingdom: assists mankind, his brethren, in their education for heaven; and is useful to them, not only here, not only long after his death, but even in eternity. How much must not such prospects as these ennoble all his virtuous endeavours and actions! Can the imagination frame any loftier, any more extensive purposes than these?

And will they ever allow him to be weary or disheartened in his endeavours to improve himself and others? Will he ever set bounds to his wisdom, his goodness, and his general utility; ever think that he has done too much, or even enough? No; his aim is perfection, christian perfection, ever greater resemblance to Jesus, ever progressive approximation to God. Nothing short of this can satisfy him. The standard by which he measures the value or the magnitude of his virtue, is not the judgment of the world, but the judgment of heaven; not what he is and does, but what he can do, and what he may be. Even when he has laboured long at his improvement, has already made great advances, already done much, brought much about, and suffered much, he still exclaims, with the apostle, “ Not that I have already
attained

attained or am already perfect." No; I forget those things that are behind, I scarcely make any account of what I have already done and performed, while so much remains for me to do; I press forward, after the higher degrees of perfection I have not yet attained, after the prize of the mark of righteousness and integrity I have then to expect when I surmount all things, and persevere unto the end.

Yes, this is thy generous disposition, this thy modest and yet ardent language, thou best and surest guide of man, o christian virtue! — Blessed be thy arrival upon earth! and blessed the Lord who brought thee amongst men, and laid the foundations of thy empire in their hearts! Gentle is thy sway, and obedience to thee is liberty and peace. Thou givest strength to the weary, and power to the impotent. Thou liftest up the poor out of the mire; thou exaltest the humble and meek. Thou blestest them with the sentiment of their present and future dignity. Thou art divine wisdom to the unlearned as well as to the learned. Thou givest resolution to the irresolute; inspirest the dead with life, and the timid with the courage of heroes. The miserable is indebted to thee for his sweetest comfort, the despised good man for the inward repose of his spirit, the victim of persecution for the rewarding consciousness of his integrity and constancy, the sufferer for his silent persevering courage, and the dying man for his joyful hopes. Thou hast performed, and still daily performest, numberless noble acts, which never come

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to the knowledge of any mortal, which are sullied by no vain thirst of fame, which he only sees who sees in secret, and which under his inspection never cease to spread happiness and joy throughout his kingdom. O that thy dominion were universal, that every christian were animated by thy warmth, and that every christian might make thee his model for becoming what he is not yet!

Yes, my pious hearers, this may the christian, and this should he be! The light of the world, the salt of the earth, the instructor, the pattern, the improver, the helper, the saviour of the rest of mankind; far wiser, far more virtuous, a far more useful citizen, a far greater benefactor to his brethren, than the wisest, the best of men, who is not a christian! This is his calling, this his election; and this should be the aim of his endeavours!

And it promises him, both in the present and in the future world, far greater happiness than to any other wise and virtuous man. Every degree of virtue renders us susceptible of a certain degree of happiness; wherefore let us, no more than God, exclude any good man from all felicity. But christian virtue is the way that leads to the purest and the sublimest bliss.—Walk then therein, o thou that hast the happiness to be called a christian! Thy business should not merely be to escape eternal ruin, or to be transported after death into a state not altogether wretched. Wouldst thou be a christian indeed, and turn the privileges of christianity to thy real advantage, then
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must thou think more generously, and strive after greater things, rise superior to all thy brethren who are not christians; aspire after a higher felicity, that hereafter thou mayest be, still more than here, the leader, the teacher, the benefactor, the helper, of thy less perfect and less happy brethren; that thou mayest be ever approaching nearer to God, ever acquiring a greater resemblance to Jesus, and mayest have ever more communion with the father and with his son. What a prospect, my dear brethren! O may it be ever present to our minds, to our constant improvement in all christian virtue, ever bringing us nearer to perfection!

SERMON XIV.

The Pleasures of Virtue.

O GOD, the supreme, uncontrollable ruler of all mankind, of all worlds, to obey thee is pure felicity. The ways thou commandest us, as rational creatures, to walk, are ways of pleasantness, all the paths thou pointest out to us are peace and lead to happiness. If thou requirest of us virtue and obedience, thou requirest them of us because without them we cannot be at rest, cannot be contented, and could not enjoy so many real substantial pleasures, so many pure delights, or but in a very inferior degree. Yes, this we clearly perceive in the calmest, best hours of our rational life, when reason and conscience, nature and scripture address us in plain terms, in a language that cannot be mistaken. Oh might we not forget it, oh might we then acknowledge and believe it when inordinate passions are

are rising within us, when temptations and dangers and bad example beset us, amidst the tumult of worldly affairs and distractions! Oh might virtue even then be our companion and guide, our monitor and patron! How securely then should we not walk! How contented and blessed not be! We are now assembled before thee, in silence in a place consecrated to reflections on the most momentous subjects, to remind ourselves of those eternal truths, and to imprint them deeply on our minds and our hearts. Oh then do thou bless our reflections upon them! Do thou teach us to esteem virtue for what she is, let her present herself to us in her captivating form attended by her peculiar satisfactions and delights, that we may ever revere and love her the more, and more carefully follow her dictates. We make our prayers to thee in this behalf as the followers of thy son Jesus, the most perfect exemplar and the greatest promoter of virtue, addressing thee farther in his name: Our father, &c.

PROV. iii. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

OF all the mistaken notions that may be and actually are entertained in regard to moral matters, not one is more pernicious than this, that though virtue may hope for joys and rewards in a future world, yet in the present she procures but few pleasures to her followers and friends. Who can be ignorant how much more forcibly we are affected by the present than by the future, and how extremely difficult it is to the generality of mankind to concern himself merely about the latter, to the neglect of the former? To suffer at present, in order at some time hereafter to rejoice; to impose restraints on our appetites and to do violence to ourselves at present, in order at some distant indeterminate period, to live the more comfortably and happy; to sacrifice and relinquish at present a number of things that we love and value, in order to receive a twofold or a tenfold compensation hereafter; to be scrupulously abstinent at present, in the hope of future enjoyment, and voluntarily to endure want and pain, in order hereafter to enjoy a greater abundance of satisfactions and delights: all this is by

no means pleasing to the sensual man, and can only work upon such as have a mind invigorated by habitual reflection, whose reason has already in some degree acquired the mastery over sense. Need we then wonder, if virtue labours under an evil report among such numbers of persons, at most exciting in them reverence, but not love, holding as they do her service to be hard and severe, and the compliance with her commands extremely joyless; persuading themselves that she requires more sacrifice and renunciation of pleasure, than she procures enjoyment of it? If they would be enamoured of virtue, they must learn differently to regard and to judge of her. To them she must appear as the wisest, the gentlest sovereign, the truest friend, the most liberal dispenser of joy to mankind. And this in truth she is, my dear friends; neither reason nor scripture, neither our own nor foreign experience will allow us to doubt of it. The ways of wisdom, says our text, or, which is just the same thing, the ways of virtue are pleasantness, and all her paths are happiness, are peace. Oh that I may be enabled, to expose that pernicious error, and to convince you of its opposite truth, of the truth that virtue and pleasure are connected together by the closest ties! I intend to lay before you the various pleasures of a virtuous and pious life. I will first enumerate and describe them; and then make some remarks in order to justify my proposition. Enjoyment of innocence; sentiment of order and truth; satisfaction with one-

self; livelier and freer intercourse with others; more comfortable and confident thoughts on God; the pleasures of beneficence and general utility; the blessedness of love towards God and man; the fairest prospects in futurity: all these are pleasures procured to us by virtue; some of them being entirely, and some eminently peculiar to her. Let us consider and appreciate them apart.

First then, Enjoyment of innocence. This is a pleasure entirely peculiar to virtue; a pleasure which no wicked man, however brilliant his fortune, can either understand or taste. And how great, how pure is not this pleasure! To be conscious of no ill design, no intentionally bad action; to be harassed by no inordinate and fordid passion; to be driven to and fro by no vehement sensual appetite; to be tortured by no reproaches, haunted by no dread of condign punishment; to be deceived neither by idle hopes nor vain alarms: but to have a good, unfulfilled conscience before God and man; to bear within us the evidence of sincerity and rectitude; to feel oneself free and to assert our liberty; to know that we are come out of darkness into light, from death to life, that we are reformed and renewed after the image of God, that we love and seek only what is good, readily do our duty, readily promote the advantage of others, and are ever sedulous to be and to do what in conformity to the will of God we ought to be and to do; in a word, to walk the way which God himself has pointed out to us, and of the

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the rectitude and happy issue whereof we are assured; what serenity, what agreeable sensations, what blessed enjoyment of self must not this procure to a man! What cause has he not to exult in his existence, in his life, in his capacities and powers, in his conduct and his appointment! How much more cheerfully and boldly may he not pursue his way, and enjoy whatever is beautiful and good that he sees and meets with on it, than if he were forced to accuse and to condemn himself; than if he were under the harsh, tyrannical dominion of sin and vice; than if, with all the pomp and glare that surrounded him, he were a criminal, a slave, a creature fallen from its dignity and ripe for punishment.

Another pleasure that virtue bestows on man, is the sight and the sentiment of truth and order that reign in his mind, in his heart, in the whole of his character, in all the parts of his inward and outward conduct, giving a certain dignity and beauty to his mind as well as to his life, which cannot be seen and observed without complacency. If vice begets inconsistency and strife, disfiguring and degrading the man: virtue produces order and harmony, ennobling and beautifying whatever the man is and does. If the slave of the former be never truly in agreement with himself, but is discomposed at one time by vile and sordid lusts, at another by untoward accidents, at another by the passions of other men, and at all times agitated to and fro, and driven from his aim like a plaything of fortune: the

friend of the latter, of virtue, has a way of thinking and a character at all times equal; he has stated principles on which he constantly acts, fixt determinate aims which he steadily pursues, and thus is ever coming nearer his mark, the mark of christian perfection. Thoughts and perceptions, desires and propensities, words and works, are with him in perfect unison. What he speaks and says, that he thinks and feels: what he does, that he wills, and conceives to be right and good, the best he can do for the occasion. In every place, at every time, in every business, in every pleasure, in society as in solitude, in domestic as in civil life, in the affairs of his calling as in his religious worship, he is ever the same; the same sincere votary of God and his will, the same friend and promoter of truth and goodness, the same foe to all deceit and imposture, to all flattery, to all base and sordid purposes and actions, the same just and equitable judge of his brethren; the same humble, discreet, contented, kind, beneficent, generous-minded man and christian; constantly animated by love towards God and all mankind, constantly true to his conscience and his duty, and constantly ready to do and to suffer, whatever God shall will that he should do and suffer. And to be this and to feel this, what sweet repose, what pure delight must also this procure a man! Doubtless far more pleasure than the sight of a beautiful, majestic figure, or the sentiment of health and vigour of body.

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With this pleasure a third is indissolubly united, and that is satisfaction with himself. Extremely seldom does the vicious man know and enjoy it. Rarely is he altogether that which he could wish himself to be; seldom has he and does he that, which he could wish himself to have and to do; seldom can he entirely approve of his designs and undertakings; seldom can he look back on his past conduct, entirely without disquiet, entirely without reproach, or consider the present state of his mind with entire approbation. But this the virtuous man can do, and this can he never do without heart-felt pleasure. Free from culpable pride, in the liveliest sentiment of his natural weakness and his entire dependence on God, he can yet boldly say to himself: I am that which God would have me to be; I do that which God wills that I should do; I maintain the post that he has assigned me, I walk the way that he has prescribed me, I carry on the work that he has committed to me. I become by little and little that which here on earth I should become. My intellectual capacities and powers unfold themselves and are kept in exercise; my inclinations are turned solely to good, to the best objects; the discharge of my duty is ever becoming more easy and agreeable to me; the temptations to evil are constantly losing their force upon me; outward things, appearance and glittering show charm and impose upon me constantly less; the revolutions, the vicissitudes that happen in my outward condition and all

around me, perplex, bewilder and alarm me less from day to day; my mind rises constantly more above visible and present things, and rejoices more and more in its high descent and its high appointment, its communion with God and with the invisible world. No; I am not retreating from the perfection to which I am called as a man and a christian; I am not losing sight of the mark of the prize that is set before me; it shines constantly brighter in my view; and I perceive, I see that I am constantly advancing towards it. And how satisfied with himself and with his condition must this render the virtuous man, let his outward circumstances be ever so mean, and his fortunes ever so adverse! And what pleasure is more pure and lasting, what can diffuse a serener light over all the life, over all the path of man, than this satisfaction with himself!

But when a man is thus animated and blessed, my pious hearers, he also enjoys, fourthly, the pleasure of a free and chearful intercourse with his fellow-creatures. And this pleasure too does virtue procure him, if not alone and exclusively, yet in an eminent degree. The virtuous man is not haunted by envy and ill-will, by pride and vanity, by base ends and tricks, by secret reproaches and anxieties; no, wherever he goes he is accompanied by benevolence and love, complacency in whatever is beautiful and good, and delight in all beauty and goodness; he is accompanied by a quiet and contented heart,

heart, a good conscience, a modest assurance in the company of his brethren. He comes neither to persons whom he has injured, affronted, estranged, or whom he intends to hurt, or whose displeasure and resentment he has reason to dread; nor to any against whom he nourishes hatred and animosity in his heart, whom he cannot absolutely endure, whom he is not ready to pardon, to succour, to benefit. In his intercourse with others he has no need to fear disgrace or reproaches; has no need to impose on himself any troublesome restraints, carefully to veil and to conceal his thoughts and intentions, nor to court protection and respect, now under one mask and then under another. He can, without any danger, shew himself as he is, speak as he thinks, act in conformity with his character; and the consciousness of his integrity, the inward sentiment of his dignity, divests even any unjust censure or undeserved neglect, he may occasionally meet with, of its principal force. The less claim he lays to outward distinctions, to particular marks of honour; the more he prefers reality to appearance, what is personal to what is borrowed, the essential to the accidental: so much the less liable is he to affronts and slights in society; so much more calmly and fully does he enjoy the agreeableness of it. The less invidiously and partially he views all the beautiful and good that others have and do: so much the greater satisfaction and so much the surer satisfaction does the sight of it procure him; so much greater is con-

stantly the preponderance of the sensations of pleasure and of joy over the sensations of displeasure and of dissatisfaction in his heart. He that has ever enjoyed this pleasure of conversing with his brethren with freedom and vivacity, must confess it to be very great and desirable. And who enjoys it so pure, so complete, as the virtuous man?

Still greater, still sublimer pleasures arise, fifthly, to the virtuous man, from his meditations on God, and converse with him. Boldly and freely can he think on God, the first, the greatest, the most perfect being; in filial frankness can he converse with him, as with his father, pray to him, look up to him, and employ himself in his worship. While the wicked man strives to put away from him the thoughts of God, and to obscure the idea of him in his mind, because he must ever tremble before the Almighty and the Just One, as before the judge of his evil actions and designs: to the virtuous man these thoughts are ever welcome, ever quieting and consoling, and therefore diffuse brightness and joy over all that he sees and hears, that he thinks and does. Since he reveres the will of God as his supreme law; since he walks before God in piety and sincerity of heart: so he has no need to fear either his displeasure or his punishment. To him it is encouragement and recompense to have the Omniscient and Omnipresent for the witness and judge of his behaviour: and, even when he mistakes or fails, this idea does not confound him, for he knows how
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righteous, how equitable, how indulgent the judgment of the universal parent is, and how exactly all his demands are suited to our powers and circumstances. As sure as there is a God, may he confidently say to himself, as sure as there is a God, a sovereign inspector and ruler of moral creatures, of mankind, so certainly may I assure myself of his complacency and his approbation; for he knows my heart, he knows that my intentions are honest, that I love truth and virtue above all things; that, with all my failings and infirmities, no sin, no vice has the dominion over me; that I strive more after intellectual, permanent perfection, than after any outward distinctions, and that I prefer the benefit of knowing, of loving, of obeying him, my creator and father, and of constantly approaching nearer him by wisdom and virtue, to every other benefit. And to him sincerity is agreeable; to him integrity is the most valuable of all. And how much must this assurance compose the virtuous man! With what courage, what confidence must it inspire him on occasions where others tremble and are dismayed! with what blissful sensations must it not frequently replenish his heart! From how many troubles and cares defend him! How much sweeten and enhance to him every other pleasure!

A sixth source of pleasure which virtue opens to mankind, and which flows for her friends far more copiously than for any others, is the pleasure of beneficence and of general utility. If self-interest and selfishness contract the heart of the vicious man,
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causing him to reckon every service he performs to others, as a burden, and to regard every benefit he bestows as a loss; if he prize and love any thing only inasmuch as it procures him personal advantage or sensual gratification: yet virtue enlarges and ennobles the heart of him she animates, renders easy every service he performs to his brethren, and converts every benefit he does them into gain. He understands, he reveres his appointment; knows that he is not to live and to act merely for himself, but also for others, not only to care and to work for his own, but also for the general good; and the more good he does and promotes in his station and according to his relative situations, the more he can contribute to the diminution of human misery and to the augmentation of human happiness, so much the more he rejoices in his designation and in the abilities and means that providence has granted him to the accomplishment of it. And how often, in how many various ways, in what an abundant measure may he not enjoy this noble, this divine satisfaction! How much good, and how many kinds of good may not the virtuous person do, or give occasion to, or promote, as a man, as a citizen, as the head of a family, as a friend, as a worshipper of God! How much light, how much life, how much comfort, how much content, may he not diffuse around him! How much useful influence may he not have on others! His sagacity, his opinions, his example, his assistance, his prudence, his compassion, his interest, his indefatigable activity in
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goodness: what may not, what must not these, mediately and immediately, visibly and invisibly, effect upon others and in others, for the present and for the future! What good, what precious seed, is he not sowing on all sides, and who can reckon up the fruits, that, sooner or later, grow from it! And, as he is and does all this, not constrainedly, nor for the sake of appearances, but with his whole heart, in deed and in truth; what agreeable ideas and sensations, what pure, unadulterated pleasures must it not procure him! How consoling, how recompensing the thought, that he is acting up to his duty, maintaining his post, that he has been of real benefit to human society, that he has wiped away tears from the eyes of the mourner, has supported the feeble, relieved the indigent, succoured the miserable, and promoted the cause of truth, of virtue, of religion, of human happiness, to the utmost of his power! What pleasure is more pure, what have we more in common with the deity, than this?

A no less abundant, indeed an inexhaustible source of pleasure, which stands open to the virtuous man alone, is, seventhly, the blessedness arising from love towards God and man. What is love in itself and in its effects, but joy; and what love is more fertile in true and lasting, in ever renewing and heart-satisfying joy, than a love towards God and all mankind? And this love is known, and this blessedness is enjoyed in all its purity and in its full extent, by the virtuous man alone. Never without

joy does he think on God, his father in heaven; never without joy, does he behold mankind, his children on earth. He rejoices in being a creature, a subject, a child of the Most High; in living under his inspection and government; in having communion with him; in being guided and conducted by him, and in having him about his path and about his bed, the witness of all his ways. He rejoices in all his dispensations in nature and in religion, in all his works and ways, in all his ordinances and laws; in every trace of his wisdom and goodness that he perceives in himself and others, in heaven and on earth, in the inanimate and the animate creation; in every instance of bounty, in every blessing that falls to the lot of himself or others; in every ray of light, in every spark of life, in every source of comfort and solace, every means of improvement, every advance towards improvement that he discovers in himself and others, near him and afar off. He rejoices in all the capacities and powers, all the endowments and aptitudes, all the bodily and mental distinctions, all the beautiful and good, all the virtues and merits, all the advantages and benefits and pleasures, which he finds in such great abundance and variety, among mankind, his brethren; and when he thinks on their great dispositions and their high designation, when he imagines them all at the goal of perfection and happiness, and sees that all is right and good and unsusceptible of farther correction; then his pleasure rises to transport, and he enjoys

joys somewhat of the felicity of God, who surveyed all that he had made, and behold it was very good. And how blessed must not that man be who is animated by such love towards God and man, who learns thus to rejoice in God and man, in all that is and all that will be! What a totally different aspect must not the generality of objects thus assume in his sight! How much more lightly and gayly may he not pursue his way, than the wretch, who, blinded and hardened by vice, wanders about, either with an indifferent, unfeeling heart, or even with an envious, fullen, censorious, murmuring, misanthropic temper, among the works of God and his noblest creatures on earth, thinking he perceives on all sides nothing but evil and defect and misery!

To all these primary pleasures which virtue ensures to man, must be added, lastly, the cheering, glorious prospects she opens to his view in futurity. To the virtuous man, whose virtue is founded on religion and piety, neither the nearer nor the remoter futurity is dreadful. He has no anxiety concerning either the events that await him in the present or in the future life. They are all in the disposal of the All-wise and All-bountiful, in the disposal of his father in heaven, from whom he can expect nothing but good, from whom he must constantly expect the best. Yes; with this the virtuous man may continually console himself. As certainly as virtue is not an empty name, as certainly as she is a daughter of heaven, and is well-pleasing to him
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who dwelleth in heaven : so certainly is she the way to happiness in every condition of man, in every period of his life, at every stage of his existence. Yes ; as surely as there is a Providence that watches and presides over all, that never takes the bad for good, nor the good for bad : so surely may I reckon upon the inspection, the patronage, the guidance and direction of the Almighty and supremely-bountiful, my father in heaven ; so certainly may I be assured that he requires of me nothing impossible, lays no insupportable affliction upon me, that he will never abandon or neglect me, that he determines and decrees concerning me nothing but good, under whatever form it may appear ; that he conducts all things, the evil as well as the good, sorrows as well as joys, to my real benefit ; that he will infallibly lead me to the mark, to the mark of perfection. As certainly as my spirit is immortal ; as certainly as another, a higher life awaits us after death : so certainly shall I rejoice for ever in my immortality, so certainly shall I be happy in that superior life, and there proceed from perfection to perfection ; for of this I feel myself capable, thither already at present my principal desires and inclinations tend, and the issue of the way of virtue, on which I walk, can, under the government of an all-wise and all-gracious God, be no other than this. And to know this, my dear brethren, to be assured of this, how completely must it not divest futurity of all its terrors ! What glorious prospects does it there not open to
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our view ! And how much must not these prospects alleviate and brighten the path of life to man ! What pleasures and joys procure him !

Yes ; thus it is, my pious hearers. The ways of virtue are ways of pleasantness ; and all her paths are peace. Virtue is the purest, the richest source of pleasure and happiness. From it already have innumerable persons drawn life and comfort and joy ; and still daily do thousands and thousands draw these blessings in full measure. Oh be persuaded of this, my dear brethren, and seek constantly more and more to certify yourselves of it by your own experience. Venerate and love virtue with all your heart, form yourselves by her dictates, give an exact and willing obedience to all her precepts : and then I promise you, in her name and in the name of God who recommends her to us, not indeed riches, not superfluity, not power and majesty, not gross carnal voluptuousness ; but peace and contentment, but pleasure, solid, diversified, lasting pleasure, exceeding every other. This you may as surely expect, as surely as you devote to her your love and your service. This you will enjoy in every station, in every stage of outward prosperity, in every period of life ; and never will this pleasure cause you satiety or surfeit, never will it lose of its charms ; never be a hindrance to you in your duty, never injure your spiritual perfection, never keep you back from attaining to the mark of your high calling, but be ever bringing you nearer to both. Yes ; the longer
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you walk the way of virtue; the more carefully and diligently you pursue your course upon it; so much the more will you be able, from your own experience and from complete conviction, to say, with the wise man in our text: Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace!

SERMON XV.

Why many virtuous Persons enjoy not more Pleasure.

O GOD, thou hast created us all for happiness, hast rendered us all susceptible of it, thou callest us all to the enjoyment of it, thou hast opened to us sources not less abundant than various in nature and in religion; and it is our own fault, if notwithstanding we are not happy, if we enjoy not satisfaction and pleasure, and often break out in complaints under the sentiment of a deficiency in them. Yes, but too frequently we mistake thy parental voice, and hearken not to thy gracious invitations. But too frequently we pass by the purest and richest sources of pleasure, to seek it there where it is not to be found. But too often we embitter to ourselves those sources by various failings and transgressions, or entirely stop them by follies and sins. Yes, Lord, thou art righteous, thou hast no pleasure in our misery and in our

forrows ; but lookeſt down with parental complacency on us thy children when we piously and chearfully enjoy thy bounties, and live contented in the enjoyment of them. Devout exultation and innocent and chearful enjoyment is the principal act of gratitude thou requireſt of us. Oh that we all conſtantly believed and acknowledged this ! How eaſy, how agreeable to us would not then the way of duty and of virtue be ! How ſoon would the moſt of our complaints be ſilenced and converted into thanksgivings for thy bounties ! What progreſs ſhould we not at the ſame time make on the road of perfection and happineſs, and how clearly learn to perceive that it is one and the ſame way that leads to both ! Oh teach us ever better to know the impediments to the chearful enjoyment of a virtuous life, and aſſiſt us ever more completely to ſurmout them. Let our preſent reflections on theſe ſubjects be bleſſed to that end, and hearken to our prayer through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord, in whoſe name we farther addreſs thee, ſaying : Our father, &c.

PROV. iii. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

WE have lately seen, my pious hearers, how various and great the pleasures are which virtue procures to her followers and friends. They enjoy the consciousness of their innocence and integrity; they perceive and feel that truth and order prevail in their soul, and in the whole of their conduct; have cause to be satisfied with themselves; may converse frankly and cheerfully with their fellow-creatures; think comfortably and confidently on God; enjoy the satisfactions of beneficence and general-utility; the felicity of love towards God and man; and have the fairest, the most glorious prospects in futurity. As certainly as all these are pure and noble pleasures: so certainly are they grounded in the very nature of virtue; belong of right to every virtuous person, as necessary effects and consequences of it, and cannot well be separated, at least in the abstract from his character and his conduct. However, there are persons, who cannot but be reckoned virtuous, and yet have either no share at all in those pleasures, or only enjoy them in a very inferior degree; persons who with very good

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dispositions,

dispositions, are nevertheless more gloomy than gay, more sad than joyful, and who are heard to complain and lament more than to call themselves happy. How does this agree with the position we have maintained? Is the rule liable to exceptions? Does virtue grant only to some of her votaries and friends, but not to all, what she promises to bestow upon them? No, my beloved brethren, her nature and qualities are unalterably the same; her energy, her activity, is uniform; she performs what she promises, and is not in fault for any deficiency of pleasure. The reasons, the most various and most forcible reasons for pleasure, are always, are indissolubly connected with a virtuous and pious life; the richest sources of it stand perpetually open to the man who diligently pursues such a course of life; every thing authorizes him, every thing invites him to draw from these sources, and to derive from them felicity and joy. But, besides that the enjoyment of pleasure, by such limited creatures as we are, cannot be always equally vigorous and lively, so, with numbers of otherwise well disposed persons, it will be weakened and impeded by many inward and outward causes, which have their foundation, not in virtue, but merely in human weakness and frailty. And on this, my pious hearers, let us at present the more attentively reflect, as we are all so much concerned in discovering the obstacles to our pleasure, and in removing them out of our way. Let us therefore inquire into the causes why the pleasures of virtue are not enjoyed by all
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virtuous persons, and perhaps only by the least part are enjoyed in a high degree and in full measure.

Frequently an infirm, a more or less disordered state of health is the cause that the virtuous man does not lead so pleasant and chearful a life as it might justly be expected he should; the cause of this weakly and disordered state may moreover lie in the natural frame of the body, or in disastrous accidents, or in a previous irregularity of conduct. The consequences of which always weaken the sensibility to pleasure, or disturb and interrupt the enjoyment of it. Not unfrequently thence arise in us a variety of involuntary painful or otherwise disagreeable sensations, which overbalance the agreeable representations of the mind, or entirely obscure them. Frequently such circumstances confine the exertion of our abilities, our activity in goodness, and likewise our satisfaction in such works as we have happily completed, in the relief and service we may have afforded to others. Virtue may indeed alleviate to us all these troubles and sufferings; she can teach us, inasmuch as they are dispensations of God, to view them in a more agreeable light, she can teach us to make a salutary use of them; but she cannot either entirely remove or reform them. Let this teach you, my pious hearers, the value of health in regard to the noblest the most exalted pleasures of man; and if you, who now enjoy this benefit, and are still in the flower of your age, if you wish to lead a truly contented and chearful life in the service of virtue, and

to experience all the blessings she bestows : oh then let the preservation of your health and your faculties be recommended to you, not only as a duty, but as the means to vivacity of mind and the most diversified pleasures ; and, be persuaded that you can make no sacrifice to moderation, especially in the early part of life, for which you will not afterwards be repaid a hundred fold.

Another cause why many persons do not at all, or not completely enjoy the pleasure that virtue can and should afford them, are the impressions not yet effaced, of their early education, and the erroneous example upon which they were formed. He that has been educated and instructed by pious, indeed, but too severe and too little enlightened parents and tutors ; he that, in the first years of his nurture, had about him persons, honest indeed, but of a shy, mistrustful, and anxious disposition ; he who perceives that both the one and the other, indeed, do nothing bad and omit nothing good, yet act more from constraint than with ease and satisfaction, more servilely than frankly and with chearful ease ; who always hears more talk of sacrifice and self-denial, of crosses and sufferings, of dereliction and destitution for the sake of goodness ; to whom the danger of sinning and of falling short of the mark of perfection, is repeatedly magnified, the present world so often displayed on its contemptible side, and the lot of the pious in it as generally woeful and calamitous : he may indeed learn to honour virtue and to hearken

to her precepts ; but seldom will she thoroughly gain his love, and still seldomer will he experience the entire felicity of her service. She will always, in his eyes, have more the appearance of an austere imperious mistress, than of a mild obliging friend. He will ever be actuated more by servile than by filial sentiments ; will often torment himself with groundless scruples and doubts, often be in dread of imaginary dangers, will always prefer the extreme of meekness in his judgments and his behaviour, and be but too easily apt to think himself incapable or unworthy of the pleasure that virtue offers him, or to surrender himself too much to the enjoyment of it. Let these remarks serve as a warning to such of you as are parents, preceptors, and tutors ! Strive to render virtue no less amiable than venerable to your children, your scholars and pupils, so soon as they are capable of knowing and feeling any thing of it. Make them acquainted with her at once as the surest way to happiness, as the best comforter, as the only dispenser of joy to man. Never speak to them without cheerfulness, without heartfelt complacency, of her requisites and effects. Practise her precepts never but with readiness and satisfaction in their presence, and let them see and remark that you are never more contented and gay, than when you have done or promoted some good. Endeavour at the same time to give them right notions of God, of the world, and of the present life ; and accustom them no where to overlook what is beautiful and good,

and to view all things in the mild and benign light that wisdom and religion shed over them. So will virtue and pleasure, duty and joy, ever more intimately be connected in their ideas and sensations, and in the sequel of their lives so much the more surely awaken and accompany each other.

A third but too common cause why many a friend of virtue so little knows and so sparingly enjoys the pleasures that should belong to him, is a too defective, too often violated virtue. He that is not fully decided in favour of virtue, and has not entirely devoted himself to her service; he that does not proceed firmly and undismayed along the way she shews him, but is still ever and anon looking back with secret pleasure to his former erroneous courses, and indulges himself in them for a longer or a shorter time; he therefore who oftener or seldomer, acts against his conscience, omits or neglects his duty, allows himself in greater or smaller irregularities and deviations, or falls back into the sins and frailties that formerly swayed him: he cannot indeed always, can never entirely, never in full measure, with all his other good qualities and endeavours, enjoy the pleasure of virtue. There is yet too much restlessness and contradiction in his character and in his behaviour, and he has too seldom reason to be thoroughly satisfied with himself, with what he is and does. And virtue does not lavish her favours on unsteady and fickle friends. She is jealous of her rights; she requires undivided love. The relish of her joys pre-
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supposes susceptibility, and that, with such a vicissitude of light and darkness, of zeal and negligence, is but very small. No, my dear brethren, would ye be thoroughly capable of the pleasures of virtue; would ye have them to your portion; then form yourselves entirely after her mind, follow every suggestion she gives you, and observe all her precepts with unremitted care and unshaken fidelity. You must first sow and plant before you can reap; first be confirmed in the love of goodness and be expert in the practice of it, before you have a right to demand all the benefits arising from it. The more acquainted and familiar you are with virtue; the longer you have remained in her service; the more you have done and sacrificed for her; the more worthily you maintain the character of her votaries and friends: so much the more surely and completely will she cause you to relish all the joys and blessings which we can ever promise ourselves in her company and fellowship.

A fourth, and that the most fertile cause why many good persons do not enjoy the pleasures of virtue in that degree which they might and should, are various prejudices, various false or mistaken notions concerning the most important matters. These are, wrong notions of God; wrong notions of virtue; wrong notions of pleasure; wrong notions of the end and aim of the present life; wrong notions of the spirit and designs of christianity. Let us more nearly inspect these various impediments to alert and chearful

cheerful virtue, in order that we may be able to avoid them.

The first that present themselves, then, are unjust or false notions of God which weaken the enjoyment of the pleasures of virtue with numbers of persons. God requires of us virtue, and he is the author of all our happiness. How much then must depend on the ideas we form of him ! And how gloomy, how much more adapted to excite apprehension and terror than love and confidence are these representations of God with many otherwise sensible persons ! But too often they think of God merely as the Eternal, the Infinite, the Almighty, the Supreme, the perfectly Holy Being ; feel in all its extent the immense distance that is between him and them ; sink, as it were, under the pressure of this sentiment ; and without forget that he is at the same time, the All-wise, the All-good, the Supremely gracious and merciful, that he is love itself. But too often they represent him to themselves as an austere master, as an inexorable judge, ever inclined to punish and to revenge not only every sin and every crime, but every frailty and every infirmity ; and are far too much affrighted at his strict justice, which is however nothing else but wise kindness, to be able to repose and rejoice in the consciousness of a defective virtue and an imperfect obedience, which yet all human virtue and all human obedience is. But too often they imagine that God issues his commands to mankind more as a proof of his sovereign authority over them, than for
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the advancement of their happiness; and it is therefore that they so seldom comply with them in a cheerful manner, and are so seldom happy in the observance of them. Be upon your guard against these erroneous representations, if you would obey God with delight, or, which is the same thing, if you would enjoy the pleasures of virtue. Learn to know and to revere God as a sovereign who prescribes laws to his subjects merely for their own good, and exactly proportions his demands to their circumstances and abilities. Learn to think of him as an inspector and judge, who requires only sincerity and rectitude, but not faultless perfection; and whose inspection and judgment is not terrible but comfortable, to the honest and sincere, though they have a lively sentiment of frailties and defects. Learn to know and to love him as the Father, the kind, the gracious, the indulgent father of mankind, who intends the welfare of all his children on earth, who has designed them all, not for sorrow, but for joy, not for misery, but for happiness, by all his commands intends merely to guide them to that mark, and with paternal complacency looks down upon them when they enjoy satisfaction and pleasure on the path of duty and of virtue.

Not less detrimental to the cheerful enjoyment of the pleasures of virtue are, secondly, the unjust, the false ideas that are formed of virtue itself. What is it else, in the sight and in the judgment of numbers of persons, but another name for severe abstinence,

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an abstinence from the most innocent pleasures and accommodations of life; for perpetual renunciation of all that we prize and love, that is valuable and dear to us, an abjuration of our most natural instincts, appetites, and desires? What is it in their eyes but a grievous constraint to be imposed on them; an anxious solicitude about every step and motion, a solemn pondering of every word and action; a continual struggle and conflict with oneself and with outward things? How can we thus be enamoured of virtue? How can there be any pleasure in following her precepts pretendedly so austere? But how false is not this representation! How much is not virtue disfigured and dishonoured by it! No; she is nothing less than such a spectre, than such a tyrannical mistress, than such a cruel disturber. Doubtless she demands abstinence of us, but only from hurtful, vile, disgraceful things and actions; and, if she demand temperance of us on one side, on the other side she teaches us enjoyment, the grateful, cheerful enjoyment of all the beautiful and good that God has bestowed on us and others, and with which he has replenished the world. If she prescribe to us self-denial, it is not that we should do violence to our natural impulses and inclinations, but only renounce whatever is at variance with our nature and our happiness, what debases and destroys the former, and weakens and disturbs the latter. If she at times lays us under restraint, in this or the other particular, it is only in the view to help us to the possession and enjoyment

enjoyment of true liberty, or to preserve us in it. If she rouses us to vigilance and caution, it is not to inspire us with anxious and servile fear, but to promote our safety and repose. If we are forced at times to fight in her service and to take up arms against ourselves, it is but rarely that we have occasion to resist, as the apostle says, even to blood; and this warfare is for the most part only hard to beginners in the lists of virtue, but not to him who has learnt to rule himself and to overcome the world, and to this conflict succeeds, sooner or later, conquest, and the peaceful blessed enjoyment of victory. No, my pious hearers, form not such mistaken notions of virtue, take her for what she really is, if you would taste and enjoy her pleasures. Virtue is pure truth and order, freedom and strength of mind; repose and contentedness of heart. Virtue is the predominant love for all that is true and beautiful and right and good, with the continual readiness and endeavours to do and to promote whatever is conformable thereto, and this must surely be much easier than its opposite, much more natural and agreeable to the uncorrupted mind of man, or the man improved by religion.

A third class of false or only half-true ideas, that disturb mankind in the chearful enjoyment of the pleasure of virtue concern the pleasure itself, its real quality and its moral worth. Either a man expects from virtue pleasures which she does not promise, and which she cannot dispense; or he does not sufficiently

ciently understand and value those which are proper to her; or he is prepossessed against pleasure in general. One while he expects virtue to yield him nothing but very sensible, lively, extatic pleasures; a state in which one agreeable, blisful sensation presses upon the other, and the heart sinks as it were under a succession of rapturous transports; and if this does not ensue, as, from the limitation of our nature and our dependence on numberless outward things, it is impossible it should, he finds himself deceived, and mistaken in believing that there are pleasures in a virtuous and pious conduct. One while a man is too much habituated to the pleasures of sense, ascribes to them a too great, an exclusive worth, has not yet a sufficient relish for spiritual, moral pleasures, for the pleasures of reflection, of devotion, of silent self-examination, which yet are the purest and sublimest of all: and forasmuch as virtue encourages and promotes these far more than the former, is concerned far more for the perfection of our spirit than for the gratification of our senses; so he fails of enjoying in her service that satisfaction, which he had promised himself from it. Sometimes, in short, a man looks upon pleasure in general as a dangerous matter, as not properly compatible with the gravity of a philosopher, of a virtuous man, of a christian, and therefore looks with a suspicious eye on whatever presents itself to us under that name and in that shape. Be upon your guard, my pious hearers, against these false opinions, if you would be

as happy as you may be by means of virtue. Expect from it no pleasures, no joys, no happiness that is incompatible with our present condition, of which we at present are not capable. Learn to prefer silent tranquillity and inward content to every amusement and diversion however fascinating. Purify, ennoble your taste; be constantly elevating yourselves more and more above whatever only charms and exhilarates merely sensual men; give scope to your feelings of the dignity and the high appointment of your spirit, and study ever more and more highly to prize whatever promotes its perfection and contentment. At the same time condemn no pleasure if it be innocent, if it be not hurtful to yourself or others; rather enjoy it with a gladsome mind; and be assured, that the cheerful and moderate enjoyment of it dishonours no creature that God has designed for happiness; that seriousness and joy may well subsist together, and that even wisdom and virtue are no small gainers by this connection.

Wrong notions of the destination of the present life compose a fourth class of prejudices that hinder or disturb many well-disposed persons in the complete enjoyment of the pleasure that virtue might procure them. Whoever represents to himself this earth, a case by no means unfrequent, as in some sort a place of banishment, as a joyless vale of tears, as the peculiar residence of affliction and misery; whoever

whoever thinks this life to be a place of such exercise and preparation as is merely exercise and preparation, to the exclusion of all real enjoyment, just keeping us up with the hopes of the future, and fitting us for the enjoyment of it; whoever persuades himself, that here not only our principal or our entire happiness, but that no real happiness at all is to be looked for or to be found: he will indeed be constantly more disposed to view all things on their gloomy side, to fix his attention more on the evil than on the good, and ever to feel the former more sensibly than the latter, because he is constantly expecting that, and holds this, if not for impossible, at least to be extremely rare. How can then his heart stand open to the pleasures which virtue offers him, how can it thoroughly feel their value, and calmly resign itself to the enjoyment of them? No; form to yourselves juster notions of what man is and is designed to be. Already here he is in a province of the kingdom of God, which is adorned with a thousand beauties and benefits, all inviting him to enjoyment. Already here he ought to reap a part of the fruits of his labour, already here enjoy true happiness, though the full harvest, the higher and highest happiness, does not await him till after this life. Already this inferior stage of his existence consists of ends as well as means conducing to ultimate ends of a superior order; he is here, not merely and alone for the sake of the future, but also

for the sake of the present ; and godliness, religious virtue, has as well the promises of the present as of the future life.

Lastly, the chearful enjoyment of the pleasures of virtue are by no means more at variance with the spirit and the design of christianity. On this head we too often confound times and circumstances, applying that to all christians which was only meant of some, and principally of the first confessors of Jesus. Thus, when the way of christian virtue is represented in the gospel to be narrow and toilsome ; when the disciples of the Lord are required to take up their crosses and to follow him in sufferings ; when it is said, that the pious must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God ; when we find it written : he that would live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution : it is but too common to conclude from thence, that true christians should in a manner renounce all pleasure, that they should be more liable to calamities and troubles than other men, and should make up their minds to pass their lives in afflictions and sorrows. But true as this was in regard to very many of the first disciples and followers of Jesus, yet it can never be applied to more peaceful times, like ours, and neither are the spirit and the views of christianity attended by these consequences. No ; if christianity require a greater and purer virtue of us than of other men, it also promises and procures us greater and purer joys. If at times it demand of us the sacrifice of some outward advantage, it compen-

fates this loss by the gain of far nobler goods. Besides, the whole of it is designed and adapted to encourage mankind and not to deject them, to inspire them with courage and confidence, not with fear and alarm, to calm, not to ruffle their mind, to open to them new sources of pleasure, and to purify and render more abundant those that they already have. Cast not away your confidence; enjoy with thanksgiving and assurance all things; be ever cheerful; be of good cheer even in tribulations; rejoice in the Lord, and again I say, rejoice; the kingdom of God consists not in meats and drinks, but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy ghost: this is the language, this is the spirit of christianity, and it is our own fault if we mistake it, and then complain of the want of satisfaction and pleasure.

And these, my pious hearers, are the principal causes that the pleasures of virtue are not enjoyed by all virtuous persons, and perhaps only by the least part in a high degree and in full measure. Virtue is therefore perfectly innocent of this defect. She is and remains the most bountiful dispenser of joy to man; but she forces not her blessings upon him. She offers them to him; she invites him to the enjoyment of them; but he must not mistake them, must not shut his heart against their influence, must not render himself incapable of enjoying them by an erroneous behaviour or prejudice. And surely, these pleasures of virtue highly deserve that we should look after them, that we should take pains in order

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to have them, that we should be ever making ourselves more susceptible of them, that we should carefully obviate every thing that may rend them from us, that may weaken them, that may render them less delicious to us : and the more diligent we are in all these respects ; so much the more surely will our expectations be fulfilled, so much the more experiences and so much the more blessed experiences shall we have of the truth of our text : The ways of virtue are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

SERMON XVI.

The Value of Religion in General.

O GOD, the creator and father of mankind, never ought we to assemble in thy worship, never lift up our eyes and our hearts to thee, without feeling the value of the happiness, the inestimable happiness with which thou hast favoured us as thinking, rational, moral creatures capable of communion with thee! Yes, that we can raise our minds to thee, the first, the greatest, the most perfect of all beings; can know thee, know thee as our creator and father; that we can love thee, rejoice in thee, entirely repose on thee, resign ourselves entirely to thee, trust firmly in thee, continually expect the best from thee, and can do all this as christians with confidence and satisfaction: what felicity, what bliss! How it dignifies our nature! What prospects does it not open to us in the remotest futurity! Ah, what
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what darkness would not surround us, what doubts, what terrors would not haunt us in life and in death, if we were obliged to seek after thee with anxious uncertainty and yet not be able to find thee; if the light of true religion did not enlighten us and guide us on the way to happiness! And how confidently may we not now pursue our path of life! How cheerful and contented travel onwards! How undimmed behold its end approaching! Yes, this is life eternal, eternal happiness, that we know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent! Eternally praised be thy bounty, o merciful God, for having brought us to this knowledge, that thou hast so gloriously revealed thyself to us by all thy works, by thy son Jesus, that through him art come so near, art so visible to us! Oh that we might never mistake the value of these benefits; constantly feel them and constantly make the best use of them! How wise, how virtuous, how happy should we then be! How rapidly, how securely proceed from perfection to perfection; ah therefore deign to add grace to grace, benefaction to benefaction. Let the gift thou hast favoured us with by religion, be ever more important, ever more salutary. Let us ever more experience its power to our improvement and tranquillity and ever become capable and partakers of greater felicity. In this behalf bless the meditations we are now to begin upon it. Let the discourse of thy servant find admission into the hearts of the hearers, and make deep and lasting impres-

fions on them. We ask it as the followers of thy son Jesus, and address thee farther in his name: Our father, &c.

JOHN xvii. 3.

This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

RELIGION, — I speak of true religion, founded on reason and revelation, — religion is very differently judged of by different persons. One man deems it of little or no value, and another esteems it beyond all price. The former holds it to be a troublesome and fruitless employment of the mind; while the other maintains it to be the most important, the most blessed occupation of the heart and life. To the former it is a heavy and oppressive yoke, which he endeavours by all means to shake off, a grievous restraint upon his freedom and inclinations, a common disturber, whom he keeps away from as far as he can; to the latter it is a gentle monitor, a beneficent generous friend and comforter, the most fertile source of satisfaction and joy. The former, therefore, meddles but seldom with it, confines it to certain times and
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and places, and finds neither comfort nor benefit in it; the latter never loses it out of his sight, makes it his constant companion and guide along the path of life, and is continually receiving consolation, pleasure and assistance from it.

And we, my dear brethren, to which of these two classes of persons do we belong? What is religion to us? How much value has it in our estimation? Of what importance is it to our heart? What influence has it on our lives? At least we cannot be quite indifferent about it; otherwise we should not frequent the assemblies of the votaries of God and Christ; should there discover neither attention nor sentiment; and not do many things which we now do, nor neglect many others which we now neglect. But whether we acknowledge its whole worth; whether we revere it as the most precious gift of heaven; whether we prize it as highly as it deserves; whether it be as dear, as advantageous, and as comfortable to us, as it might and should; are questions which I can only answer for myself, and not for others. Religion is to me the most important, the most indispensable, the most exalted object of which I can frame an idea, the greatest benefit for which I stand indebted to heaven. It guides me more safely than any other light; it affords me more utility and comfort, makes me more contented and happy, than any other knowledge or science, privilege or possession, is able to do. Nor can I once forget its value, or in the smallest degree depart

from its directions to virtue and happiness, without suffering manifold detriment and prejudice.

May this be the judgment passed by all of you, from a cordial sentiment and experience, on the value of religion! For this estimation precisely suits it, and every one that rightly understands and sincerely follows its precepts, must and will find it prove what I have pronounced it to be. Every one will confess, with our saviour in the text: "This is life eternal," this is indeed the way to true felicity, "to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent!" However, let us examine the matter itself impartially, let us weigh the value of religion. It will confirm its votaries in the just judgment they pass upon it, and perhaps inspire even its scorers with esteem for it. There are two subjects, whereon, to this end, we must reflect.

The first is, how our religion must be framed, and how we are to be disposed towards it, if we would experience the great advantages of it.

The next, whence it receives its value, or where in it consists.

Religion that is founded on error, and degenerates into gloomy superstition; religion which consists in empty rites and ceremonies, or in the sterile belief of incomprehensible things; religion, which employs the mind of a man merely as a science, as a theory on certain phenomena in the physical and moral world, but leaves his heart unamended and untranquillized; religion which is not entirely moral, not
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immediately directed to the improvement of mankind, or is even favourable to sin and vice; such a religion has indeed no value; and far be it from me to praise it for its excellency, or to say a word in its behalf. No, that religion alone which is built upon truth; which teaches us to know God and our relation towards him, and to think and live conformably to it; which supplies our manifold wants; which renders us wiser and better, and is adapted and designed in all its parts to our perfection and happiness: this alone has any real worth, this alone has any title to our profound veneration and most cordial love. And of this kind is whatever we learn, by reflecting on the world, and by rational meditation on God and the proper end of man; of this kind is that, in particular, which God himself has revealed to us of himself and his will, by his son Jesus. “This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

But that this true, particularly that the christian religion, which we revere as the most express and perfect medium of revelation, may be valuable and excellent to us, or in regard of us, before all things we must understand it. We must acquire just and clear conceptions of its contents, of its designs, of its doctrines, precepts, and promises. Neither the name, nor the confession, nor a blind reverence of religion, will make us wiser and better and happier. It does not operate upon us like a magical charm,

charm, without our knowledge or concurrence, but only in proportion as we understand it, reflect upon it, and actually use it. Attend therefore, o man, attend in this design to the voice of God in nature, to the voice of thy creator and father, who speaks to thee in all his works; and adhere to the writings of the evangelists and apostles, who deliver to thee the doctrine of Jesus in its primitive simplicity and purity. If thou grant an attentive audience to that voice, and draw truth from these living fountains, then will religion appear to thee devoid of all human interpolations and inventions, will appear to thee in the most venerable aspect, in her majestic unvarnished beauty, as a daughter of heaven, whom the Father has sent to mankind for their consolation upon earth.

Would we, farther, have religion to be really and excellently valuable to us, then must we be assured of its truth, and of its divine origin. We must believe it, and believe it on principle, with satisfying certainty. So long as I remain doubtful in this respect; so long as I take its doctrines for only probable conjectures, its precepts for well-meant useful rules of life, its promises for desirable events; so long may I easily esteem and admire it to a certain degree, and it may have a certain influence on my sentiments and my conduct: but I shall not experience its whole force to my amendment and my comfort; I shall not become so good and so happy as I may and should, till I acknowledge its doctrines to be truths of demonstration, its precepts the laws of my
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supreme sovereign and judge, and its promises as infallible assurances of the true and unchangeable God. This belief only then makes religion intrinsically sacred and important to me; this belief only then gives it the respect and authority it necessarily ought to have, when I take it for the rule of my heart, and the guide of my life.

Yet even this is not enough. Would we have it to be to us, and to perform for us, what it is ordained to be and to perform, then must we not only understand and believe it, but suffer ourselves to be actually directed and guided by it. We must follow its directions to virtue and happiness, be animated by its spirit, and frame our whole behaviour on its precepts. Religion requires obedient and teachable disciples: she instructs, she improves, she comforts us, but not against our will, or without our co-operation. She offers the most salutary aliment to our mind inquisitive and longing after rest; but we must take and enjoy this aliment, if we would have it to strengthen and refresh us. She will lead us by the hand on the way of virtue and happiness; but we must actually walk that way, and pursue it with a firm and stedfast step, if we would have her for our companion, and be encouraged by her assistance. She promises us light and help and comfort; but we must accept and use this light, this help, and this support, if we would profit by her offers. Wouldst thou, then, learn how properly to estimate the value

submit thyself to her guidance in all times, in all places, under all events. Think constantly as she teaches thee to think; do constantly that which she calls thee to do; abide steadfastly by that which she tells thee and promises thee on the part of God. Separate not from her in thy ordinary, thy daily course. Confine her not to the times and places destined to worship and devotion. Make her not merely thy last resource and comforter in thy distresses. She despises the votaries and friends, who only fly to her in misfortune, in idle or melancholy hours, but drop all acquaintance with her when success smiles upon them. No, she must be thy counsellor in all thy undertakings and affairs, thy companion in solitude and in society, thy close and familiar friend in prosperity and in adversity, in life and in death! Then wilt thou confess her entire worth, and receive more substantial benefit from her, than from any thing whatever that mankind can possess besides.

And how great, how great indeed, is the value of religion to him who thus understands it, thus trusts to it, thus reduces it to practice, and thus intimately connects it with his whole system of thought and sentiment! Oh could I represent to you her value, as I feel it myself, and render her as important to your understandings and your hearts, as she is to me! It is religion that makes me wise; she makes me good; she makes me contented and chearful; she teaches me how to use and enjoy the present;

present; she opens to me the loveliest prospects in futurity, there promises me a higher, an everlasting felicity, and at the same time renders me actually capable of it. Knowledge of truth, inclination and power to do good, a calm, contented heart, moderation in prosperity, comfort and fortitude in adversity, hope and assurance in life and in death: these are thy gifts, o religion, and how precious, how indispensable to my happiness!

Yes, religion makes me wise; it leads me to the knowledge of truth, the most important, the most indispensable, the most sacred truth! Without her, I should wander in darkness, roam backwards and forwards in a labyrinth of doubt, ignorant of my origin, mistaking my object; all that surrounds me, all that happens to me and to others, would be a mystery, an indissoluble mystery to me. Effects without causes, means without end, faculties without adequate objects, numberless series and consequences of things destitute of an intelligible connection, beauty and order produced from chance; virtue and vice, life and death at incessant variance; moral creatures without controul, an immense world without a sovereign and ruler: such would be the appearance of visible things to me, and how must such a view perplex my spirit! In what a dreadful abyss of doubt and despondency must it sink me! Lost among the innumerable multitude of things which belong to this universe, alone and abandoned amidst all the living creatures that surround me, I should have nothing
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whereon to fix; nothing wherein to trust; nothing that could lead me with safety in my thoughts and pursuits; nothing that I could consider as the fixt object of my wishes, my desires, my endeavours; nothing that could unite me with other beings and things! Like a child, which cruelty or accident had abandoned to itself soon after its birth, I should not know whom I had to thank for my being and my life, from whom I might expect the support of it, who would adopt me, to whom I might look up for protection and help and parental love!

But thou, o divine religion, thou freest me from this distressing perplexity; thou leadest me forth from this labyrinth of doubt, and guidest me in the way of truth and assurance. Thou teachest me to know God, and the relations in which I stand towards him. Thou givest an author, a preserver, a ruler, and a father, to me and to the whole world; and thereby diffusest light over all things, combinest all in one, impartest life and order, importance and dignity to all. I now perceive that I am no longer abandoned and forlorn in the immensity of space; am no longer the pitiable sport of chance or fate; no longer an insignificant, feeble, wretched creature, dependant on nothing, ignorant of its origin and end; wandering, without protector or guide, through the wilderness of life, this day or the next to become a prey to death. Under thy directions I have discovered God, have found in him a father, the wisest, the best of fathers, who knows and loves me; and

and I am his creature, his child, am formed after his likeness, am capable of his correspondence, am and live and subsist in him and by him; know to what purpose he has fashioned and ordained me; dwell under his inspection and care; know his tender dispositions towards me, and nothing can destroy the blessed connection which binds me with him unalterably and for ever.

And how differently now does every object appear to me! What a totally different, what a brighter and more cheerful aspect does the world now wear to me, and how its magnificence and beauty exalt and rejoice my spirit! Now I perceive and revere a first, eternal, and all-perfect cause of every thing that is and was and will be; a God from whom all things proceed, by whom they are, and to whom they belong; a God extolled and praised by every particle of matter, every plant, every beast, every man, every spirit, the heavens and the earth, as the Almighty, the All-wise, as him who is love itself. I now behold, on all sides, as far as my eye surveys and my penetration reaches, a continued scene of beauty, symmetry and order; all around me the wisest, the kindest designs, and the fittest means for their accomplishment; on all sides life and joy and happiness, here in tendency and in bud, there in bloom and in maturity. Now all things depend in the closest and most intimate union on each other, the small and the great, the visible and the invisible, the grain of sand on the sea-shore and the all-vivifying source of light; all is the work of one sole,
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supremely perfect mind ; all form but one whole ; in which the natural and the moral, the good and the bad, the present and the future, are indissolubly knit and interwoven together ; in which nothing is unnecessary, nothing redundant, nothing unintended, nothing absolutely bad and hurtful ; a whole, supported and maintained, disposed and guided by its infinite author himself, and wherein all tends to the greatest possible perfection and happiness. And to know this, to be assured of these most sublime, most fruitful, and most comfortable truths, as the clue to our reflections and researches, as the rule of our behaviour, as the ground of our desires and hopes, is this not wisdom ? is it not greater, sublimer wisdom, than all else that bears the name ? And must not the religion which leads us to this wisdom, be of inestimable value to us ? must it not be the most venerable gift of heaven ?

As religion makes me wise, it also renders me good ; and this is a second proof of its superior worth and excellency. Religion is the bond of love, the intimate tie of union between the Creator and his creatures, and between all thinking, sensible, and rational creatures with each other, the principle of the closest connection of the natural with the moral world, and the present with the future. And this love, this connection, this union, produces, in every human heart it animates, new spiritual life, fresh inclination and power to all goodness ; more spiritual vigour, more desire and ability to duty and to virtue, than any other consideration, any other relation

relation of things could do. And surely, when I know and venerate a God, who is my creator, my preserver, my benefactor, my father, my sovereign, and my judge, and who has given me laws and annexed the most glorious rewards to the observance of them, the severest punishments to the violation of them; what authority must not these laws have over me! How sacred, how inviolable, must they not be to me! And if I perceive this God, this father, on all sides in his works; on all sides hear his instructing, his encouraging and warning voice; feel myself on all sides encompassed by him and the effects of his wisdom and goodness; revere him, wherever I am, in the thickest vail of darkness no less than in the brightest day, as the witness of my thoughts and actions: how shall I dare to think or to do any thing that militates with his will, or neglect any thing that he has enjoined me? How can I be deficient in courage and ability, in his presence and under his inspection, to do, and readily to do, what is right and good, and in every case the best? And if I love this God, this father, as religion teaches me, with filial affection, think on him and raise myself to him with cordial satisfaction, rejoice in his existence, in his presence, in his benefits, in his dispositions towards me, and his connections with me: how easy and agreeable will it not then be to me to keep his commandments, to promote his designs, and to labour, as it were, in fellowship with

him for advancing the universal perfection and felicity of his kingdom!

But, as religion connects the creatures with the Creator, so likewise does it connect the creatures with each other; so does it unite me also with all my fellow-mortals; it teaches me that they are all children of my heavenly father, that we all compose but one large family, whose father is God, and whose first-born brother is his son Jesus. And, if I believe this, if I have an inward sentiment of this, I then live among my own brothers and sisters, who have the same origin and the same destination with myself: and, then, how must the sight of every man, how must the dispositions, the capacities, the abilities of every man, the pleasures, the prosperity, the merits of every man, delight me! And, if I am animated with that brotherly love towards them which religion alone can inspire, how impossible will it be for me to deprive them of their property and advantages, or to disunite and injure them by any means whatever! How far from my heart will all pride, all coldness, all envy, all hatred be! How compassionate shall I be towards them, merciful as my Father in heaven is merciful, beneficent as he is beneficent! And what duty towards my neighbour shall I then neglect? Which of them shall I discharge without fidelity and pleasure?

And, if I feel the whole weight of the love of God and of Christ towards man, which the christian doctrine

doctrine represents to us in so affecting a manner; if I have an inward sentiment of what great things God has done for me, how much his son Jesus has sacrificed and suffered for me: if I take the temper and the life of this my deliverer for the rule of my conduct; if I look up to him as my fore-runner and chief, and firmly confide in his promises; if I seriously consider the intimate connection of the present with the future, and regard one as the preliminary to the other, one as the time of sowing and the other as the time of reaping; what incitement, what ability to every thing that is right and good; that is great and generous, must not all this afford me! No, if religion make me not better, if it make me not a very good and virtuous man, I must then be incapable of amendment, must be deeply sunk beneath the dignity of man, must have a completely insensible and thoroughly depraved heart! And what a value must this likewise give to religion in our esteem, if we do but in any degree understand the worth of moral goodness and virtue!

He that is wise and good, my pious hearers, may also be contented and chearful; and the religion that procures us those advantages, procures us likewise these. Far from inspiring her true professors with servile fear and gloomy terrors, she fills them with resolution and courage. Far from being a disturber of joy, she opens to us the richest sources of it, and invites us to enjoy them. Yes, if I follow her precepts and believe in her promises: then tran-

quillity and joy inhabit my breast; then am I assured of my pardon, the forgiveness of my sins, the good pleasure of my Creator and sovereign; then my heart no more torments and condemns me; then I enjoy the blessedness of a good conscience. Yes, if I allow myself to be guided and conducted by her, and consider all things in the light which she diffuses over them: then am I satisfied with all things; satisfied with God, whom I know and revere as the wisest and most tender father, and from whom I expect only good, and constantly the best; satisfied with all his arrangements and dispensations in the natural and the moral world; satisfied with the place and the circumstances wherein he has set me, with the portion of abilities and goods he has assigned me, with the events he has suspended over me, as I know that all this is adapted to my appointment and to my happiness; satisfied with myself, as I am conscious of my uprightness and integrity, and, if I even fail, yet do not wilfully transgress, and am approaching nearer to the mark of christian perfection; satisfied with all my fellow-creatures, as I hate none, envy none, as I love them all, rejoice with all the good, and am patient and indulgent to the frail and infirm; satisfied with all things about me, as every thing is, and is just so, as the all-wise and all-gracious God would have it to be!

Nay, if I allow myself to be guided by the light of religion, and to be animated by her spirit, I find sources of joy opening to me on all sides, as pure

as they are inexhaustible; then I possess more real joy than the greatest minion of fortune can have, who knows not this giver of joy; then I rejoice in God, my benefactor and father; rejoice in his son Jesus, my redeemer and lord; rejoice in my capacities and powers and my high vocation; rejoice in all the beautiful and good that is and happens in the world; rejoice in all mankind as my brethren, as the children of my heavenly father, as the partakers in my future felicity; rejoice in every animate and inanimate creature, as the creature of my God; rejoice in visible and invisible things, the present and the future; and rejoice that I am immortal, and may assuredly expect an everlasting life, a never-ending felicity. And for this chearful confidence, this satisfaction, these manifold joys, I am indebted to religion. How can I fail of perceiving its worth! how can I mistake its excellency?

Yes, this it is, this divine religion, which conducts, strengthens, comforts, and exhilarates me, in all the vicissitudes of my circumstances, in whatever I do, and in whatever befalls me, in prosperity and in adversity, in life and in death. She gives quite another appearance to all things; sweetens every pleasure to me, and augments every good; mitigates every trouble, and alleviates every sorrow; and never leaves me destitute of instruction, of support, of consolation and assistance. If I enjoy satisfaction and pleasure, she exalts the enjoyment by inspiring me with the chearful sentiment that it is God who grants me

this satisfaction and procures me this pleasure. Have I various and important duties to fulfill, toilsome affairs to manage, she alleviates and ennobles them, by representing them to me as commissions from God, by assuring me that I am labouring in his service, that I am discharging my trust under his inspection, and with his approbation. Does an opportunity occur to me of doing good, of being useful, and of promoting human happiness, she causes me to feel the whole weight of the honour of being an instrument in the hand of God, whereby he executes his designs, and disseminates life and blessing amongst the human race. Do I meet with difficulties on my way, do I fall into danger and distress; she bids me lift my eyes and my heart towards heaven, and implore and expect succour from him who does what he will both in heaven and on earth, and never wills any thing but what is right and good. Am I oppressed by any burden of life; she then bids me depend upon the succour of him who laid this load upon me, and to be assured that he will not impose on me more than I am able to bear. Does any misfortune overtake me; I then adore in silent reverence, as instructed by religion, the hand of him who inflicts it upon me, who inflicts it upon me for wise and good purposes, and without whose permission no harm can happen unto me. Do afflictions befall me, which I have not deserved, I accept them as the dispensations of my God and father, with filial submission; revere them as the means of

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nurture and exercise, by which he would lead me to higher perfection; and I know that, sooner or later, all will turn to my good. Am I alarmed and perplexed at any extraordinary or terrifying events that happen in the world, and among mankind; then, full of faith, I look up to him who governs all things, directing them by the laws of sovereign wisdom, and tranquillize my spirit by the consideration that he will certainly, at length, by them bring to pass some good. Do my honest undertakings, my good and beneficent endeavours, fail of success; I then make an offering of my will to the far wiser and far better will of my God and father; satisfy myself with the consciousness of having acted uprightly and well-pleasing to him; and therefore reckon not my pains and labour for lost, because I know that in his kingdom, and under his administration, nothing good can possibly be lost. Do the infirmities of age oppress me, diminish my faculties, and bow down my body to the earth; I resign myself to that God, who, in my infancy, in my childhood, in my youth, and in my manhood, has never forsaken me, who has been constantly my provider and my father, and will be so for ever. Does death draw nigh me, bid me set my house in order, and prepare to quit all visible and earthly things; I then hear the voice of my heavenly father calling me to himself, calling me from the present into another and a higher life, calling me home from my pilgrimage. Conducted and supported by religion, I

follow this call with joy, enter with confidence the dark and silent path of death, pass along it undismayed, being certain that it terminates in the purest light, in undecaying felicity to me.

Thus am I taught, thus led, thus cheered, thus supported and strengthened, thus comforted by religion, in prosperity and in adversity, in life and in death! Thus does she preserve her value in all times, in all places, in all circumstances, in regard to all my affairs, all my concerns and fortunes, unchangeably continuing what she is; constantly the safest teacher, the most faithful guide, and the best comforter of man! Yes, o divine religion, that art thou, that wilt thou ever be to me, as thou hast hitherto been! Ever my truest friend, my inseparable companion along the path of life, the partaker of all my joys and sorrows, my consolation in death, and my conductor to the mansions of heaven! Yes, o God! to know thee, the only true God, the all-wise, the all-bountiful, the father of mankind, to know thee, and him whom thou hast sent, our saviour Jesus, this is life eternal, the supreme, everlasting bliss!

SERMON XVII.

The Value of the Christian Religion in particular.

O GOD! every living and intelligent being pants after thee. Of thee, all who have the happiness to know thee seek light and solace and force and hope and bliss. And never do any pant after thee in vain. Thou animatest and rejoicest them all and conductest them all to their higher appointment. None seek of thee what they may not in full measure find with thee, and thou willingly lettest thyself be found of them that diligently seek thee. Thou even preventest thy children with fatherly kindness, callest them to thee, offerest them all thy gifts and goods, and invitest them to the chearful enjoyment of them. As various and urgent as their wants, so rich and inexhaustible are the sources of assistance and refreshment thou openest to them. O God, what blessed experiences have we, thy human offspring, had of thy

thy preventing grace and goodness! Who of us, how few of all the children of Adam sought thee, sought assistance of thee, while disconsolate under the strongest sentiment of want and misery, and thou sentest to them thy son from heaven to supply those wants and to remove that misery? And how gloriously hast thou not holpen us through him! What light, what comfort, what life, what hope, what bliss, has he not brought from heaven to the earth! What happy alterations in our present state, and what exhilarating prospects in futurity are we not indebted to him for. By him thou hast converted our penury into wealth, our misery into happiness, our sorrow into joy, our wants into incitement and means to a blessed enjoyment. By him and through him we find all things, that we could no where else have found. Oh praised, for ever praised be thy goodness, most merciful father, who hast afforded us this help; by sending this deliverer and saviour, this comforter and giver of joy, and opening to us these sources of life and happiness through him! And praised, for ever praised be thou, who once came in the name of the Lord, dispelling the darkness of misery and desolation before thee, and shedding light and joy and blessing on the human race and also upon us! Blessed be to us the memorial of thy advent upon earth, and of the great work thou hast finished on it! Yes, in thee and through thee are we blessed; and therefore we magnify thee and the Father, who gave thee to be a saviour to us, with
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united and grateful hearts. O God, teach us thyself to understand the whole worth of thy bounty and our happiness, and worthily to use them. Let the misery we bring upon ourselves be ever diminishing among us, and true christian happiness be ever increasing. Accompany in this view the discourse of thy servant with energy and blessing, open our hearts to it and cause it there to make deep and lasting impression. These our petitions we offer up unto thee, in the name and words of thy beloved son, our lord: Our father, &c.

JOHN X. 10.

I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

THE arrival of a person who promises life, and more abundant life, that is, complete felicity, to them to whom he comes, and is able to fulfill his promise, must be most desirable to such as have vehement desires after happiness, and at the same time are oppressed with the inward sentiment of their want of it! And who of us, my dear brethren, can mistake this wished-for person, who the happy people to whom he brought these joyful tidings? How eager are all men after happiness; and how little true felicity,

licity, how much actual misery, was there among mortals when Jesus made his appearance in the world, and offered them their deliverance from misery and the possession of that happiness they had so long been seeking for in vain! And with how great right could he not make them this offer! Knew he not all the sources of their happiness? Opened he not all of them to the human race? Where is there one that ever yet drew from those sources, and was deceived in his expectations? And how many thousands and thousands again have actually drawn therefrom, and assuaged their thirst for happiness!

To us also these sources stand open; and we are invited to them by the Saviour who came into the world to impart life and more abundance of it. Let us then approach these sources, study to know more of these blessings, compare them with our wants and defects; and then try whether we may not be happy likewise, or whether our happiness may not be augmented and improved.

What are then the principal wants of mankind? And how can and will Jesus supply them, and thereby render them happy? To answer these questions will be the subject and scope of my present discourse.

Light for the understanding; rest for the heart; courage and ability to goodness; comfort in distresses; hope for the future: these are the principal wants of man. Whoever supplies these, delivers him from the burden of his misery, opens to him the richest sources of felicity, and makes him truly happy.

happy. And this the Saviour of mankind, who came into the world, both can and will perform. He can and will, in all these respects, give them life, and more abundantly.

* Light for the understanding, is the first and most urgent want of the thinking man. To act with consciousness and consideration; to reflect upon what he sees, what he hears, what he feels, and what befalls him; to inquire into the causes and scope of things; to look back upon the past, to pry into futurity, and to compare them both with the present: is the natural employment, the most essential privilege of man; it is this which renders him a man. To scrutinize after truth and to discover the truth, is the life and the nutriment of his spirit. But how long can he employ himself in such reflections, without entangling himself in a labyrinth, whose outlet he can never find! How far can he proceed in the investigation and the knowledge of truth, without coming at some precipice, which strikes him with terror and makes him recoil! How soon will he be deceived by error and images of affright, or tormented by doubt and uncertainty, if he have no faithful conductor through the intricacies of human thought!

What am I, and what is all that surrounds me? Whence am I, and whence have all these arisen? To what end am I, to what end are all these ordained? What is to become of me, what is to become of all these? Does intelligence preside or casualty, wisdom or blind chance, in the concatenation of things, in
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the occurrences of the world, in the fortunes of mankind? Are wisdom, virtue, happiness, real attainable things, or only empty names? Which is the way that leads to the knowledge of truth, to the possession of virtue, to the enjoyment of happiness? Is there a God? Is there a Providence? In what relation stands this God to the world and to me? How far does this Providence extend over the world and over me? What have I, in these respects, to hope for or to fear?—What questions! How difficult to be answered by the man that is left to himself! What error is too absurd for him to plunge into in researches like these! And yet how important is their solution! What a torment must all rational reflection be to him, while they cannot be accounted for in any satisfactory manner! Yes, here a man feels the want of some safe guide, some superior light. Here he longs for this conductor, for this light, as a pilgrim, overtaken by the night in some lone and trackless wild, longs for the benign effulgence of the morning sun, or the appearance of some traveller acquainted with the way.

Christians, this day has dawned on us! God has sent to us from heaven this faithful guide! Jesus calls to us in our forlorn estate: “I am the way, the truth and the life; I am the light of the world; he that followeth me walketh not in darkness.” No; his divine doctrine has dispersed the darkness of error and of doubt, of ignorance and of superstition, with which the wise and the unwise, the learned and the unlearned,

unlearned, were heretofore oppressed. It has brought concealed and mistaken truth to light, and what was but little, and that little only doubtfully known, has it divulged to all, and placed beyond all doubt. It has brought us to the knowledge of God, the true, the only God, and thereby given firmness and assurance to the human intellect. By it enlightened, we know our origin and the origin of all things, our destination and that of all living and rational beings. By it instructed, we know that there is a God, a supremely perfect spirit, an infinitely wise and bountiful father of the world and of mankind, and that we are his creatures, his children; that we and all things subsist under his inspection and providential care; that all is disposed, conducted, governed, and all directed to the best and worthiest purposes by him. — And now casualty and chance and blind necessity with all their terrors vanish from before our eyes. Now no intricacies bewilder us, we are no longer perplexed by any apparent disorder and contradiction in the combination of things, in the complication of human concerns. Now light, order, beauty, perfection, are displayed in all things; for all are effects and arrangements of supreme benignity and wisdom. The entrance to the sanctuary of truth, the most important, most comfortable truth, stands open to us; the way of virtue is made plain and luminous, and leads us straight to the mansions of bliss, where we are invited to the enjoyment of its treasures. We have now a certain clue to guide us
through

through the labyrinth of afflictions, by means of which we can avoid every pit and precipice, are furnished with all necessary light, and proceed to meet an ever brighter day. — — Yes, look to Jesus for the supply of your wants, all you who thirst after the knowledge of truth. Comprehend his doctrine, adhere firmly to it, study it in the writings which his messengers have left us, improve your knowledge in it from day to day, trust to its declarations with ever increasing confidence; it cannot, it will not lead you into error: it will conduct you to ever higher wisdom, and you will find complete satisfaction in it.

Rest for the heart; rest under the sentiment of our weakness; rest amidst the violence and impetuosity of our appetites; rest under the consciousness of our transgressions and sins; rest, at the sight of the seeming perplexity in the course of things and of human misery; rest amidst the great frailty and inconstancy of every thing sensible and earthly: what requisites, what urgent requisites are these! Who will supply them? Where shall a man seek and find this rest? In what school of wisdom, in what temple of mirth, in what silent and desert solitude, or in what brilliant abode of pleasure and pomp, in what rank, in which of the classes of mankind, shall we search after it and find it? Oh, how earnestly do the wise and the ignorant, the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the hermit and the voluptuary, strive after this repose! With what eagerness of ex-

pectation do they now strike into this path, and then into that; and, sooner or later, affected by repeated disappointments, how they return by the way that they went, sighing and ashamed at their credulity and folly, and joining at last in that dismal complaint, All, all is vanity and vexation of spirit!

But why, my brethren, why do you seek rest where it is not to be found? Oh come to him, seek it of him, who has promised to give you likewise in this respect life, and more abundance of it; to Jesus who has brought back to the earth that rest which mankind had mistaken, and as it were banished from their hearts and their dwellings! Hear what he announces on the part of God to such as in sincerity seek rest of him, and how he supplies every want of the heart.

O thou (it is thus that he addresses mankind) who art sensible of thy infirmities, let not that sentiment cast thee down. God, thy sovereign, thy father, requires nothing of thee that thou art not able to perform. He lays no burdens on thee that are too heavy for thee to bear. Only exert thy faculties, and they will grow stronger by exercise. He who has, and faithfully employs what he has, will be ever receiving more. Thou hast the Almighty for thy support; and his strength is mighty, above all expectation, even in the feeble that look up to him and rely upon him. At present thou art still a child; hereafter, if thou only retain the simplicity of a child,

thou wilt arrive at manhood, and perform manly actions, such actions as I have performed.

Dost thou feel appetites within thee, which none of all the things that surround thee are able to appease or to satiate; oh learn, from thence, that thou art not made for this world alone; that greater capacities, and nobler faculties, than belong to the course of this terrestrial life, lie hid within thee. Direct thy aspirations to God and to futurity; let the love of truth, of virtue, of God, of man, pervade and possess thy heart. These are goods and blessings that are worthy of thy most strenuous efforts, that will employ all thy faculties and powers, that leave neither repugnance nor disgust, nor languor nor satiety, behind them. Fight manfully then against pleasure and passion. The prize that awaits thee is worth the conflict. Whoever here contends and conquers with me, shall reign hereafter with me: he that loses his life, or any thing else, for my sake, shall find it again.

Does the consciousness of thy past sins and failings disturb thee, dost thou dread the displeasure and the punishment of the judge of the world: then accept the glad tidings he commissioned me to announce to sinful man. Accept them, and rejoice that God, thy sovereign and thy judge, is also thy father; that he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great goodness; that he forgives the repentant and returning sinner all his sins, remits his punishment, restores him to his once slighted favour, and will grant him
grace

grace for justice. To assure thee thereof he sent me upon the earth. Sin is done away by obedience to my precepts; by following my injunctions, iniquity is remembered no more; reconciliation between God and man is thus procured by me. Only beware of the deceitfulness of sin; rescue thyself more and more from its shameful dominion; maintain thy regained freedom; redouble thy zeal in goodness; devote thyself by gratitude and love to thy gracious benefactor and patron, and be faithful unto the end; and then shall thy former transgressions be remembered no more, and their ruinous consequences shall be removed for ever.

Art thou apt at times to be staggered at the sight of so seemingly perplexed a scene of things as the present state affords, and the diversity of misery that prevails among mankind? Quiet thy mind in the consideration of the parental providence and love of thy heavenly father, whose thoughts and ways are as far above thy thoughts and ways as the heavens are above the earth. Leave it to him how the world and mankind should be governed, and the ends of his creation obtained: and be assured that his purposes will not fail, and that his ultimate end is nothing but perfection and happiness. Judge not by that span of space, by that moment of time, which thou art enabled to survey: extend thy comprehension, if thou canst, to the whole, and let thy mind expatiate in eternity; and doubt not but all will be sooner or later unraveled, conformably to the laws

of sovereign wisdom and goodness. He, the supremely wise, the supremely good, comprehends the whole, he can produce light out of darkness, and turn every evil into a source of joy.

Does, in short, the great uncertainty and instability of all earthly and sensible things alarm thee, disturb thy rest; oh learn to esteem those things as only what they really are; and while thou seest that the world, with its pleasures, is passing away, never forget that he who doth the will of God abideth for ever. Never forget that thy spirit is immortal, and that an unchangeable, undecaying, and incorruptible heritage is allotted thee in heaven. Soar above this transient scene of vanity, and consider thyself as a denizen of the future city of God, which has firm foundations, and which is thy true, thy permanent country. Thus does Jesus inspire with rest and content the man who seeks them of him: thus does he supply all the wants of our heart: thus does he give us likewise in this respect life, and greater abundance of it.

Courage and ability in goodness is a third and no less urgent want of the thinking man. Unless this be supplied, how can he be contented and happy? He is sensible of powers, various active powers, within him. But how and to what end shall he apply them? What shall he hope to execute with them? Can he, or will he, discomfit his weakness, conquer his dependance on sensible things, and overcome himself? Is not virtue too exalted for the reach of his faculties? Is she not probably designed for beings

ings of a superior order to man? Is she not rather a daughter of heaven than the offspring of earth? As many powers as he feels himself to possess, so many obstacles and difficulties does he meet with in his endeavours to use them. Respectable and venerable are the dictates of reason; yet importunate and alluring are the requisitions of sense. For every incitement he perceives on one hand to goodness, he sees a temptation and inducement on the other to evil. Who can proceed in so slippery a path with firm and vigorous steps? Who can live confident and secure amidst enemies and dangers? Who dares set himself to stem the impetuosity of a torrent?

The christian dares and is able to do it. In this respect also Jesus gives him life, and more abundantly. With him new spiritual life is come from heaven to earth. Feeble, torpid, and dead, as the moral world appeared before his birth, it acquired a fresh activity, a nobler life, by his doctrine, by the moving of his spirit within it. Abandoned and waste as the way of virtue had long formerly been, because thorns and briars choaked up its unfrequented paths, or concealed them with impenetrable shade: many a traveller now walks them with satisfaction and delight; Jesus has cleared them for his followers, made the crooked strait, and the rough places plain. He became a light to our feet and a lantern to our paths. — Follow, then, o thou that aspirest after freedom and virtue, who wishest to soar above sensible things,

and to become thoroughly wise and good ; only follow the guidance of Jesus, follow his example, tread in his footsteps, become and be a christian with all thy heart. This will inspire thee with fresh powers, and animate thee with new life. Thou wilt learn to feel the dignity of man, the dignity of a christian ; and this sentiment will never allow thee to be deficient in courage and ability to goodness. Thou wilt learn to love God, and to love mankind ; and this love will make all things easy to thee, every duty a delight. Christ will live and govern in thee ; his mind, his spirit will direct thee, and through him thou canst do all things. His brilliant example will be ever before thine eyes, constantly alluring thee to imitation, and warning thee of every devious and oblique way ; and while thou seest the traces of his steps before thee, thou wilt pursue thy course in confidence and safety. The assurance of his support, the consciousness of his approbation, the generous ambition of ever resembling him nearer, and thereby becoming capable of ever greater felicity, will never allow thee to be faint or fatigued in the following of him. His promises will strengthen thee, the victor's crown he holds out to thee at the end of thy course, will shine upon thee in all its radiance, and the glorious prospects he opens to thee in futurity, will encourage thee to vanquish every difficulty, firmly to brave the hardest conflicts, and to persevere unto the end. Yes, the faith of the christian overcomes the world ; conquers all opposition ; is an inexhaustible source

source of spiritual life and spiritual vigour. So certainly as thou allowest thyself to be thoroughly animated by the spirit of christianity and to be guided by its precepts, so certainly wilt thou be thoroughly free, thoroughly virtuous, and become as perfect as a human creature can be.

Comfort in afflictions; who can deny this a place among the wants of mankind? Who has not often felt how great, how pressing it is? For who has not often suffered, and earnestly looked around him for refreshment and comfort? Without suffering no man has ever yet completed his earthly course. To be frail and mortal, and to live among merely frail and mortal creatures and things, and to keep free from all sufferings, is a contradiction in terms. The very enjoyments of this life are, for the most part, so interwoven with sufferings, that they cannot be purely possessed. And how infinitely diversified are they! Inward and outward sufferings; sufferings of the mind; sufferings of the body; sufferings of affection; sufferings of friendship; sufferings of virtue. And how rapidly do they not succeed each other! How often do they not increase in numbers and in bitterness! And what can alleviate the burden of them to me? What can teach me to bear them with serenity and fortitude? What can give me comfort and confidence when I suffer want; when I labour under pain; when so many attacks are made upon my welfare and my pleasures; when oppressed by cares and sorrows; when in conflict with such ob-

stacles and contradictions; when I fail in my best designs, and cannot enjoy the fruit of my virtue; when my friends forsake me, my powers decay, and the infirmities of age bear hard upon me? Can I expect assistance from mankind, who are as feeble as myself? Can riches, or honours, or dissipations, or a splendid luxurious life, assuage my pains and heal my wounds? Or can I be relieved by the sight of such numbers of the unhappy, who suffer as much as myself, or even more than I?

No, my christian brother, this is what Jesus, the comforter from heaven, alone can do. He, who himself endured so much, was made perfect through sufferings, and by sufferings entered into his glory. He knows the afflictions of human nature, he has undergone them himself, has thus dignified them, and given them a quite altered aspect. He can, he will console thee; will in this respect likewise give thee life, and more abundantly. Accept his offered comfort, and let him revive thy wounded heart, restore thy soul. Even sufferings, he says to thee, come from God; are ordinances and dispensations of thy father in heaven; and whatever he, the All-wise, the All-bountiful ordains, what he, thy father, appoints for thee, is good, and must and will advance thy welfare. Readily would he spare thee and all his children upon earth, from sorrows, had he not in view to exercise and improve and train thee and them to a superior life. Readily would he grant you pure delights, and let all things go according to your wish,

if

if you were already capable of bearing such success. He chastens, he proves, he exercises you, because he loves you, and because his love embraces all your fortunes and provides for your future welfare as well as for the present. The path of sorrow is, indeed, a dark and rugged way; but it leads to perfection and happiness such as firmly and prudently pursue it. Even sufferings are benefits, when God inflicts them on his children, to teach them obedience, fortitude, and faith. Even sufferings, to such as patiently endure, and wisely use them, sooner or later become a source of blessing. What they now sow in tears, they shall hereafter reap in joy. The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall hereafter be revealed in us. No; bear, endure, suffer without repining, with filial resignation, what thy father in heaven calls thee to bear, to endure, and to suffer. He knows thy wants and thy powers, and every burden he lays upon thee is proportionate to them. He knows to what he has appointed thee in his kingdom, and at present intends to prepare and fit thee for it. Look unto me, says Jesus to his confessors, look unto me, thy leader and guide. Bear and suffer, as I have borne and suffered; fight the conflicts which I have fought, and in which so many of my followers have successfully striven. The end of thy way will be pure, exalted bliss, the prize of thy victory will be eminent glory and honour. And what can inspire us with comfort in sorrows, if such promises and such prospects are unable to do it?

Hope,

Hope, a sure and certain hope for futurity, is another want of man, which it is uncommonly necessary for him to supply. The more transitory the present, the shorter and more uncertain his duration here: the more steadily must he direct his eyes and his desires towards futurity, the less indifferent can he be concerning what he has there to hope for or to fear. That, sooner or later, to-day or to-morrow, all outward visible things will vanish away to him, and be sunk in the profoundest obscurity of night; that, sooner or later, to-day or to-morrow, his riches, his distinctions, his honours, his power, his beauty, his health, his life, all that he is and possesses as an inhabitant of this world, must be lost to him; that, sooner or later, to-day or to-morrow, a dark and lonely grave will inclose his body, and dissolve it into dust; that, sooner or later, to-day or to-morrow, he will quit this world, with all its glories and all its joys, and pass into a quite different, to him an unknown state: this he knows, this he feels; this every pain declares, every infirmity, every sickness, the departure of every acquaintance and friend, every stroke of the passing-bell, every open grave, every tomb, every church-yard hillock, with an incessant voice. And where is the man whom this does not affect, does not plunge into deep reflection, does not frequently alarm with concern and doubt!

Is then this night to last for ever? Are all these beauties and satisfactions to vanish from my eyes for ever? Am I to lose them all entirely and for ever, and to be made amends for my loss by nothing?

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Am I, then, wholly dust? Is this visionary life my whole existence? Do I totally cease to be, when my body ceases to move, and the blood to flow in my veins? And, if that which now thinks and acts within me survive the dissolution of my body, what will be my portion then? Into what region of all the immensity of space shall I be transported? Who will be there my conductor? What joys, or what sufferings, what recompences, await me there? How is the present connected with the future? Oh, who can dispel this darkness from before my eyes; who will solve these doubts? Who will give me that light and certainty, without which I cannot here be satisfied?

This also, my christian brother, this also can Jesus do, and will; he who promises to give thee life, and more abundantly. Even this thy want he powerfully supplies, the conqueror of death and the grave, the restorer of life and felicity. Authentically to certify thee of this, God sent him from heaven upon the earth, to die upon the cross, and to rise again from the dead. "I, says he, I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, shall not die eternally;" he shall pass through the gate and grave of death to a better life. No; this life is not the whole of thy appointment; it is only the first, the lowest step of thy existence. No; thou art not wholly dust; thy spirit is of divine descent, it is immortal, will rise above the dust, and need not dread corruption. No; the night that surrounds thee in
 death,

death, will not eternally, will not long endure; the morn will come, and a glorious day arise. No; the loss thou sufferest then is not irreparable, the friends thou then wilt lose are not for ever lost; infinitely more joys and blessings await thee in the future world, than thou couldst enjoy in the present. Therefore shudder not thou at the presence of death, tremble not thou at the grave, be not thou dismayed at the darkness and gloom of the valley of the shadow of death, nor at what will be the portion of thy heritage for ever. Be faithful to God and to thy duty; think and live constantly as befits a christian: and then will thy death be a passage into a better, a superior life; then wilt thou, with confidence, see before thee the resurrection of the dead; then wilt thou enter the abode where thy chief, thy lord, thy redeemer is, and take part in his glory; and he, who now is thy precursor and guide, will also be thy leader through the valley of death, thy guide for eternity. There wilt thou reap the fruit of every good thought and action, and a constantly increasing perfection and happiness will be the reward of thy fidelity. What hopes, what prospects, my dear brethren! Animated by these, how confidently may we meet futurity! How calm and resigned behold all that is visible and earthly, changing, revolving, sinking hence, and vanishing away!

Thus are all our wants supplied by Jesus. Thus do we find light to our understanding, rest for our heart, courage and ability to goodness, comfort in sorrow,

forrow, hope in futurity ; thus do we find life and more abundantly with him. Thus does he free us from every kind of misery, and lead us to the highest felicity whereof we are capable. Oh let us, then, rejoice in him and his advent into the world and his great business on earth ; let us adhere firmly to him, and resign ourselves intirely to his guidance and direction ! Replete with affection and gratitude, let us draw from the sources of knowledge, of wisdom, of virtue, which he has opened to us. They are no less pure than inexhaustible. “ He that drinketh of this water shall not thirst for ever.” He that draws from these sources, will draw joy and felicity, both for the present and the future life. Oh may we all do so, and thus assuage our thirst after truth and certainty, after peace of mind, perfection and felicity !

Advent-sunday, 1781.

SERMON XVIII.

The Value of Christianity, in regard of the General Advantage it has procured to Mankind, and still procures.

O GOD, our most loving and beneficent father, what a joyful salutary event calls us this day into thy presence! Of what benefits, of what advantages, of what blessings and comforts of the present and of the future life does it not remind us! Yes, the commemoration of the nativity of Jesus in the world, and his great work on earth, is the commemoration of our deliverance and our felicity; the commemoration of the happiest revolution that ever took place in the state of mankind in general, and also in our's! Yes, that light which first shone upon the world at the rising of the sun of righteousness, lightens and rejoices even us! The comfort and the hope which this great benefactor by his doctrine diffused among mortals refresh and restore
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even us! Even among us has virtue acquired numerous votaries by this its grand promoter! Yes, by him we enjoy as men and as christians, innumerable advantages of which otherwise we should be destitute, and of which we could not be destitute without being wretched! Now we know thee, our Creator and Father; we know thy gracious, thy compassionate dispositions towards mankind; we know the way that leads to thee and to supreme felicity. Now we need not wander in the dark mazes of superstition or doubt, but may fulfil our destination on strait and luminous paths. Now we are deficient neither in motive nor ability to do good, and by doing good to attain to the perfection of which thou hast made us capable. Now we have grounds enough for tranquillizing ourselves in life and in death. Oh happy we, that thou hast so highly favoured us in thy son Jesus, that thou hast blessed us through him with such various and inestimable benefits! Thanks, heartfelt eternal thanks be to thee, the Gracious, the Merciful, for this proof of thy grace and love! How far does it not exceed all our desires, all our expectations! How happy are we not thereby become, and how much happier may we not still be! Ah let us never forget it; let none of us receive thy grace in vain; let us rather feel the whole worth of the benefits which thy goodness has conferred upon us; let us study to understand their magnitude, their intimate connection with our happiness ever more and more by our own experi-

ence, and so constantly to use them, as is conformable to thy will and our salvation. Bless to that end the meditations we are now about to enter on concerning the things that relate to our peace, and let them fill us with pious gratitude and joy. All this we implore of thee in the name of thy son our saviour, and in full confidence address thee farther in his words: Our father, &c.

2 COR. V. 17.

Old things are past away; behold, all things are become new.

WE all rejoice in the advantages accruing to us from the appearance of Jesus among men, and his great work upon earth. Why otherwise are we wont to celebrate the festival of his birth; why hail this day more gladly than others? Our joy is undoubtedly very proper and becoming; it rests upon the most solid foundations, on events superlatively desirable and joyful. But is our joy likewise rational? Do we know, do we rightly consider what a blessed influence christianity has had and still has on our welfare, and in general on the welfare of mankind; and is this the reason that the

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consideration of the birth of Jesus, the founder of christianity, is so joyful to us? — I shall endeavour, my pious hearers, to advance this knowledge, and promote these reflections in you, by my present discourse, and thus render more rational and lively the joy the return of this festival excites. We are naturally furnished with an occasion hereto by the words of our text. “ Old things are past away,” says the apostle, “ behold, all things are become new.” Judaism, would he say, judaism, with all its burdensome ordinances and ceremonies, is superseded by the christian doctrine; the wall of separation between the jews and heathens is broken down; christianity has produced a great and happy revolution in the sentiments, in the manners, in the religion and worship, in the whole state of mankind; it has contributed much to the advancement of their perfection and happiness. Let us, therefore, from these words, consider the general advantage that christianity has procured to the human race in general, and still procures; advantages which even they who deny or doubt of the divine origin of the christian doctrines, must allow to be highly valuable and important.

We may reduce these advantages to four chief heads. The first concerns knowledge; the second virtue; the third peace of mind; and the fourth, the outward welfare of mankind.

First, the culture of the human mind and the knowledge of truth in general, has been improved

and more diffused by christianity among mankind. As christianity does not, like the old heathen religions, consist in celebrations and ceremonies, in solemnities and sacrifices, but in doctrines and moral precepts; so must it necessarily have excited mankind, by degrees, to more reflection on invisible, intellectual and moral objects, on their nature and end, on their mutual relation and connection with each other, on what they are at present, and what they may be and become hereafter; and these reflections must, by degrees, have spread themselves among all ranks and conditions of men, whereas, till then, they were left only to the wise, as they were called. By this means the culture of the human mind in general has been very much promoted, and will in course of time continue to be more so, as mankind proceed to perceive how far christianity is from enfeebling the rights of sound reason, and how favourable it is, on the contrary, to the free investigation of truth. By this means many precepts of wisdom, many kinds of knowledge, which were formerly looked upon as the peculiar property of the philosophers, are already incorporated into the general mass of human knowledge; and thus, by degrees, all that is useful and good of this kind, together with the peculiar doctrines of religion, will be a known and serviceable treasure to every man, and be delivered and accepted by every man to the purpose of disseminating and acquiring wisdom and knowledge. Thus much, however, is certain, that,
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among none of the heathen nations, the Greeks and Romans not excepted, were there such numbers of persons, of all ranks, who reflected so much on their most important concerns, on God and religion, on morality and virtue, on the end of their existence and their immortality, and by reflection proceeded so far, as among the christians; and, for this extraordinary phenomenon, I know of no consistent reason to be given, but christianity itself. I will not deny, that, considered as a predominant religion, at certain times it has been as great an impediment to reflection and liberal inquiry as heathenism; and that, at times, it has consisted, in regard to the generality of its professors, in a blind implicit belief. But I speak at present of the advantages we owe to christianity, considered at large; and if it has not, at all times, and always in the same degree, been productive of them by the fault of mankind, yet they still subsisted, and it is undeniable that we are at present greatly indebted for them to its salutary influence.

Let it not be said that we are chiefly obliged to the writings of the antient sages of Greece and Rome, and the more general publication of them, for the cultivation of the human mind, and the progress human knowledge has made. If we examine the matter thoroughly, we shall find that even the benefits we have obtained from that quarter, and still may obtain, are all owing to christianity. I decry not the writings of these antient sages: I am sen-

sible to the beautiful, the true, and the good they contain. But what has preserved these writings to us, and put them in our hands? Was it not christianity that preserved them for us, and, as it were, gave us them afresh? How happened it that the languages wherein these writings are composed, and which were no longer spoken any where, were studied and pursued, but because the worship of several christians was performed in them, and because they were the languages of their sacred books? Had it not been for this, would they not, like many other antient languages, which are only known to us by their names, have fallen into total oblivion, and, with the treasures of wisdom they contain, have become a prey to all-devouring time?

But if christianity has been favourable to the advancement of human knowledge in general, the knowledge of God and of religion in particular has been much more benefited by it. How widely is not the important doctrine of the eternity of God disseminated among mankind by christianity! Not only all christians of every sect and denomination, but even all mohammedans, who inhabit so considerable a part of the earth, and are probably still more numerous than the christians, are indebted for their belief of one true God, that first principle of all true religion, to the christian revelation. And how important is this doctrine! By it alone the world becomes to us a perfect system, wherein all things are most intimately connected together, and
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tend to one and the same great end. By this doctrine alone man is taught to know the author of his existence, the source of his felicity, the supreme object of his adoration, the foundation of his hopes. Enlightened by this doctrine, he no longer considers himself as a fatherless orphan, or as the effect of blind chance, or groaning under the authority of several powerful beings to him unknown, and at variance with each other. He knows from whom he springs, on whom he depends, under whose inspection he is and will for ever be; and he has now a certain fixed point, at which all his thoughts, desires, endeavours, designs and hopes, unite as in their proper centre.

How greatly has the prevalence of idolatry been diminished in the world by christianity, and how many regions of it are freed from the tyrannical sway of superstition, and from the iron sceptre of crafty and self-interested priests! And what slavish notions, what tormenting uncertainty, what fears, what terrors, what childish sentiments, what empty hopes and frivolous joys, must debase and perplex mankind, where the abominations of idolatry prevail! Calamities and horrors, from which christianity has delivered millions of human creatures, and ourselves among them; and by their abolition has prepared the way for millions of mankind, and for us among them, to liberty, to peace of mind, to firm and generous principles! That we are now no longer terrified at every unusual appear-

ance in nature; that we no longer perceive, at every step we take, the harbingers and signs of imminent misfortune or approaching danger; that we are not continually obliged to be contriving new forms of sacrifice and new modes of expiation; that we are no longer in dread of the casual neglect or imperfect observance of numberless rites and ceremonies; that we do not take every adverse event that befalls us for the vengeance of a wrathful deity; that we do not allow ourselves implicitly to be led by others, but dare to follow our own perceptions and feelings: for all these privileges and blessings, we are indebted to the abolition of idolatry, and therefore to christianity. Though many superstitions may still prevail among christians, and formerly many more may have prevailed than at present, yet we, and with us many thousands of our brethren, are freed from them by the influence of christianity, and in it lie the fruitful means for the total eradication of it from among its confessors; means which are continually coming forth into practice, and allow us to hope for still more glorious effects.

And how very much is not the knowledge of this only true God, and his relations to us, advanced and extended among mankind by the doctrines of christianity! Every christian, that is not completely ignorant, confesses and reveres God, not as a being who, infinitely exalted above him, stands in no kind of connection with him; but knows and reveres him as his creator and preserver, as his father
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and benefactor, as the ruler and judge of the world, as the observer and rewarder of human actions. And how prolific must not this conception be among christians, who reflect more attentively upon it! How must it lead to the solution of a thousand things which were before inexplicable mysteries to them! They every where discover traces of the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of this God; they see him every where acting for the benefit of all living creatures, and for their own; all things lead them back to him; and the thought of him spreads light and life and joy on all the face of nature.

Certainly the idea of what God is, of his attributes, and especially of what he is in regard to us, which, generally speaking, is even among persons of the inferior stations in life, more just, more satisfactory, more adapted to promote virtue and happiness, than it ever was among heathen nations, not excepting even the generality of their fages, or could be by their mythology. What low, gross, and contemptible ideas did they not form of their gods in general, of their dispositions, of their actions, of their pleasures! What weaknesses, what passions, what crimes, were not ascribed to them! And how little was even the father of gods and men, as the Greeks and Romans styled their sovereign deity, exempted from them! How much juster are not the notions diffused by christianity, on this article, among mankind of every station, of every age, and of every profession! Indeed, even these conceptions are ex-

tremely imperfect, and must remain so, as finite man is not capable of comprehending infinity. The best conceptions, indeed, with many christians are mixed with various errors. But, amidst all these imperfections and failings, they are still incomparably better and worthier than the former were. What christian, however moderately informed, knows not and believes not that God is the most holy, the most perfect, the best of beings; that he is almighty, all-knowing, and every-where present, supremely just and supremely good; that he cannot do evil, and tempts no man to wickedness; that he loves virtue and integrity above all things; that he abhors every species of iniquity and sin; and that there are no better means of pleasing him, and of securing his favour, than by doing justice and loving mercy, and, like him, by promoting the good of mankind? And are there not thousands of men, at present among christians, for one among the heathens, who raise themselves to still higher and more adequate representations of the deity; who carefully separate every thing that is weak, human, and narrow, from these representations; who consider and revere God as a being uniting in him every thing that is great and good and beautiful and perfect, incessantly employed in beneficence, willing and effecting nothing but felicity; who is to be won by no outwards tokens of reverence, to be soothed by no rites or offerings; who is infinitely superior to all human passions, to all the emotions of wrath, of partiality

partiality, of revenge; who requires no slavish dread of him from us, but only filial reverence and love; and who is supremely worthy of our profoundest reverence, of our most ardent adoration, of our sincerest affection, of our most chearful obedience, and our firmest confidence!

Add to this more adequate knowledge of God, the general and firm belief of our immortality, and of the future retribution, which christianity, wherever it has been preached and received, has so deeply imprinted on the hearts of men, and so intimately interwoven with their whole course of reflection, that even the most violent attacks of infidelity cannot, with the generality, eradicate or weaken it. Consider, likewise, that this belief inculcates such an immortality and such a retribution, as is consequent upon the moral conduct of mankind in this life, on virtue and vice; and conclude, from thence, how favourable this faith must, generally speaking, be to the amendment and repose of mankind, and how much more force it must have to this effect than the dark, uncertain, doubtful, false, and immoral opinions concerning this doctrine which obtained in the heathen world, and which, as it appears, were not much regarded by ordinary persons, and were looked upon by the wise as difficult and inexplicable problems.

A second class of general advantages, for which our thanks are due to christianity, relates to human virtue and integrity. These, upon the whole, have
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likewise been great gainers by it. The notions of virtue are, in general, more just among christians than they formerly were among the heathens. Every one knows, that the essence of virtue consists neither in bodily strength, nor in the valour that braves all dangers; neither in courage nor intrepidity in war, nor in the great achievements of heroes and conquerors, commonly not less destructive than renowned. Every one knows that it consists not merely in abstinence from gross and flagrant crimes, or in particular actions, though just and good, but that it comprehends the whole turn of mind and the whole series of conduct; that it is expressive of our entire moral perfection; that he is virtuous, who is and does all that he can be and do, according to his abilities, his vocation, and his circumstances, whose sentiments and behaviour are regulated by the will of God and the injunctions of his law. It is a maxim generally known and received, that real virtue consists not in attachment and affection to certain persons, or to a particular nation, founded on contempt and hatred towards the whole human race, but in an enlarged desire and strenuous endeavours to promote the happiness of all mankind. And how much more adapted is not this conception of it, for which we are chiefly indebted to christianity, to further and confirm the tranquillity, the security and the welfare of human society, than that barbarous, falsely called patriotic virtue, which passed for every thing in the old heathen world, and which is still so often

often extolled by partial judges to the disparagement of christian virtue! But particularly the silent and domestic virtues, the virtues of common life, whose beneficial influence on the public welfare is so various and lasting, have acquired a greater dignity by christianity; they have obtained the deserved, though otherwise not acknowledged, preference to the boasted heroic virtues, which, for the most part, were founded on injustice and violence.

The doctrine of virtue, among christians, is closely connected with the doctrine of God and religion, and is therefore to every man, and especially to the inferior classes of mankind, much plainer, much more fixed, and much more forcible, than it could possibly be among the heathens. Among them, religion and virtue were two distinct things, not connected together; nay, frequently in direct opposition to each other. The heathens, that is, individual persons, or some few particular sages among them, had a morality; but heathenism or the heathenish religion, had none. Morals, therefore, rested intirely either on the natural sentiment of the difference between good and evil, which was debilitated and almost destroyed by errors and vices; or on philosophical investigations of the nature and connections of man and the material world, totally above the comprehension of the generality of their fellow citizens. Christianity, as well as Socrates, but in a far loftier sense, and in a much more general and effectual manner, has brought down true wisdom

wisdom from heaven to the earth — has reduced it to the understanding and the heart of every man — has drawn it from the schools of the learned, mixed it with common life; and, by uniting religion and morality together, has rendered easy and important the knowledge of our nature and the practice of our duties.

How many motives, how many incitements to integrity and virtue, does not this happy conjunction of morality with religion afford the christian, who is not totally ignorant or inattentive! He cannot avoid making such reflections as these on a thousand occasions: God, my creator, my preserver, my benefactor, my judge, requires me to do this, and to abstain from the other. This he has expressly commanded me; that he has as expressly forbidden. If I do the one, he will bless and reward me; if I do not abstain from the other, he will call me to account, and the consequence will be fatal. My life and my fortunes are both in his hand; my all depends on his grace and favour; without them I cannot hope for success, and nothing can shield me from the effects of his displeasure. From how many iniquities must not these reflections restrain him, though they should not be altogether just, though they should be accompanied by many erroneous conceptions; and to how many worthy, good, and generous actions must they not incite him! How much must conscientiousness, integrity, and fidelity in secret, be promoted thereby!

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Both history and experience uniformly confirm these good effects of christianity, in regard to the moral conduct of mankind. It is not to be denied, that many inhuman and destructive vices, which heathenism tolerated and favoured, are now, by means of the christian doctrine, if not intirely exterminated from amongst its confessors, branded with so much infamy and disgrace, that they are no longer allowed to be named. It is not to be denied, that, on the whole, more integrity and honour, more fidelity and confidence in commerce, and all dealings between man and man, prevail among christians than amongst the most polished nations that are not christian. It is not to be denied, that the sentiments of general philanthropy and beneficence, and the indications of them, are far more frequent and effective among them than ever they were among the heathens. The erection and endowment of so many hospitals, so many institutions for the maintenance of orphans, for the comfort of the poor and the sick, of which we find comparatively but few among the heathens, are speaking examples of it. In general, without partiality, we are fully justified in affirming, that among christian nations, taken at large, the knowledge of duty and virtue, an aversion to wickedness, and a love of goodness, and therefore their morality, is greater and more general, the reverence for the deity and his laws more operative, the consciences of men more tender and delicate, and, in particular, the
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mild and social virtues are far more common than they ever were among the people of any nation, that we know of, before the coming of Christ.

A third class of general advantages, for which we are indebted to christianity, comprehends the tranquillizing of the human mind, and the fixing of its hopes. How considerably have these, which are such essential parts of christianity, been gainers by its peculiar doctrines of Providence and the divine government of the world, of the forgiveness of sins, of the immortality of the soul and of the life to come! The heathen, at least, among the Greeks and Romans, regarded his divinities either as indolent beings, totally unconcerned about the affairs of mortals, or as selfish, partial, and capricious beings, easily provoked and hard to be appeased. He knew not in what relation he stood to them, and what he was to fear from their displeasure or to expect from their favour. He was forced to console himself with the absolute necessity of gods and men, with a blind and inevitable fate. On the other hand, the christian, the unlearned as well as the learned, the poorest day-labourer as well as the exalted amongst the people, the christian is acquainted with truths which have quite a different influence on the repose of his mind. There is, thus can he reflect on all occasions, and thus does he in fact very often think — There is a being supremely wise and supremely good, who is interested about us all, whose creatures and children we are, who loves and provides

for us all. Nothing can happen without his will; and God, the All-merciful, wills ever the best. Nothing is impossible to him; he knows how to deliver from death. To them that love him, all things must tend to good. If he be for us, none can be against us. His strength is mighty in weakness. He will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able to bear. How much do not these and the like reflections alleviate the hardest toils, the greatest indigence, the severest afflictions, to many thousands of christians! How much courage and confidence do they not give them in misfortunes and perils! If we frequented the cottages of the poor, the dwellings of the lower classes of men, and made ourselves more acquainted with their habitual manner of thinking, we should perceive how much comfort and serenity the christian doctrine affords them all, almost without exception, because they receive and believe it in simplicity of heart, are free from all the doubts with which the wise, as they are called, are perpetually tormented, rely firmly on what the scripture tells them, and constantly suppose God particularly employed in their concerns and in the disposition of their fortunes; and then we should rightly judge of the advantage christians must have, in this respect likewise, over all, even the most civilized nations, that were or are not christian.

How much more easily may the christian, oppressed by the guilt of his sins and the terror of punishment, quiet his mind, than any other man
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who finds himself in the same perplexity, but knows not the christian doctrine! The christian knows, and knows it with assurance, that God is inclined to pity and to spare, that he will forgive the contrite and converted sinner all his iniquities without exception, and remit the penalty due to transgression. He knows, and knows definitively, what, in this respect, he has to do: he has no need to consider, with anxious uncertainty, what multitudes of offerings, what costly presents, what mystical atonements and expiations, or what severities of penance, will procure his pardon; but so soon as he draws nigh to his creator and judge in sincerity of heart, abhors and forsakes his wicked habits, and, effectually determined on a better conduct, holds true to his purpose, he may immediately promise himself the favour of the Most High, and his heart condemns him no more. What a healing and reviving balm must not these christian doctrines have poured into the wounded consciences and tortured hearts of thousands and thousands, who must otherwise have become a prey to the horrors of despair!

We may advance the same thing in regard to the dread of death, and the hope of a better life. Though the sage of heathenism, with a perplexed and doubting mind, or in the horrible expectation of utter extinction, saw death approach him; though the greatest number of them met this ghastly tyrant either with a reckless insensibility, or with a mind struggling between darkness and
light,

light, between fear and hope; yet christians, in general, being firmly persuaded of their immortality, and of the eternal life that awaits them after death, form juster conceptions of the future state, can more easily and with greater certainty, promise themselves a better portion there than they have had on earth; meet their dissolution, therefore, with far greater comfort and resignation; and many thousands of them actually enter the gate of death without dismay, and in the joyous, undoubted expectation of an everlasting continuance of existence, a glorious resurrection, an incessant, ever-increasing felicity. Infallible arguments, that leave us no room to doubt that there not only may be, but that there actually is, among christians, far more comfort and hope and rational peace of mind, than was ever to be found among the heathens.

Recollect, at the same time, for we cannot expatiate on particulars, recollect the multitudes of institutions and means for promoting knowledge, virtue and the composure of mankind, that owe their origin to christianity.

Think on the numerous schools, erected in all the towns and most of the villages in christian countries, and which, considered as schools of religion and morality, were wholly unknown among the heathens, at least among the Greeks and Romans, and likewise among our ancestors, the antient inhabitants of these islands*. Defective and illi-

* I have made a little alteration here, for the sake of adaptation. In the original it is, "the antient Gauls and Germans." *Tr.*

beral as the generality of these schools, in more than one respect, may be, yet children are there brought to the knowledge of the only true God, and disciplined in his fear, instructed in their duties, cautioned against all sin and vice, and incited to virtue by various ways.

Reflect on the pastoral office every where introduced into the christian church, devoted to the instruction, the encouragement, and the comfort of individuals of every condition, age, and sex; an institution peculiar in its kind, being unknown in any other religion, and which certainly a Socrates, a Plato, a Cicero, a Confucius, would have admired as the most excellent and beneficial of all others, if they could have seen it in their days. Let the pastoral office be ever so much abused, let the delivery of the christian doctrines be ever so defective; yet the conveyance of instruction in the most important doctrines of religion and virtue, in so public a manner, in such frequent returns, and often with the most intimate sentiment and conviction, must infinitely more contribute to the amelioration and composure of mankind than all the solemnities and ceremonies of the heathens were ever able to do. Take this likewise into the account, that all these advantages, institutions and establishments, are so constituted in the very nature of them, that they cannot fail, by degrees, of becoming common, and of obtaining a certain degree of perfection and actual influence; and that they are even now becoming constantly,

stantly, and with no slow progression, more perfect and productive than they have hitherto been: and you will not be able to deny that we, and all mankind in general, are under no ordinary obligation to christianity.

There are still a variety of other considerable advantages for which we stand indebted to the influence of this heavenly doctrine, and which relate in great measure to the outward condition of man. We must now, however, confine ourselves to a slight indication of them: that polygamy, for example, that fertile source of depopulation, of effeminacy and domestic misery, is abolished; that the inhuman, barbarous custom of exposing children, on account of some accidental infirmity, or because they were disagreeable or burdensome to their parents, and giving them up to unavoidable ruin, is abhorred by all men; that slavery, that unjustifiable degradation of human nature, as it formerly obtained among the Greeks and Romans and other nations of antiquity, is, at least in christian Europe, much diminished; that, by the strenuous exertions of generous and noble-minded men, we may entertain the pleasing hope that it will, ere long, be held in universal detestation; that laws and customs, with all their allowed imperfections and inconsistencies, are still, in general, milder and more humane; that war, in many respects, is carried on with less cruelty and devastation; that the conquered are spared, and neither deprived of their lives nor their liberty;

that the sentiment of the moral dignity of man, the acknowledgment of the natural equality of the human race, and a due regard for each other among individuals, are understood and felt, and are every day becoming more universal and effective; that many corrupt passions, destructive to society, as revenge, ambition, tyranny, are restrained to narrower bounds, and meet with more powerful controul, or are directed to a nobler channel: for all these advantages we are indebted, though indeed not altogether and alone, but in a great measure, to christianity, and its influence on the general opinion and manners of its confessors; and how much is not the peace, the security, the welfare of social life, improved thereby!

So many, such great advantages, in respect to knowledge, to virtue and integrity, to our tranquillity and hopes, and our external welfare, do we owe to the doctrine of Jesus, whose nativity we this day commemorate. And should not the consideration of these advantages, which we all possess and enjoy, inspire us with gladness at our felicity, and with gratitude to God, the author and giver of it? Yes, christian festivals are real days of rejoicing, but with a joy that relates particularly to the bounty of God, our father in heaven, who allows us to feel the whole worth of his parental protection and love, and impresses our hearts with gratitude towards him. Let us, then, excite these joys within us, and endeavour to render them poignant and lively by reflection.

tion. To this end, let us transport ourselves, in spirit, into the times of heathenism, visit the temples of the gods, represent to ourselves the nugatory rites their worshippers paid them, and the superstitious terrors that surrounded these abodes of imposture; let us lament over the far greater ignorance, wickedness, and comfortless condition, that formerly prevailed among mankind; let us bewail the miserable fate of the nations, who blindly followed their sightless guides, who prostrated themselves before wood and stone; who lived, as it were, without God and without hope in the world, and among whom also our forefathers were; and then compare our happier condition with theirs, and render due honour to christianity, by which this beneficial revolution was brought about.

Or, if we cannot make this comparison, from a deficiency of historical information, we need not go so far from our own times, and from the present prevailing sentiments; let us, however, at least, reflect what condition our knowledge, our virtue, our hope, our outward welfare, the security and peace of society, would be in, had we been bereaved of the advantage we have now considered as the fruit of christianity. In all probability, we should then have lain buried in the thickest darkness of ignorance and superstition; we should have been blind idolaters, miserable slaves, dupes or impostors, the sport of our gross propensities and passions; fearful, hopeless,

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wretched

wretched mortals. Now are we children of light ; men who know their Creator, their duties, and the end of their creation ; worshipers of the true God, comforted by his providence, by his grace, by the expectation of a better, an eternal life ; members of a civilized society, where vice is detested, where virtue is esteemed and revered ; where, upon the whole, much integrity, much philanthropy, much truth and confidence, is actually to be found. How happy, then, is it for us that Jesus was born into the world, and promulgated his doctrine ! What thanks do we not owe to him and to his heavenly Father, who sent him to us as our teacher and deliverer !

And how much happier may we still become, by employing his doctrine aright ! Let us not be satisfied with the general advantages it procures to all nations and languages. Let us strive to be partakers in the highest perfection and happiness, to which it is adapted to lead us. Let us, therefore, continually improve in the knowledge of this excellent doctrine ; ever apply it more sedulously to ourselves ; ever allow ourselves to be more and more animated by its spirit, and ever study to think and live in a more christian manner. Let us follow its directions, to the obtaining of felicity, with a cheerful and intire resignation of heart, and observe all its precepts with unremitted attention. Thus shall we endeavour

to become, by its means, intirely free, thoroughly wise, and perfectly virtuous, perfectly and eternally blessed! God grant, my dear brethren, God grant that this may be the happy portion of us all!

Christmas-day.

SERMON XIX.

The high Value and Excellence of the Human Soul,

O GOD, to thee belong majesty and power, glory and dominion, adoration and praise; for all that is in heaven and on earth is thine. 'Thine is the kingdom; thou reignest over all. Thy kingdom is immense; and thy dominion is gracious and merciful, just and wise. Thou lovest all thy creatures, and wouldst render them as perfect and happy as their nature and their relations allow. We likewise, o God, may boast of thee as our gracious ruler, as our beneficent father. Thou hast created us, however humble the station we fill in thy kingdom, after thy image. Thou hast made us little lower than the angels, crowned us with glory and honour, and made us lords over the works of thy hands. Thou hast elevated our souls into rational and immortal spirits, and rendered us capable of everlasting felicity. And when we had rejected this felicity by

our sins, thou even sentest us, o miracle of grace and favour, thou even sentest us thy son, the only-begotten, to be a saviour and deliverer; and now we may presume again to call ourselves thy children and to hope for an everlasting felicity in communion with thee. What are we, o God, that thou hast done so much for us, that thou hast so highly favoured us? Praised be thy glorious and inexhaustible goodness! We acknowledge, we feel the infinite worth of thy gifts; but we also feel that we can never worthily thank thee for them. Oh that our whole lives might be a never ending act of praise to thy great name! Oh that we constantly shewed by the best use of the benefits and advantages which thou hast granted us, how highly we prize them, and how much we are bounden to thee for them! O God, do thou thyself support, confirm these good dispositions in us. Let their efficacy be manifest in the whole of our future conduct. Bless, to this end, the meditations we are now about to begin. Teach us to understand the entire value of our souls, and at all times to think and act consistently with that knowledge. Harken to our prayer, for the sake of Christ, our mediator and intercessor, in whose name we farther call upon thee, saying: Our father, &c.

MATTHEW XVI. 26.

What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

RIGHTLY to ascertain the value of things, not to prize them higher, and not to be fonder of them than they deserve; to connect the present with the future, and in drawing our inferences to look not only at the former, but also at the latter; never to lose sight of our grand object, and to regard and use all other things only as means to the advancement of it: this is the character of the wise man. To judge of outward things only by the first impression they make on our senses, which is often a very fallacious one; to treat empty trifles as matters of great moment, and important concerns as contemptible trifles; to follow blind instincts or corrupted passions, in the choice of the objects of our love and esteem; to sacrifice a great future fortune to a present momentary pleasure or transient advantage; to take the means for the end, or to live in the world without a determinate plan upon a bare capital: this is the character of a fool. But who is that sage, if it be not the christian, who thinks and acts conformably

ably to his heavenly calling? Who is this fool, if it be not the sensual man, who follows his inordinate appetites, and barter heaven for the goods of the earth? The former, the true christian, holds all that is terrestrial and transient for what it actually is, and will hereafter be; and this moderates his affection towards it, and renders the loss of it by no means intolerable: the latter, the mere sensual man, seeks his whole happiness in earthly things; and, if they chance to be ravished from him, he thinks himself cast into the lowest depth of misery, as indeed he is, since he has nothing left to compensate the loss. The former directs his desires to the worthiest objects; his whole heart is devoted to God, to religion, to virtue and friendship: the latter bestows his whole love and esteem on such things as are unworthy of them, inadequate to the capacities of mankind, and hostile to his vocation. The former knows that he has an immortal spirit, and all his endeavours tend to render that nobler part of his being more perfect, and more fitted for that superior state to which he is hastening: the latter forgets, as it were, that he has a reasonable soul, that is to live for ever, and confines his cares to his outward condition, and to whatever can flatter his senses. The former lives for eternity, and considers his dwelling here on earth as a preparation for it: the latter limits all his thoughts, desires and views to the short moment of his earthly pilgrimage, and loses sight of the term to which it leads. From this contrast of the temper and conduct

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of the true christian, with the temper and conduct of the vicious man, can we for a moment doubt that the former follows the dictates of wisdom, and that the latter betrays the greatest folly? Whence, however, proceeds this difference in their sentiments and actions? The christian understands and feels the whole value, the high dignity, the important destination of his soul; he frequently reflects upon it; he compares what he is and does, impartially with what he ought to be and to do; and strives to conduct himself according to his knowledge. The other on the contrary allows all this to escape him, seldom or never thinks on it, and judges and acts in the generality and the most important of cases, as if he belonged to an inferior order of beings. Of so much consequence is it, my pious hearers, that we should frame to ourselves right notions of the value and excellency of our soul, and that these notions should have a powerful influence on our conduct. May it be granted me, under the divine assistance and blessing, by my present discourse, to excite you to such a deportment, as is conformable to them! What a value, what a dignity must not the human soul possess, of what a perfection and happiness must it not be susceptible, since Jesus, the delegate of God, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, so expressly admonishes us in our text against every thing that may be injurious to our soul, and declares the gain of the whole world, the possession of the greatest opulence and the most splendid earthly circumstances,

cumstances, to be nothing in comparison to these injuries, by saying: "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Well then, my brethren, let us consider the high value, the excellency and dignity of the human soul: but let us, likewise, attend to the behaviour that is fitting for such noble, such highly favoured creatures as we are. These two considerations will compose the matter of my present attempt; and they are certainly of a nature to merit your utmost attention.

The nature and origin of the human soul, its great capacities and powers; what God has done, and still does for its preservation and the advancement of its happiness; its appointment and its future lot: all these proclaim it of exalted worth, and set that worth beyond all doubt to reflecting creatures.

How lofty is the origin of the human soul! How far, in this respect, does it excel the body! This is formed of the dust. It is produced by generation. It lies concealed in other terrestrial bodies, and its developement is occasioned by mortal man. The soul, as the scripture says, is of divine descent, is the offspring of God. God is, in a peculiar sense, her creator and father, as he is the creator and father of superior spirits: she is, therefore, related to those exalted beings. Yes, she bears the impress of him that made her; and even the state of meanness and of moral corruption, wherein she is at present, cannot totally efface the glorious image. Her reason is a
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ray of his unbounded intellect; her freedom and power are derived from his unlimited and constantly efficient might; her love to what is beautiful and good, to order and perfection, her friendly and beneficent dispositions, are emanations, if I may so speak, of his pure holiness, of his eternal and unalterable benignity.

Her spiritual nature, raised so far above all that we discern about us, and in connection with us, bears witness also of her excellency, and of her high descent. She tells us intelligibly enough that she is not of the earth, but of heaven. Had we already no plain and clear conception of the nature of our soul; even in affirming, that she is a simple essence, it would be much the same as saying that she is not, like matter, composed of parts: yet our reflection, as well as our feeling, would inform us that she is somewhat wholly different from the body she inhabits, and is far more excellent than it. The body continues not a single moment in the same state in which it was before. It is continually undergoing various alterations, which, imperceptible as in part they may be, yet, taken together, are very considerable. It is constantly losing numberless little particles, which are as constantly, by means of air, of food and drink, replaced by others; and thus, in the course of a few years, our body is, as it were, totally renewed. But, amidst all these revolutions of its grosser shell, the soul remains invariably the same. She is conscious, at every period of time, that she is exactly what she
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was in any previous portion of her life. She can connect the past, the present and the future together, though the past be long since past, and for the future there be no reason discoverable in the material world. She begets thoughts, she draws inferences, she exerts powers, which not only have nothing similar to what we term magnitude, figure, solidity and movement, but are contradictory to all these properties of matter. All her ideas, diversified and innumerable as they may be, concentrate, as it were, in one point, which we must necessarily represent as indivisible. She is therefore of a quite different, of a far more permanent and unchangeable nature than our body, and all other things that fall under the perception of our senses.

Hence likewise it is, that the well-being of the soul depends not so much on the outward circumstances in which she finds herself, as on her own moral frame: so as that she may be wretched while in possession of the most brilliant advantages of this life, and be sad amidst the free use of all the sources of joy that human society can open, if error, passion and vice, shed darkness and dismay upon her: so can she on the other hand be contented in the absence of all the goods of fortune, and serene under the burden of severe afflictions, if the knowledge of truth, the consciousness of innocence, the sentiment of her dignity, and the prospect of the future world, inspire her with light and rest, with hope and assurance. She can maintain her nobility in the lowest station,

station, her freedom in the bonds of slavery, her cheerfulness at the sight of death and corruption: she can preserve her virtue amidst all temptations, her fortitude in all dangers and her greatness under all oppressions. She soars above every thing earthly and visible; presses by meditation into the very abodes of the perfected just; gets a foretaste of their purer joys; and looks down from that eminence on all that is transient and vain with compassion and contempt. Her perfection and happiness repose on such properties, perceptions, sensations and aptitudes, as no changes of fortune can affect; which she cannot lose, though heaven and earth should pass away. How excellent then must be the nature of the human soul! What a value must not these advantages confer upon it, beyond all that is material!

Cast, secondly, a look at her capacities and powers, and you will still more plainly perceive her excellency and her value. How noble are the occupations of the human mind! Of what a great perfection is it not susceptible! How many great and astonishing things is not man able to execute with it! He thinks, and is conscious of it. He forms to himself clear representations of the things that are without him, and can increase the number of these images without end. He compares his ideas with one another, judges of their harmony or their contradiction, and combines them in thousands of various ways. He proceeds from known things to unknown, from the easy to the difficult; adopts prin-

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ciples, draws conclusions, concatenates these conclusions together, and is ever opening new prospects in the unbounded regions of truth that lie before him. Would he dismiss his ideas, they fly from his presence. Are they obscure; he spreads a new light upon them. Are they vanished away; he calls them back. With his understanding, man traces his own capacities and powers, and observes the rise, the progress and the varied combination of his reflections, his propensities and inclinations. By means of his understanding, man rules over all the beasts of the earth; knows how to restrain their strength and over-rule their subtlety by prudence, and to ease himself by their service of the most difficult labours; and the whole inanimate and irrational creation is rendered subservient to his profit and pleasure. By his understanding, when providence has allotted him an exalted station among his brethren, he comprehends the multifarious and complicated concerns of intire kingdoms and states; judges of the strength and the weakness of every particular district and of its relation to the whole; is vigilant and provident for the benefit of all; knows how to connect the several capacities, the jarring interests, the opposite views and various talents of his subjects with each other, to keep them in their due equilibrium, and to turn them all to the advancement of one and the same great end; enlightens and animates millions of persons by the radiance he diffuses around him, and governs them so, that, in their sovereign they revere

the kindest of fathers. He proceeds still farther with his intellect. By unremitted reflection, and by the help of a researching mind, he dives into the secrets of nature; scrutinizes the latent causes, properties and effects of things; sees and admires the wisdom and art discernible in the smallest insect no less than in the structure of the world, and, from observations on what are in and of themselves apparently of little import, discovers the universal law by which the largest of the heavenly bodies roll. With his understanding man lifts himself from earth to heaven, measures the path and the distances of the stars, arranges them in classes, calculates their dimensions, weighs their solidity, and seeks and finds the place where they have stood for thousands of years, and where they may stand for ages to come. Nay, with his understanding man soars to the knowledge of all things, to the knowledge of him who is the creator and lord of him and the universe, who is beauty and perfection itself, before whose grandeur and glory suns and worlds are nothing. Even the infinite attributes of this most exalted being are not absolutely hidden from him. He sees them resplendent in all his works, and studies his eternal will from the constitutions and arrangements he has established in nature.

And who can settle the boundaries of the imagination and memory of the human soul! The former traverses the immense realm of creation, far swifter than light; ranges from one solar, from one planetary system to another; forms new worlds to itself; connects

nects the past with the present, and pierces to the remotest futurity. The latter, the memory, can restore to its pristine disposition and arrangement all that we have ever felt, all that we have ever thought, and of which no trace remains without us; it can store up unnumbered ideas of the most dissimilar things, without confusion or mixture, for our future use; it can contain, within itself, the whole circle of arts and sciences, all that ancient and modern history teaches us of remarkable transactions, of the inventions and discoveries of mankind, ever augmenting this enormous stock of knowledge, and at all times delivering to us whatever is best adapted to our present purpose.

With what faculties, farther, is not the human soul endowed? The faculty by which, of its mere will, not as an effect of a natural and irresistible instinct, but from free choice, with complete consciousness, and to wisely directed aims, the most diversified movements in our body instantaneously and infallibly arise, and by means of them a thousand revolutions, in the objects without us, as instantaneously and infallibly take place, and at its command as suddenly and certainly cease: this faculty is an image of the omnipotence that calls that which is not into being, and orders that to pass away which is to exist no more. It is a faculty that we know not how to explain, but which undoubtedly has something god-like in it, and exalts man far above the inanimate and the irrational creation; a faculty that, likewise, must

have a great and beneficial influence on our moral conduct, if we studied to exert it with greater consideration, and learnt to apply it aright.

In short, how far may not the human soul advance in moral perfection? She is not necessitated to follow a blind and irresistible instinct. She determines herself. She acts from discernment and choice, from knowledge and argument. She knows how to distinguish the semblances of good and evil from what is actually so, and even, by her inferences, to bring the remotest consequences of things into consideration. She is susceptible of the noblest sentiments, and capable of the most magnanimous actions. Has the desire of pleasing God and of accomplishing his will, has the love of truth and virtue once got the ascendant in her, then may she withstand and repel the strongest incitements to sin, either outward or inward. She can cheerfully sacrifice either fame or authority, either riches or honour, either quiet or fortune, either health or life, to her duty. To resemble God, her heavenly father, in justice and beneficence, to copy him ever more closely, and to render herself ever more capable of nearer communion with him, is the ultimate object of her inclinations and endeavours. This exalted aim she pursues with undeviating ardour; readily renounces every thing that might turn her aside; becomes constantly wiser and better, and never ceases from striving after higher degrees of perfection. What a value, what a dignity must the human soul possess, adorned as she

is with such capacities and powers, and capable of such a high degree, of so incessant an elevation of knowledge and virtue!

It is true, that the same human soul, from whose capacities and powers we conclude of her excellence, has likewise her weak side; and were I to deny it, or endeavour to hide it from you, the experience of all mankind of every age would convict me of falsehood and insincerity. Yes, we all but too frequently experience how easily our soul faints under the pressure of intense application; how suddenly she is precipitated from the heights to which she had climbed, and how often she fatigues herself in vain to scan and explore them. We all but too much experience how easily we are seduced into error, how quickly we suffer ourselves to be hurried away by violent passions; how often we accept the semblance of a matter for its actual substance; and how difficult it is for us to regain the path of truth and virtue, when once we have deviated from it. All of us experience but too much, that, at present, we are still surrounded by great darkness and uncertainty; that our knowledge is only patchwork; that, in most of our aims, we walk by faith and not by sight; and that, in fine, the noblest capacities of our nature can only be carried to a certain degree of perfection on earth by a very small proportion of mankind. But be upon your guard, that, from these experiences, you draw no inferences detrimental to the value and dignity of the human soul. Consider under what ad-

verse circumstances she lives and acts in this world. Consider how much she is oppressed by the corruption of sin ; how much she is confined by the irregularities and infirmities of the body ; how much she is impeded in her functions by the wants and affairs of this life, which demand the greatest part of our time and the principal exertions of our powers ; and how often her fire is even repressed in education ; and represent to yourselves what she will be, when these circumstances shall be changed, these impediments removed, and she finds herself in another and a better world. Then will she first shew herself in her intire vigour, and, if we at present pay a becoming attention to her improvement and sanctification, will proceed with rapid steps from one degree of perfection to another. Here, according to the wise constitution that God has established, she neither can nor ought to be so perfect as by her nature she is adapted to become ; and herein she loses no more of her worth and excellency, than the diamond loses of its intrinsic value by not being cut and polished.

But, it may be said, what are these faculties and powers of the human soul, let them be as great as they may, when compared with the powers and faculties of superior beings ? Indeed, my pious hearer, when I consider the immeasurable magnitude of the universe ; when I reflect how probable it is, that we occupy but one of the lowest places among the intelligent creatures of God ; when I ruminatè on the distance between mankind and the highest order of spirits,

spirits, which may be as great, and probably much greater than the distance between the acutest human mind and that of the simplest infant : at such times I am lost in my own reflections ; it then appears to me as if the ascribing of such value to my human soul as I am used to give it, were nothing more than a suggestion of over-weening pride. In those moments revelation comes to my aid. That teaches me what God, the creator of spirits, has done for the human soul ; and this frees me from all doubt that it must have a great value in his sight, who alone can infallibly judge of the value of things. I shall not, at present, observe how much the wisdom and goodness of God is revealed in the structure of the body which the soul inhabits ; how curiously all the organs of sense are adapted to its instruction ; and how plainly all the methods of his providence tend to the advancement of its perfection. I shall not at present make my appeal to the frequency with which God has sent extraordinary teachers to mankind, to discover to them his will, to recall them from their deviations and to promote their salvation ; how often he has even employed celestial messengers, to rescue them from dangers and to certify them of his gracious protection. I will only now remind you of the last and most glorious revelation of the divine grace promulgated to us by the gospel. Christ, my friends, the only begotten son of God, the lord and head of angels, by whom God made the world, and still governs it, divests himself of his authority and

glory, comes upon earth, takes our nature upon him, lives among mankind, is their brother, their teacher, their mediator, suffers for them unspeakable pains, and dies at last as a sacrifice for their sins on the cross, to deliver human souls from ruin, to enlighten human souls, to improve, to sanctify them, to prepare for them the way to communion with God and to everlasting happiness, to make them, from servants of sin and death, the children of the Most High, heirs of a blessed immortality, citizens of heaven. These proofs of divine love towards mankind, elevate them far above all that we can understand or conceive; and this very proof of the divine love must necessarily give our nature a quite different, in reality an inexpressible dignity. What we learn therein of the love of God towards man must necessarily confer upon our nature a quite peculiar, an inexpressible dignity. Yes, when I contemplate that love as the love of a father for his children, that it has ordained us to the greatest felicity, I can no longer doubt that the human soul is precious in his sight. Then every scruple arising from my reflections on the immensity of the kingdom of God, on the countless multitude of his adorers, and on the inconsiderable station I fill amongst them, vanishes from my mind. Then I recover from the illusion into which the consideration of his infinite greatness and my own insignificance had thrown me. I am sensible to the whole value, the honour, and the felicity of being his child, of bearing his likeness, and of being the brother of Jesus.

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Figure to yourselves, lastly, from the worth and excellency of your souls, what their future appointment and lot must be. Has not the reflection already arisen in your minds from the foregoing considerations, that our soul is not here what by its nature it may and ought to be; that its capacities and powers are far too great and noble to be completely displayed in the present state of weakness? And may we not thence venture to infer, that the God who cannot possibly fail in his designs, and who imparts to his creatures no faculties which they never can employ, has not formed our soul for this terrestrial scene alone, that this is but the first and lowest step on the scale of its existence, that it is appointed to a continually advancing, to an eternal elevation? And must we not draw this inference from what God has done for our soul? Would he, who is wisdom itself, who always exactly proportions the means to his ends, would he have made such great preparatives, such marvelous dispositions, to the promoting of our natural and moral perfection, if he had only produced us that we might pass a few years of more sensible than rational life, and then return again to nothing? How! God has made me capable of knowing him, of worshiping him, of loving him, of seeking my whole felicity in him; and this capacity, from which I have a right to promise myself so much, which inspires me with so ardent a desire after a closer communion with this glorious being, I am to lose in death! No; God cannot annihilate creatures whom

whom he has endowed with such faculties, and favoured so highly besides ; and, if he cannot destroy them, then are they safe from all destruction. If these conclusions have not sufficient force to convince you of this, then take the documents of christianity upon it. It dissipates all the darkness and uncertainty which in this particular might still remain. Enlightened by the light of christianity, we authentically know that our souls shall not die, that they shall live for ever, that they shall exchange this world hereafter for a better. There will they unfold all their faculties and powers, and attain to the highest degree of activity and strength. There will they proceed from one stage of knowledge to another, from virtue to superior virtue, from happiness to superior happiness, and nothing will impede them in their progress. Glorious arrangement ! Happy portion ! For ever shall we live and act, for ever be more perfect and happy, and for ever make nearer approaches to God Most High. Yes, then will it first appear that God has made man in his own image. Then will our nature appear in the full display of its dignity, in all its magnificence and grandeur.

Behold, o man, thus noble is thy origin, thus extensive are thy capacities, such great things has God done for thee, so exalted is thy vocation ! Thy soul is of divine descent ; it is capable of an ever-increasing perfection ; it is of infinite duration. Oh praise thy creator ; let all that is within thee extol his name ! Be sensible to thy worth ; forget not thy dignity ;
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learn to prize thyself, and to think and act proportionately to thy value. Rejoice in thy happiness, and ever render thyself more susceptible of it by wisdom and virtue. But shudder likewise at the misery, at the inconceivable misery, of which this natural excellency makes thee susceptible, and shun the way that leads to it, the way of vice, which degrades thee, that hurls thee from the throne to which thou art ordained and renders thee a slave.

Oh how much to be pitied are sensual and earthly-minded men, who never rise above visible things, never seriously reflect on the privileges granted them by God, on the perfection and glory to which he has called them; who are insensible to their noblest powers, or misapply them to voluptuousness, to iniquity, to sin; who are as it were all matter, and think they live for no other purpose than to satisfy their corporeal wants, to abandon themselves to sensual gratifications, or to accumulate unprofitable treasures! How can they imagine that, for this end, God has so far exalted them above the beasts of the earth, that to this end he has used so many extraordinary means for their deliverance and their salvation, or that in these pursuits they shall attain the end for which they were created! How can they boast of, what is indeed the highest boast of man, that they are honoured with the image of God, and that they may be constantly drawing nearer to that glorious being, and ever gaining a closer resemblance to him! No; they belie their nobility; they debase themselves

selves to an inferior class of beings ; they defeat the great designs their maker has upon them ; they prefer darkness to light, bondage to freedom, a merely sensual and animal life to one that is heavenly and divine. The exalted, the everlasting felicity of which their nature is capable, they spurn from them with contempt. Yet this is not all : they thus are preparing for themselves punishments, which will be so much the heavier as the talents are more excellent which God has committed to them, and which they abuse. This ye may do, o foolish men ; ye may weaken, deprave, disgrace your soul, by folly and vice ; ye may render it totally incapable of the favour of God and the bliss of the future world ; ye may beguile it, and hide your shame and your misery from yourselves. But kill it you cannot. It is immortal. It will live for ever. It will awake from its illusions in another state ; and then will it feel the whole weight of the shame and misery that lies upon it. Then will you experience, to your extreme affright, the truth of what the Saviour says, that it will profit a man nothing to have gained the whole world, if he lose his own soul ; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ? Lamentable prospects ! dreadful expectations ! Oh strive to put your soul into a better frame, ere that great day arrive which shall decide your future lot. Raise yourselves from the earth ; rend yourselves from the dominion of sordid pleasures. Avail yourselves of the gracious dispositions of God through Christ, for the deliverance

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ance of our souls. Seek of him and his doctrine that light which can enlighten you, that power which can amend and sanctify you, that grace which can console and bless you. Accustom yourselves to consider and to judge of every thing by its analogy with the futurity that awaits you, and pursue such a course as is suitable to the excellency of your nature.

Let the consideration of this excellency of the human soul instruct and comfort you, ye poor and low among the people, whom neither riches, nor illustrious pedigree, nor exalted stations procure any regard. Let it inspire you, not with pride, but with a generous confidence, a lively sentiment of your inherent dignity. Let it teach you contentedness in your condition. Let these considerations serve as preservatives from base sentiments and sordid behaviour. That which truly exalts mankind above the other creatures, what renders them capable of such great perfection and happiness, is common to you with the mightiest of the earth, with princes and with kings. If you possess the essential and everlasting privileges of mankind, how easily may you dispense with the things that have more outward shew than interior worth, and the possession of which is confined to a few years. Honour therefore them, to whom, by an effect of the diversity of station established by providence, honour is due. Be obedient to them who have a right to command you: but both honour and obey, in a manner consistent with the excellency of your nature, generously and nobly, not with meanness and abject servility;

fervility; and account it no misfortune that you have no share in that supremacy and honour. Seek only to embellish your soul with knowledge and virtue, to maintain your moral freedom, to renew yourselves after the image of God, and to become fitted for a blessed immortality; thus, in whatever station you are placed, you will be great and happy, both in the present and in the better world.

And you, who have power and authority in your hands, you who, by the station you fill in human society, or by the other advantages that adorn you, are so far exalted above your brethren, never forget that those who are beneath you possess what principally ennobles man, what gives him his greatest worth, in common with you; that their nature is as excellent as yours; that they have the same destination with you; and they are mostly accidental and transitory things by which you are distinguished from them. Beware then of considering them as if they were beings of an inferior order; and constantly reflect, that nothing, absolutely nothing, can make a man mean and contemptible but folly and vice. Testify, much rather, even to the lowest among mankind, the esteem and affection that is their due as rational and immortal creatures, as children of our universal Father in heaven, as co-heirs of your future glory; the regard and love which God and his son Jesus have shewn to them, and everlastingly will shew.

And all you, who bear the name of christians, confess likewise here the excellency of the gift with
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which God has favoured you in the christian revelation. To this revelation you are chiefly indebted for the knowledge you have of the dignity of your soul, and its high vocation. To this revelation you are indebted for knowing the means whereby you may maintain this dignity of your soul, and reach the ends of its formation. This divine revelation has even guided you, christian philofophers, on the way of truth, has removed the grand impediments that might have stopped your progress on it, and given you both light and force to walk with firmer step and to come nearer to the mark of perspicuity and certainty.

O christians, revere the heavenly doctrine to which you are so much indebted. Beware how you misuse this gracious present, or apply it only to the adorning of your minds. Let the light, with which it enlightens you, strike into your hearts, so as to cheer and fertilize them to generous sentiments. Let it not only guide your perceptions and judgments, but let it direct your inclinations and regulate your conduct. Think and act at all times so as becomes creatures whose origin is so illustrious, whose faculties are so great, whose ordination is so glorious. And whenever temptations flatter, whenever the men of the world would seduce you to take part in their follies and excesses, then let these thoughts be present to your mind: — What! shall I debase my rational and immortal soul? Shall I prefer gross and animal gratifications to the pure and noble pleasures and pursuits

pursuits of the mind? Shall I, by foolish and sensual pursuits, plunge from the eminence on which I stand, as the image of the deity, into the mirey pool of wallowing beasts? Shall I surrender the happiness to which I am invited in the world to come, and disqualify myself for it, that I may enjoy a few fleeting goods and fallacious joys of the present, or that I may gratify particular persons, and purchase their favour at the expence of my innocence and peace? No; I will endeavour to maintain the post my creator has assigned me, and worthily to employ the talents he has intrusted to my care, that he may intrust me, as a faithful servant, with more hereafter, and requite the use he approves of my faculties and advantages with higher advantages and greater powers. To know him, to commune with him, to direct my heart and my life by his will, to strengthen and cherish in me each beneficent, each friendly propensity, to become constantly wiser and better, and even now to pursue a heavenly course, shall be my chief concern, my glory and my joy. This shall supply the want or the loss of all earthly distinctions, transport me beyond time and the grave, and lay a firm foundation for my everlasting perfection and happiness. And may this be the purpose and endeavour of us all; may this be our future portion!

perfection, a purer felicity than this earthly life can afford us! Yes, thou hast called us, who are dust and ashes, to immortality; thou hast made us capable of an everlasting duration, of an ever-increasing felicity. And how important is not thus our short life-time on earth! How important every day, every hour of it! Here we are to prepare and form ourselves for that superior, better life. Here we are to accumulate treasures, treasures of wisdom and virtue, for futurity. Oh might we never lose sight of our high destination! Might we constantly be coming nearer it every year, every day! May particularly the year we have entered upon to-day, be blessed in this respect, and be distinguished from all the past years of our life by a zealous, unabated progress towards the mark of our high calling! Yes, to thee the lord and father of our life, may this gift of thy bounty be consecrated, to the faithful accomplishment of thy will and the duties of our superior celestial vocation! Oh teach us then its importance, teach us thoroughly to know and to feel the value of the time, whether longer or shorter, thou hast appointed each of us for his terrestrial abode as the period of his exercise and preparation; and grant that we may ever employ it more faithfully, improve it more diligently, and thus ever strengthen farther our hope of a blessed immortality. Yes, let us continue and complete this new period of our lives with the same good, pious sentiments and dispositions

with which we have begun it. Bless to that end our reflections on these important subjects, and let them have a powerful, lasting influence on the whole of our future conduct. We ask it of thee in the name of Jesus Christ our lord, addressing thee farther, with filial confidence, in his words: Our father, &c.

PSALM cxliv. 4.

Man is like a thing of nought: his time passeth away like a shadow.

NOTHING is by many persons more thoughtlessly squandered away than their time. They hold nothing to be more insignificant than an hour, a day, or a week. Therefore, as they have always time enough for every thing, they put every thing off from one time to another, and take no account of its loss. Therefore it is, that time seems, by their feelings, so tedious in its progress, hangs often so heavy on their hands, as to make them anxiously long for each successive change or section of it. Therefore it is, that they are so sedulously attentive to the means of shortening their time, and so eager to seize on any thing that promises them this favour. Therefore, every dissipation, every company, every

amusement, every play or farce, every new scene, be it never so terrifying or alarming, finds so hearty a welcome. — Would one not imagine that persons who think in this manner were sure of their lives for hundreds or thousands of years to come, and that the prospect of this long continuance filled them with perturbation and horror? And yet these are beings of yesterday, and may perhaps see nothing of to-morrow! Mortals, whose time flits away like a shadow! Men, whose longest life is as short as it is uncertain, and who even themselves but too frequently complain of the brevity and uncertainty of it! Whence, then, this direct contrariety with themselves? How can one and the same subject have such opposite qualities, and occasion such opposite judgments? Because it is not always seen in the same point of view, not always enjoyed by the same measure and rule; because it is not always judged of by what in and of itself it is, but according to the present sentiments a man has of it, and the use to which he applies it. Is the time still future, do whole months and years lie still between; then its tedious approach makes the man of the world impatient: is it present, and he knows not well how to employ it; then the weight of it is a burden: is it past, has it slipped from him unused and unenjoyed; then he laments the shortness and velocity of it. Mere mistakes, which he alone avoids, who knows how to estimate the value of time, and constantly to make a good use of it. To
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him the time that is allotted him on earth is of the utmost importance, as he understands its nature and destination, and in the application of it has both of them constantly in view. And this, my dear brethren, it should be to us, to us who have again left behind us another large section of it, and are come nearer its end by one whole year! To the furtherance of this purpose let us, first, consider the great value or the vast importance of time, in so far as it limits our sojourn and our destination on earth; and then draw a few precepts from the result for the prudent regulation of our behaviour in regard to it.

The time of our life upon earth is important, it is of great value, as it is short, and of extremely uncertain duration. He need not be very choise of his time, and might be somewhat prodigal of it, who should have some thousands of years to live, and was sure of his life! But by no means he who can scarcely count upon so many days, and not upon one with any assurance! Yes, short is the longest life of man; and yet very few of the species attain to the utmost limits of it. Numbers are obliged to quit the course, when they have but just entered upon it; have hardly advanced a few steps, ere they know any thing either of its use or destination, ere they have tasted its pleasures or experienced its troubles. And how many others are snatched away by death, before they have left the half of it behind, and come at once to the goal which they thought at so great a distance! And what are even seventy or

eighty years to such as have passed them? Are they any thing more than a transient morning's dream to a being that pants after immortality, and feels inexhaustible powers and insatiable desires within him? And who of us all can tell whether he shall dream out this dream, or whether he shall not much sooner awake in another scene of things? Who of us knows whether the present year may not be the last, whether the present day may not be the last to him? As certainly as we are all here at present alive, so certainly will more than one of us be no longer on the earth by the end of the present year. And this may be the portion of the youngest, the healthiest, the strongest, as well as of the most aged and infirm; it may attack any one of us, however great the sentiment of his vital powers may be at present! And must not the time, which is so short and uncertain, be of great value to us? Can we afford to squander any of it away? Can we allow any of it to run to waste? Did the youth consider, that, even in the spring tide of this life, he may become a prey to death; that he may blossom here, but not bear fruit; did the man reflect that he may not reach the pinnacle of extreme old age; that he may be thrown into the grave in the midst of his course: how very differently would both the one and the other apply and enjoy their appointed time! How carefully would the former cherish and guard, in the bloom of his life, that innocence that is to be the ground of his bliss in a better world; and how zealously would the

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the other strive to answer to his vocation! But does either the one or the other know the contrary of this, with any assurance? Can the former reckon, with certainty, on seeing the summer, can the latter on seeing the autumn of his life? And should not both of them, then, so pass the few uncertain years they have to live, as though every one of them were to be the last?

The time of our life on earth is, farther, very important, it is of great value, as it flits away with incredible speed. The time of man, says our text, passeth away like a shadow. Place thyself upon the margin of a rapid torrent; observe with what incessant force one drop pursues another, one wave drives on another, how every moment the surface of the stream is changed, how soon and how far what thou sawest but now is rolled away beyond the sight, and how it flows together to the larger river, and afterwards, with the river itself, is absorbed in the ocean; then wilt thou have a similitude of the velocity with which thy hours, thy days, thy years, flow on. Yes, every thing, as it were, adds fleetness to time! What a considerable portion of it are we robbed of by sleep, the brother of death! How close together, how blended, are commonly the moment of being awake and the first instant of sleep! How imperceptible, how totally effaced from our remembrance, how completely annihilated is the interval between them! And then the various and successive affairs of life, which admit of no delay, constantly pursu-

ing and pressing on each other; the daily, the hourly revolutions and vicissitudes of every thing about us; our own restless endeavours after some end, after greater activity and happiness, after new pleasures and prospects; the multitude and variety of views, of projects, of concerns, of expectations, of obstacles, of impulses, of joys and sorrows, which are continually meeting, pursuing, overtaking, or impeding us in the path of life: how much must not all these accelerate the race of time! Yes, rapid, inconceivably rapid, is its current! Ere we have looked about us, it is gone; ere we have made up our minds, the opportunity for doing or enjoying good is past. Nothing can detain its flight, nothing abate the rapidity of its course. Tirefome as it may frequently seem, in regard to our wishes and expectations, so quickly is it elapsed when once it is arrived; and from him who knows not how to prize its worth, and does not feel its value, who does not account of hours and moments as well as of days and years, from him will the greater part of it flow on unused and unenjoyed.

The time of our life on earth is, thirdly, of consequence, it is of great value, as it is irrevocable. Once past, it is gone for ever. Once elapsed, unused and unenjoyed, it is for ever lost. No remorse, no tears, no lamentations, can recall it from the gulph of the past. Where is the year we completed yesterday; where are the hours we have already passed to-day? Can we live or enjoy either the one

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or the other again? O young man, where is the period of thy guiltless childhood? Where are the days of thy blooming youth, o thou that art arrived at manhood? Where is the whole of thy life-time, thy childish, thy youthful, thy manly, thy advanced age, o thou that art full of years, who tremblest on the brink of the grave? Is not the childhood of the youth, the youth of the man, the whole life-time of the aged, for ever elapsed, irrevocably vanished away? Which of you all can set out upon his course afresh, or only tread one pace of it again? Thou wishest in vain, o thou who hast trifled and squandered away thy youth, or spent thy best years in the service of folly and vice, in vain dost thou wish their return; in vain dost thou repine at the inconceivable velocity with which they escaped thee; in vain dost thou deplore thy levity, thy heedlessness, and the misuse thou hast made of the fairest season, the best years of thy life! Their loss is irretrievable; the ceaseless torrent of time has carried them away, and nothing can repair the damage thou hast thus brought on thyself. The time that is still before thee, thou mayst more wisely and better employ, and thereby become happier; but the hours, the days, the years, that are once behind thee, are no more in thy power, and the detrimental effects of the unemployment or abuse of them can never be entirely done away. And should not the time that is so irrecoverable, the loss of which is so irreparable, be of great importance, of great value in
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our eyes? We should, surely, be as cautious and economical as possible in the management of what we may so easily neglect and lose, but which cannot with impunity be neglected and lost?

The time of our life on earth is, fourthly, important, it has a great value, since it is granted us for the purpose of executing a number of weighty and difficult matters. Oh how much have we all to do in this short space of life, if we would apply it to the ends for which it is given, if we would be and become here what we are called to be and to become! To satisfy our animal wants, to procure us food and raiment, to support our terrestrial life, to pursue some art or trade; to provide for the maintenance of our family, to promote the welfare of society, and to perform a particular part in it: this is not all, this is not the chief of what we have here to perform and bring to effect! To these purposes we have no need of all the great capacities and powers we have received of the creator, of all the means to higher perfection and happiness of which he has made us susceptible! No; here we are to become intelligent, wise, virtuous creatures; here we are to controul our sensuality, to govern ourselves, to think and live by principles; here we are to love God and our brethren, to direct all our inclinations and desires to the best and worthiest objects, to seek our satisfaction in justice and beneficence, to refine and ennoble our taste, to study to employ all our capacities and powers in the best manner,

manner, and by these means to prepare ourselves for the employments and pleasures of a higher life. And are these, truly, things that are so quickly, so easily effected? Is this, truly, the work of a few hours or days? Does it not require many and reiterated attempts, continued practice, incessant application? Have we not many both inward and outward impediments and difficulties to encounter by the way?— Can we ever, in all these particulars, become so expert, so complete, that we cannot still become more apt and more perfect? Are we not capable of a constantly progressive, of an unbounded perfection? And should not the time in which we have all this to do, and which is so short and uncertain, be important, be precious in our sight? Certainly the man who degrades himself in his sentiments to a level with the beasts of the field, and expects after death to share their lot, may consider the time of his life on earth as insignificant, and be indifferent to the use of it! But to him who reflects on his true appointment, who understands the dignity of the man and the christian, who considers and feels his immortality, his affinity with superior beings, and with the deity himself, to him every day, every hour of his earthly existence, must and will be highly important. To turn it to the best account must and will be, at once, both his duty and his joy.

A fifth circumstance, which renders the time of our life on earth of much importance, and gives it
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a great value, is this: however short, however uncertain, however irrevocable time is, yet, in every greater or smaller division of it, we may do much good or much harm, may be very serviceable or very prejudicial. To this neither a whole stage of a man's life, nor whole years, nor months, are requisite. Every day may occasion to ourselves and others whole centuries of happiness or misery. Every hour may be the parent of a thousand and a thousand gloomy or pleasant, chearful or sorrowful, hours and days. They all are concatenated together, are all interwoven with each other, and all fruitful in great and important effects. Hast thou lavished away and misemployed one hour, one day, one month, one year of thy life; thou hast not only lost this time, and lost it for ever, but its loss and its misuse has the most baneful influence on all thy future hours and days and months and years. On the other hand, hast thou well employed the present time, whether long or short; hast thou sown good seed in it, and exercised thyself in useful matters; then wilt thou reap an increase of a thousand fold in the times to come. And how much good, or how much evil, how many generally useful or generally prejudicial things may we think, will, speak, plan, or execute, in one single day, in one single hour! How often is a day, or an hour, a source of never-failing joy, or of unremitting sorrow, to ourselves and others! How often is the foundation laid of a thousand agreeable or disagreeable sensations, of a
thousand

thousand laudable or shameful actions! How often does a day, or an hour, tranquillize or disturb, embitter or sweeten the whole succeeding life to ourselves or others! How often strengthen the weak, or render him weaker still; instruct or confuse the ignorant; guide the innocent aright, or seduce him astray; comfort the sufferer, or multiply his sorrows; amend the wicked, or corrupt him more; rejoice or grieve the good! How much is frequently effected by one thought, one word, one opinion, one action, one mistake, or one omission; how far do its effects extend! And if one hour, one day may be so important to ourselves and to others, how important must whole months, whole years, how important must not our whole life-time be! What an oppressive load of bad, of criminal attempts and actions, must not the vicious be heaping upon themselves during the whole course of it! And how rich a treasure of good and divine sentiments and actions, of actions that God will requite, may not the virtuous be at the same time collecting together! And should not the time, wherein we may do this or the other, and one of them we shall certainly do, be of the greatest importance to us?

Yes, the time of our life on earth is important; it is of a great value: for the use or neglect of it has an influence on all our future fortunes; their consequences accompany us into the grave, and out of the grave again into the regions of eternity. The present, my christian brother, is the seed-time. If

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thou omit carefully to cultivate the field intrusted to thee, if thou sow not good seed therein, or sow it sparingly, and neglect to guard and tend it as it springs up and fills: then thou canst not hope to reap when the season comes; the crop will fail thee; thou wilt suffer indigence and misery; or thou wilt reap but sparingly; thou wilt be reduced to eat the bitter and corrupted fruit of thy wicked works. This is the time of exercise and discipline. Here thou art to allow thyself to be educated, formed, and improved: here thou art to employ thy faculties and powers, to exert them as becomes a rational, an immortal creature, to love and to prize truth and virtue above all things, to rejoice in God, to obey him cheerfully, and to study contentment and happiness in the fulfilling of his will. Dost thou not make this thy study, rejectest thou the discipline and the instruction of thy Father in heaven; dost thou refuse to exercise thyself in what is right and good: then wilt thou proceed, ignorant, unimproved, and inexpert, from the school of this life, into thy superior appointment: then, at the time of retribution, thou hast nothing in return for thy industry and fidelity to expect; then must thou suffer the penalty due to thy untractableness and thy disobedience; then must thou, if thou wouldst even there be happy, then must thou become so by other means, by a much harsher, much severer discipline. Here is the time for preparation: here must thou learn to love, to use, to enjoy, at least as a novice

ciate, the occupations, the pleasures, the advantages of the future life, and give a nobler direction to thy desires and thy taste, such as befits that superior state. Dost thou omit so to do; dost thou persist in retaining thy animal, thy earthly dispositions: then must thy delights, thy pleasures, thy happiness, finally terminate with the present life; then art thou not susceptible of the purer delights, the nobler pleasures, the exalted bliss, which, at the time of enjoyment, await all those who have prepared and fitted themselves for them. But, well, eternally well for them, who have actually done, and continue to do so! They may promise themselves the richest harvest from what they have sown, the most glorious fruits from the docility with which they have allowed themselves to be educated, and the most blissful enjoyment from their diligent preparation. And should not the time, which thus determines all our future condition, which procures us either happiness or misery, reward or punishment, in the other world; should not this time be important, should it not be of inestimable value to us?

But if, then, the time of our life on earth be so short and uncertain; if it flit so quickly away; if it be so irrecoverable, if it be allotted for the performance of so many weighty and difficult matters; if we may, in every, even in the smallest portion of it, do so much good or so much evil, so many generally useful or generally hurtful actions, and if the appli-
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cation of it have so great an influence on our future condition: oh then consider and use this time conformably to its value and the purposes for which it is granted! It may be husbanded; but it may likewise be lavished away: it may be comparatively prolonged; but it may likewise be shortened: it may leave vestiges of its passage behind, which may gladden ourselves and others for ever; it may likewise for ever be totally lost to us and to them. The former is the aim and the happiness of the wise: this the behaviour and the punishment of fools. Oh let that be your aim, your most zealous, your incessant aim! Treasure the time, the short, the uncertain, the fleeting, the irremovable, the important time you have here to live; prize each year of it, each day, every hour. Be not prodigal, be economical of your time, of which you may have so little left, and of the application whereof you must one day give an account. Let not your time pass unemployed, unimproved away. Let it not elapse in idleness or vice. Beware of trifling or squandering away the hours, the days, that are so great and important in their value, and irreparable in their loss. Seize and fructify every moment that is still in your power; mark it with some reflection, with some action not unworthy of a man; and thereby give a certain fixedness and stability to what is so fleeting and vain. Meditate and effect as much good as you always can; and though you cannot thus stop the
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rapid progress of time, yet make it memorable to you, and the recollection of it a fountain of joy. — Procrastinate nothing; since the time is uncertain, it is not in your power. Do and enjoy the good to-day, which to-day you are allowed to do and to enjoy; since you know not whether you will have time and ability and opportunity for it to-morrow. Consider, deem, treat the present, constantly as it is connected with the future. Frequently reflect, that shortly time will be no more to you; the time for practice and preparation: and the more you have still to do, in regard of your improvement, hasten so much the more to finish this important business. The farther the day of your earthly life is already spent, so much the more sedulously apply every remaining hour or moment of it to the performance of the task committed to you, that you may not be unprepared when the night comes on wherein no man can work. And then, but only then, though your time pass away like a shadow, it is not lost; it has been that to you which it was appointed to be, and has procured you what it was designed to procure you; and to the time well employed ensues eternity, wherein we shall not lament the faithful use of it, wherein it will incessantly rejoice us!

And may this be the lot of you all; thus important and blessed may time be to you! It is certainly the best wish, at the beginning of this new section of time, I can make for you, in whose welfare I am

so much concerned; a wish in which my heart takes the warmest interest. Yes, long and blessed be your days, my dearest companions and hearers! May cheerful confidence and pious joy be their constant attendants; may hope and reliance on God, and the prospect of a better life, shed light and happiness upon them! Heightened by wisdom and virtue, may they serenely glide away; free from all self-accusing sorrows, free from reproaching and anxious cares! May no day of your lives pass by unused and unenjoyed; may none of them cause you perplexity and shame in the solemn hour of death! None witness against you at the day of judgement! But may each of them be marked by useful employments, by some laudable action, by thankful enjoyment of the bounties of heaven, each be fruitful in blessed effects for the future life! Yes, though short and fleeting your days on earth, yet may they be rich in the blessings of God, in the works of righteousness, in the works of beneficence and love, and the memorial of them be as joyful to yourselves as to your contemporaries, your children and your descendants! And when, at length, the last of the days of your life shall arrive, when you are summoned to exchange time for eternity, then may the peace of God console and gladden your hearts, then may you take up the words of the triumphant apostle: "I have fought the good fight; I have finished my course. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord,

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the righteous Judge, shall give me!" I have stood firm to God and to virtue, and shall receive the prize from my judge and my Father! — Yes; teach us, o God, our most merciful Father! so teach us to think and to live, that we may pass through the grave and gate of death, into the bliss of the better, the eternal life!

New-year's day, 1783.

SERMON XXI.

The Value, or the Importance of one Year.

O GOD, who livest and reignest and operatest from everlasting to everlasting, who orderest and rulest all times and worlds according to thy good pleasure, and, far exalted above all vicissitudes and accidents, ever remainest what thou art and whose years shall have no end; we, whose days are like a shadow, whose lives are as nothing before thee, we are here assembled in thy presence to adore thee, the Eternal, the Infinite, and to consecrate to thee, to whom our time and all that we are and have peculiarly belong, the firstlings of the year. May the offering of our reverence and our submission be acceptable in thy sight!—With grateful awe we approach thy throne, o God, and the praise of thy goodness shall be our first employment this day and for ever! What a series of precious bounties and
blessings,

blessings, spiritual and temporal, present themselves to our mind when we look back on the year that is past, and to whom but to thee and thy unmerited favour have we to render thanks for all! Life, health, strength; food, raiment; progress and blessing in our affairs; light and instruction; comfort and hope; preservation from sin and from misery; ability to goodness; private and public welfare; delights of the present and of the future life: all proceed from thee, the father of light, the source of felicity; all are gifts of thy bountiful hand. Every day, every hour of the year gone by testifies of thy kindness and affection towards us. Thy compassions are new every morning and thy faithfulness is very great.—To thee, o Lord, to thee belong glory and honour; thee should all thy creatures praise, for thou hast created them all, thy mercy is over all thy works, and thou never ceasest to bless us and to do us good!

Oh that every day, every hour of the elapsed year could likewise testify of our gratitude, of our love and our obedience to thee, oh that it might not rise up against us hereafter and convict us of the abuse of thy bounty! Lord; thou art righteous, thou art love itself; but to us belongs confusion of face! In shame and trouble we feel the burden, the heavy oppressive burden of sins and guilt which a whole year has accumulated on us, thy sinful people! Ah how many neglected duties, how many omitted acts of goodness, how many inordinate lusts

and evil deeds have we not to bewail in thy presence! How great was not the danger of many, perhaps of most of us, of being overtaken by death and eternity, ere they were ready, and had rendered themselves fit for passing into a better life! O God shew thy mercy upon us! Cleanse our hearts, and take not thy holy spirit from us. After thy great mercy do away our offences, and let them, like the year we have passed, be sunk in the gulf of oblivion.

And this new year, o God, that thy forbearance has allowed us to begin this day, ah let it not increase our guilt, but promote our perfection and our happiness; let it be more fruitful in truly christian sentiments and actions than the years of our lives have hitherto been. Grant that we may never forget our superior appointment, constantly connect the present with the future, and principally strive after that which is above, where Christ, our saviour, is. Teach us ever to remember that as men we must die, and that the spirit which dwells in us is immortal, that we may thus become wise and capable of a blessed immortality, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, in whose name and words we sum up all our petitions, saying: Our father, &c.

JOHN ix. 4.

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day :
the night cometh, when no man can work.

TO creatures whose life is of short duration ; who can truly enjoy scarce the half of their life, or use it the best way for advancing their real perfection and happiness ; and who withal are never sure of the continuance of this life ; to such creatures a year must absolutely be a considerable portion of time ; the loss or the gain of a year must be a great loss or gain to them ! Are these creatures, however, immortal ; does their present life touch on the future ; is the one only a consequence and continuation of the other ; will their future life be happy or unhappy according to the degree in which they have well or ill employed the present : then a year must be still more important to them, the loss or the gain of a year must be still much greater to them.

But are not we these creatures ? Is not this the case with our life ? It lasts seventy, and, if it runs high, it lasts eighty years. Very few reach this age. But even they who attain to it can scarcely be said to rejoice in their lives for above twenty or

thirty years, or enjoy it with consciofnefs and the exertion of their nobleft mental faculties. The reft of it we pafs as irrational children, or in fleep, in infirmities and pain, in low and animal gratifications, in doing nothing, or in grief and trouble. All this while we know, that after death we have another life to expect, and that our prefent conduct will fix and determine our future lot. How important then muft a year be to us! How much muft not depend on the good or bad application of it! And how zealous ought not this confideration to make us in the difcharge of our duties!

Our Saviour, my brethren, who always goes before us with his example, may likewise here be a pattern to us. He faw with conviction the importance of time and each greater or lefs divifion of it; thence he was fo bufy and indefatigable in doing that which was committed to him to do on earth; therefore he fays in our text, "I muft work the works of him that fent me while it is day;" while I have time and means and opportunity for it; "the night cometh," times of adverfity come, unfavourable circumftances, ficknefs and death, "when no man can work," when no man can tranfact his affairs. How wife, how noble, are thefe fentiments of our Lord! Oh that they might be our fentiments alfo! My this day's difcourfe is intended, under the divine bleffing, to awaken or to confirm them in you. I fhall therefore, to this end, lay before you the importance of a year; and I wifh from
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my heart, that these considerations may incite us all to make the best and worthiest use of the year we have entered upon to-day!

When we speak of the importance and the great value of a year, we must pre-suppose, that it was not chance, but a wise creator, that placed us on this globe of the earth; that it is not a matter of indifference, how we behave ourselves upon it, how we employ our capacities, our abilities, our time, and our possessions; that God has delivered to each of us, as well as to his son Jesus Christ, a certain work to finish; or that we are ordained to certain ends, and that these ends are important. We pre-suppose, that we are not here merely for supporting our terrestrial life, and supplying our animal wants; that we should eat, drink, sleep, propagate our species and procure ourselves a number of sensual pleasures, and, by the prosecution of the affairs of our calling, obtain the means thereto; but that we are principally designed to promote the perfection of our spirit, by reflection and practice to become wise and virtuous, and by wisdom and virtue to be useful to others, to learn to elevate ourselves to the knowledge of God, to love and to obey him, and by degrees to render ourselves qualified and fitted for a higher and more perfect state in another life.

If we hold this to be our destination; if we so consider our present life as reason and religion persuade us to consider it, and are desirous of learning

to understand the importance of a year : then we must weigh, How much good or harm we may do in one year, and how much we may thereby promote or impede our perfection and happiness ; how many important consequences and how infinite in extent the good and the harm we do in one year, as well in regard to ourselves as in regard to others, draw after them ; how different the future years may be, in many respects, from the present ; and how uncertain it is, whether this may not be the last year of our lives.

Let us consider these four particulars somewhat circumstantially. They will furnish us with so many main arguments for labouring in the work for which God has placed us on this terrestrial globe, while it is day, that the night may not overtake us before it be finished.

We may, in one year, do much good or harm, and thereby very much promote or impede our perfection and happiness ; and this is the first cause why we attribute so much importance to a year, or esteem it such a considerable part of our lives. How surprizingly great, how far above the reach of numbers, is the sum total of thoughts and ideas that arise in the mind in the course of one single year ! Divide the year into days, the days into hours, the hours into minutes and seconds ; and, when you have reckoned up the results together, still it will not nearly amount to the sum of your thoughts ! We all think incessantly, whether we wake or sleep,
labour

labour or rest; our thoughts succeed each other with a velocity that is scarcely to be conceived, and but seldom are they totally indifferent. How much good or harm then must not a man think in one year! And how much often depends on one single thought! How much then must depend on the thousands, the hundred thousands, the millions of thoughts that arise in us in a whole year!

How far must it not bring a man on in wisdom and virtue, how much contribute to his improvement and perfection, if he attend to all the thoughts of which he is conscious from one end of the year to the other; if he try them by the rules of truth and justice, frequently and ingenuously direct them to the worthiest and best objects, to God, to his perfections and bounties, to Jesus Christ and his example, to the welfare of his fellow-creatures and the means of promoting it, to his own deportment, to his present and future vocation; and endeavour to give them the degree of perspicuity, of certainty and life, which he may by frequent and pertinacious reflection! What a rich store of useful ideas and various knowledge may he thus lay up for the future! What fruitful seed may he not thus sow in his mind of innumerable other good thoughts, sentiments, determinations, and actions!

How much, on the other hand, must not a man lose, how very much must he not impede his perfection and happiness, if he allow his thoughts to ramble about, as it were, in his mind, for a whole
year

year long, without inspection and order; if he imbibes every impression from without, or admit every image his fancy presents, or that springs up accidentally in him, without consideration, without examination, without selection, and allow himself to be governed by it; if he purposely turn off his thoughts from serious and important matters, relating to God and religion and eternity; if he often intentionally direct them to bad, or even almost always to worthless, indifferent, terrestrial things; and at the same time persuade himself, that it would be an unnecessary constraint, or an over-strained conscientiousness, to make such a work about mere thoughts, or to judge so severely of their good and bad quality! How very much must the light of his understanding be darkened, and the strength of his mind enfeebled! How much nourishment must every fordid appetite within him thus acquire! How unfit must he not become for withstanding temptations and allurements to sin! How often must not irregular, violent desires arise from his corrupted thoughts, and unlawful actions proceed again from these; and how much seed is he sowing in his soul, for unjust judgments, criminal lusts and actions to spring from in future, which will thrive in concealment, and bring forth the fruits of corruption!

Go now from thoughts to the words we utter in the course of a year. How great too is their amount! How much good or evil may we not speak in one year, and how may we not thus benefit or injure ourselves

ourselves and others ! How salutary, how precious is not frequently but one good word spoken in season ! What disorder, what mischief, on the contrary, may not a bad word produce, which we are prompted to utter by envy, or hatred, or malice, or imprudence, or weakness ! To what a vast sum then must not the total of all the speeches amount which proceed from our mouth in a year ! Represent to yourselves a man who keeps his tongue, as it were, with a bridle through all that period, speaking constantly with consideration and to good purpose ; who seizes all proper occasions, one while to inform the ignorant or erroneous, whether in spiritual or in secular affairs, at another, to give affectionate suggestions and cautions to one addicted to bad habits and failings ; now to speak consolation to some mourner, then encouragement to the dejected ; now to take up the cause of the innocent, the cause of the needy, the widow and the orphan, then to defend the cause of religion and virtue ; now to impart his sound skill in the businesses and concerns of this life, then his clear knowledge of the doctrines and duties of christianity, amicably to others ; now to exhilarate the company by inoffensive, harmless raillery, and then to turn their attention to more serious and important topics ; figure to yourselves such a man, I say, and then judge how much good he may perform by speaking in the course of one year ! How many mischiefs he may prevent ! From
how

how many crimes and errors preserve his brethren! How many troubles alleviate to them! How many rational, wise, virtuous, pious, generally useful thoughts, sentiments, resolutions, actions, thereby encourage or excite in others, and by these again in other men!

Represent to yourselves, on the other hand, a man, who, during the same space of time, gives a free scope to his tongue, paying little regard to any thing he says, unless it relate immediately to himself; who accounts it something of a shame to be heard talking of important, serious, and even of religious matters; who thinks that the whole business of his social conversations is to pass away the time, or to shew his wit, and gives himself no concern at all about profiting others by a right application of the gift of speech; or perhaps even dares to sport with the most sacred and awful things, to make a mock at sin and vice, to vindicate them and to recommend them, to amuse or scandalize the company by calumnies, by slanders, by harsh and sarcastical censures on other persons, by lyes, by indecent ambiguities, by foul discourse: how much harm may not such an one perpetrate in one single year by his speech! How much suspicion, disunion, discord, coolness, strife, animosity, may he not stir up! how many bad impressions will he not probably make on the innocent but young and unguarded heart! How many good impressions weaken,—
obliterate!

obliterate! How many will probably thus be encouraged in vice, how many frightened from virtue, or rendered less steady in their attachment to it!

Consider, lastly, how many good or bad actions we may perform in one year. Their number is likewise very great, though it should not quite equal the number of our thoughts and words. Does there ever elapse one day in the year whereon we do nothing either good or bad? Nay, do many hours of the day pass by, wherein what we do is absolutely indifferent, and may not turn out either good or bad? Are we not daily either diligent or negligent, conscientious or unconscientious, in the transactions of our business? Enjoy we not daily the bounties of God either with chearful gratitude or with stupid insensibility and indifference, either in rational moderation or in extravagance and intemperance? May we not daily either exercise ourselves in meekness, in humility, in forbearance and kindness; or suffer ourselves to be thrown into rage, or seduced into pride, into a forward and haughty behaviour, or to be otherwise offensive to our neighbour? May we not daily give proofs of contentedness in our station, of submission to the will of God, of trust in his providence, of confidence in his help, or testimonies of the reverse? Is any day likely to pass but we are tempted in one way or other to ill, or allured and incited to good, and so our propensity weakened to the one, or our love to the other more confirmed? Is it likely that a day should
pass

pass without affording us some opportunity of being serviceable either to our family, to our friends, or to other men, by our advice, by our alms, by our credit, by our example, by other good offices we may do them? To what a sum then must not our good and bad actions in one year amount, according as we conduct ourselves one way or the other! And how much must we likewise thus advance or retard our perfection and happiness! If no action we perform be entirely without effect, how innumerable then must not the beneficial or injurious consequences be that proceed from the actions of a whole year! And if to these actions you add the thoughts and the words of the same year, how great in general must not the sum of the good or the evil be which will be placed to your account in such a portion of time, and which is so closely connected with the sum of the happiness or misery you have in future to expect! How important then must one year be in this point of view! How much does it not allow to be done of the work that God has enjoined us here to perform!

Think not to say, "It is true, I can in one year do much good or harm; and if I had only one year to live, then exceedingly much would depend on the use and application of this year; but as I have yet in all likelihood many, or at least several years before me, what I neglect in one, I may easily make up for in another; the harm that I do I may hereafter repair." Nothing less than this,

my pious hearers. Customary as this conclusion is, and readily as mankind adopt it, it is not the less false and deceitful; and as little can the peace it procures us stand the test of the slightest reflection. No, the good that we have neglected in one year can, neither in regard to ourselves or other men, never, absolutely never, be made up; and the evil we have committed in it can but very rarely be made good or repaired. And this is the second point, which, on consideration, may convince us of the great importance of a year.

That we never can, properly speaking, compensate the good we have neglected, must be apparent to every reflecting person. We are creatures who cannot attain to our perfection at once; it can no otherwise be attained than by exercise, by the best application of our capacities and powers; and who never become so perfect, but they may and should become more perfect still. We must therefore always be gradually growing in knowledge, in virtue, in perfection, and happiness. In this year, for example, we may advance five, in another ten, in a third twenty degrees on the scale that leads us to perfection and happiness. Now, if we stand still in the first or second year, or even go backward, can we ever make good what we have thus neglected? If we are very fortunate, we get in the succeeding year to the point we should have reached in that; but it is impossible for us to reach the de-

gree of perfection which we should have reached if we had laboured with due earnestness at our improvement and perfection, that as well as the succeeding year. When we might have advanced ten paces farther in knowledge, in virtue, in piety, in capacity for enjoying the bliss of heaven, we have either not advanced at all, or only gone five paces forward; and consequently we remain for ever and ever so much farther behind him who in the same time has done what we neglected to do, and now, like us, pursues with vigour the path of duty and virtue.

Irreparable however as this loss is, it is yet the smallest we can suffer in this respect. If we neglect one year, let one year elapse without seriously labouring at our improvement, we have not only irrevocably lost this time; we must not only do in the following year what we ought to have done in this: but we have in the mean time been weakening our abilities, our capacities for doing it; have in the mean time multiplied the difficulties attendant on it; have in the mean while afforded time and opportunity for our errors, our prejudices, our irregular lusts and appetites, to strengthen themselves in us, and to set narrower limits to our freedom; we have in the mean time thought much evil, spoke and done much evil, the pernicious effects of which will in future appear in us, and hinder us very often in the good we then actually wish to do. We, therefore,

therefore, have not only not made all the way that we might have made, but we have in the mean time been casting a thousand stumbling-blocks and obstacles in it, which will very often force us to stop, and very often make us stumble and fall, and will never allow us in the following year to make such advances on it as we might have done in this. So much do we deceive ourselves, when we yield to the flattering idea, that we may make up in future for what we now neglect.

It is no less difficult, in most cases, to repair the harm we have done in one year by exertions in the next, or to remove the pernicious effects of it. Suppose that the bad, the unchaste, the malignant, the wicked thoughts which I have raised and nourished in this year, should be the means of filling me with extreme abhorrence in the next, will they therefore be effaced and eradicated from my soul? Will they not often return to me whether I will or no? Will they not probably often disturb me in the midst of my devotions, in the midst of my most serious and important concerns? Probably they may persecute me as long as I live; probably I shall subdue them a thousand times; probably I shall be obliged to take them with me into the grave! Suppose that the bad, the injurious, or the deceitful words, which I have spoken this year, occasion me a sincere remorse, which causes me to abstain from them in the next; may they not in the mean time

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have made indelible impressions on others; may they not in the mean time have robbed the innocent of their good name, or have made him, who was wavering between virtue and vice, declare himself for the latter; and may not these corrupt effects of my imprudent or malignant speeches be of such a nature, that all I can henceforward say and do against them will be in vain? Suppose, in short, that the unjust, the unreasonable, the selfish actions that I have committed in this year occasion me the most bitter anguish and floods of tears in the next; can I thereby repair the mischief I have done my neighbour, the injustice I have shewn him, the trouble and vexation I have caused him? How seldom can I make good the loss he has undergone! how seldom can I offer him a compensation adequate to my injuries! how much seldomer can I restore to him his lost health, or his peace of mind! Or can I, by behaving to him now in conformity to my duty, hold him therefore unhurt by my not having done so before? No; just as little as the good that we neglect in one year can be made good, so little, in most cases, can the harm we have done in it even only in part be repaired. How important then must a year be, when we look to the consequences of what we do or permit in it; and on the lasting, very often unterminable duration of these consequences!

Attend

Attend to this, particularly, you who are still in your youth, and are as it were just setting out on your earthly career. One year of youth is commonly of more consequence than ten years of manly or of more advanced age. In one year of youth you may and should perform things, which either you cannot at all, or not without extreme difficulty, effect in all the future years of your life. The good you neglect in youth can never be compensated, and the evil you then commit can never be wholly made good. And yet the young man commonly imagines that he may safely be more lavish of his time than the aged; that one year is no great matter with him who has still so many before him. But he much mistakes. To the old man certainly his latter days are important. But the most of what he had to do is already done. He is now that which here on earth he might and could become. The young man has it yet to be; and on the use of his youthful years especially depends what he will be throughout his future life, and even in eternity, when this life is over. How important, how decisive then must a year be to him?

Would you learn to understand the importance and the value of one year; then consider, in the third place, how different the future years may be in many respects from the present; and how uncertain it is, whether we then shall or can perform and do what we now are able to do and to perform.

At present we are healthy and alert ; at present we have the powers of mind and body, which inspire us with chearfulness and alacrity, which fit us for continued affairs, for exercise in the harder virtues, for gaining the command of ourselves, for fighting against sin. Probably in the next year we may lose this health, this alacrity, these powers ; perhaps sicknesses and pains may cast us down ! And then we are dismayed at every difficulty we meet with on the way of wisdom and virtue ; then we start back as soon as an enemy appears ; then we avoid every thing that bears the name of toil and trouble, of conflict and self-denial.

At present we are in easy circumstances ; at present we have time and leisure for reflection, for reading, for frequent devotion ; at present we have the means and opportunities for practising beneficence. Perhaps in the next year we may meet with misfortune and want ; perhaps then our secular businesses and cares may be multiplied ; perhaps we may then be deprived of the means of doing good to others !

At present, we have children, friends and acquaintance about us to whom we may be serviceable by our instruction, our advice, or our example, whose temporal and eternal welfare we are enabled to advance. Perhaps in the ensuing year they may be ravished from us, or may be removed to a distance ; and then we can never do again what now we can do for their good !

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At present we have various means, many impelling motives and encouragements to good ; at present we have parents, friends, teachers, to instruct, to admonish, to exhort, to assist us, who go before us with their example, who co-operate with us in our improvement, and facilitate to us the performance of our duty. Perhaps, in the ensuing year we may lose, altogether or in part, these helps, these incitements to virtue ; perhaps in their stead we may meet with a thousand impediments, obstacles, temptations, and snares on the path of life ; and if we are not able now to cope with them with courage and vigour, it is hardly possible that we then shall stand out the combat and come off victorious.

At present, in all these respects, we are enlightened by the day, which renders our work easy and pleasant ; perhaps in the succeeding year the night may come on, the night of afflictions, of misfortunes, of the diseases and infirmities of age, when no man can labour and toil with success. How important then on this argument likewise must not one year be to us, and how much cause have we to press on with the most ardent zeal in the prosecution of the work that is given us to do, since we know not whether, in the following year, we may be able to pursue it so well, or even at all !

Consider, lastly, that each year may be the last to us, and learn from this circumstance also how to estimate the value and importance of one year. And we cannot have the least doubt of how much depends

on the right use of it, and how much it produces, if we repeatedly think with ourselves: Perhaps this may be the last year that I shall attend in society with my brethren the worship of God, and be able to do the will of my creator and redeemer on earth; the last I shall have for extending my researches, discarding my errors, and enlarging and rectifying my knowledge: and then I go to the state of departed spirits, where this knowledge, whatever its nature, will compose the matter of my reflections, my entertainment with myself and my pleasure. Perhaps this is the last year I shall have for labouring at my improvement, for exercising myself in virtue, and for demonstrating the integrity of my faith by good works: and then succeeds the retribution; and this retribution will be exactly proportioned to the degree of my integrity and virtue. Perhaps this is the last year in which I can be useful to my brethren, and endeavour at their advantage; and then I must leave them; and then perhaps I shall lament that I was not of greater utility to my brethren, that I did not perform more good, and did not lay up larger treasures for futurity. Perhaps this is the last year in which God will call me to repentance; that he will grant me his grace and the forgiveness of my sins; that he will warn me of corruption and condemnation: and then this call will reach me no more; then these benefits will be no longer allowed me, then perhaps the most horrible perdition will be my portion; then will the night be come upon me, when

no man can work. Ah, no; to-day, while I hear the voice of God, I will hearken to it; I will do to-day, what perhaps I may not be able to do to-morrow! This year may be my last; the good or bad employment of it may be decisive to me!

Of so great importance, my brethren, of so great importance is one year to persons who in one year do so much good or evil; who can neither make amends for the good they neglect, nor fully repair the evil they have done; who are subject to so many changes and revolutions in their present condition; and whose life is so short and uncertain! And shall we not exclaim with our Saviour: — “I must work the works of him that sent me,” who has placed me on this earthly ball; I must labour at my improvement and perfection, must do as much good as at all times I can, must be as useful to other men as I can at all times be, “while it is day,” so long as I have time, means, abilities, and opportunity for it, for “the night cometh, when no man can work!”

Yes, let this be the resolution of you all! In such dispositions may you commence and complete this year! May it be truly important to you; and may the sentiment of its importance incite you to the best and worthiest employment of it! To us all may it prove abundantly fruitful in wise and pious thoughts, in instructive and improving words, in good and generous deeds! Far advance us all in knowledge, in virtue, in christian integrity, and bring us constantly nearer to the mark of our high vocation! May every

every one of us, while it is day to him, be doing that which he has to do on earth, and prosecute it with unremitted and chearful ardour, that the night of death may fall on none — o gracious Lord ! on none, ere he have fitted himself for an entrance into eternal life !

New-year's-day.

SERMON XXII.

Of the Detriment and Danger of too frequent Dissipation and Diversions.

O GOD, thou hast created us for pleasure and for happiness. But thou requirest that we seek our pleasure and our happiness on the way of duty and of obedience to thy commands. Thou requirest that, as rational creatures, we should not suffer ourselves to be-dazzled by every false glare of pleasure and happiness; and that, as christians who are called to immortality, we should not look merely to the present, but principally to the future. Thy bountiful goodness has opened to us various sources of delight, and made us susceptible of manifold agreeable sensations; but they are not all of equal value, and the immoderate use of them may frequently convert them into sources of trouble and misery to us. Oh that we were so wise as constantly to make the best choice between the satisfactions and pleasures that offer

offer themselves to us, and in the enjoyment of them never transgressed the rules of moderation ! Do thou enlighten our feeble intellect, o Lord our God, that we may learn justly to understand and appreciate the value of things. Assist us to conquer our vehement propensity to sensual objects. Let us never forget how short and uncertain our life is, and how much depends on the proper or perverse employment of it. Teach us to provide with unabated zeal for the perfection and happiness of our immortal spirit, and grant that we may all so manage our businesses and pleasures, our labours and recreations as is most conformable to thy will and to the great purposes to which we are ordained in the present and in the future world. Bless to that end the doctrines that are presently to be delivered to us. Grant that we may listen to them with attention and a thirst of salvation, lay them up in a good heart, and be actually improved by them. Hear us for the sake of Jesus Christ, our mediator and redeemer, in whose name we invoke thee farther, saying : Our father, &c.

I THESSAL. iv. 11.

Study to be quiet ; and to do your own business.

THE design of my present discourse is to caution you against the detriment and danger of too close a pursuit of dissipation and diversions. May you attend to my warning voice with the same good and sincere dispositions as those which actuate the heart from whence it proceeds ! Think not that the restraints, under which we are laid in many respects by our station and calling, render us envious of the greater freedom which you enjoy ; or that we exhort you to a temperate use of certain kinds of recreations and pleasures, because we must either partake in them with you but seldom, or wholly forego them. Were we disposed to lead a soft effeminate, sensual life, and to be more solicitous about our pleasures than our duty, we should be no more deficient in opportunities than you ; and we might perhaps do it without any striking violation of public decorum. No, my beloved flock, neither envy, jealousy, nor compulsion, have any share in the remonstrances I shall make you. It is conviction, real conviction, grounded on reflection and observation ; it is a sincere and earnest desire of promoting your happiness, that urges me

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to entertain you at this time with such matters as are much more important than they appear to be, and which are therefore but too seldom weighed as their importance demands. Vouchsafe me then an attentive hearing. Let not custom, or prevailing fashion, let not your propensities and appetites, but let truth and the fear of God pronounce upon the weight of my reasons and remonstrances; and if you find them just and cogent, then follow what your conscience and the love you owe yourselves shall dictate. The detriment and danger of too close a pursuit of dissipation and diversions shall therefore be the subject of this morning's discourse. We will divide it into three parts. In the first we will accurately define the subject of which we are speaking; in the second, shew the detriment and danger of misusing it; and, in the third, subjoin some rules of wise and christian-conduct. Considerations which will at once instruct us in the import and reasons of the apostolical precept, "Study to be quiet, and to mind your own business."

By dissipations we here understand all kinds of employments and pleasures which draw off our attention from the duties imposed on us by our station and calling, and direct it to such things as make us forget what is unpleasant or arduous in these duties, either by procuring us a silent and placid repose, or by awakening in us more agreeable sensations and ideas. Such dissipations or recreations are more or less necessary to us all. Our powers are limited.

They would be exhausted by too vigorous and too continued exertions. Nothing, in particular, more wearies the attention of our minds than when we direct it to one and the same object for a considerable length of time. Nothing more fatigues our body than when it pursues too long one sort of motion, or of mechanical labour. Relaxation of a longer or a shorter space from our ordinary affairs is therefore requisite, if we would preserve our mind or our body, or rather both together, from sinking under the burden. This is not all. We thus prevent not only various, and otherwise unavoidable evils, but we procure ourselves the most important advantage. Nothing is more adapted to give new vigour to our minds and bodies than the enjoyment of an innocent and moderate pleasure. It has the same effect upon us as the refreshing dew upon a flower almost withered by the heat of the day. It inspires us with new life, new spirits and alacrity to prosecute the duties of our calling, from the point we had stopt at; and we are thus enabled without much pains to conquer difficulties, which otherwise would have conquered us, if we had combated them with too obstinate an assiduity. Useful and necessary, however, as these dissipations and recreations are, yet they may easily transgress the bounds of moderation; and since this but too frequently happens, our pains will certainly not be superfluous if we search for some rules whereby to judge of our behaviour in this regard.

I need not previously remind you, that all dissipations and pleasures, wherein such things are spoken or transacted as in and of themselves are bad and contrary to good manners, are absolutely to be avoided. To seek recreation in companies where slander and detraction exhale without restraint their pestilential breath, where ambiguous expressions and indecent mirth supply the place of cheerfulness and wit, where riot and licentiousness prevail; to seek recreation in such companies, is to look for health among the diseased, and for life among the dead. I now speak only of such sorts of dissipation and recreation as are absolutely indifferent and innocent, and the moderate use whereof is not unbecoming to the wise man or the christian. And when does a man go too great lengths in these? When does the use of these allowable dissipations and recreations become abuse? Probably numbers will immediately answer, when it is too frequent and too often repeated. The answer is just; but it is too indeterminate, to give us much information, or to regulate ourselves by it on all occasions. We will proceed to say somewhat more precisely upon it.

The most innocent dissipations and recreations are excesses, when sought and used by persons who have no need of any relaxation and recreation. Rest is only ordained to the weary, reward only to the workman, medicine only to the sick. Whereon then do you found your claim to recreations and pleasures; you, who pass your whole lives in inaction, in a reprehensible

prehensible indolence; who exert neither your bodily nor your mental powers in the service of your fellow-beings; who live solely for yourselves, or rather for the terrene animal part of you, and not for others also? What have you then done for the good of society, that you vindicate to yourselves its pleasures? What weighty affairs have you to transact, for which you must collect new powers? Unhappy men, you forget to what end you were designed. You know no useful, no generous employment for your capacities and talents; and therefore apply them merely to trifles, and in the manly, the best age of your life fall back into childhood. Time is a burden to you, because you know not its value. Therefore you wish the days could be shrunk into hours, and the hours into moments. And what right have you to require such frequent dissipation; you, who cannot indeed be peremptorily charged with idleness, but who should and could do far more of what is good and useful than you actually do; you, whose business requires so little exertion, whose labour and industry are so moderate, that you are scarcely ever perhaps considerably fatigued and enervated by the faithful discharge of the duties of your calling? Would you, you who thus either lead a totally inactive and unprofitable life, or a life not active and useful enough, would you with justice, and without inconsistency, apply a part of your time to relaxation and recreation; then use the other part so as to render recreation needful. Turn first your

whole attention to the important concerns that fall to your share as men, as members of the community, as christians ; first, earnestly exert your powers ; first, labour faithfully and unremittingly ; work at least at times till you feel some degree of fatigue : and then seek innocent relaxation and recreation ; then enjoy them with a chearful spirit. You have deserved them ; they are become necessary ; and they will be real recreations to you.

The most innocent dissipations and recreations will, secondly, be excesses, when by the manner in which they are used they cease from being relaxations and recreations, and become either business or burdensome. And this they will be, when they strain too much the powers of the body or the mind ; when they cannot so well be said to procure us rest, as a change of one kind of uneasiness and violent movement for another, probably still more hurtful, especially when they last too long, and are protracted to fatigue. It is certainly an innocent and proper kind of recreation at times to enjoy with one's friends the social repast, seasoned with sincerity and decent freedom, and in the enjoyment to be easy and chearful. But if this happen too often ; if pomp and luxury, more than friendship, mix in it ; if we are by various means allured, or by our own weakness induced, to exceed the bounds of moderation ; if it be thought a kind of honour or propriety to make it late in the night before we part : then we mistake the purport of this means of recreation ; it is then no longer

longer refreshment, it is a troublesome burden which enervates the mind and the body ; and the following day but too often teaches us, that we have reaped no fresh alacrity and vigour for industry and labour. The same may be said of play. Whoever has a taste for this sort of pleasure ; he who knows or can have no nobler kind of it ; who would not otherwise be able to fill up his vacant hours, and at the same time runs no risk of being discomposed by irregular passions : may indulge in this amusement with due moderation, till he shall perhaps sometime hence learn to think more seriously and more consistently with the dignity of the man and the christian. In the mean time, let him beware not to give so much into play that it cease from being an innocent recreation. He that neglects for it that exercise which his body requires ; he that makes it his pursuit unremittedly for several hours, and that frequently, perhaps daily ; he who allows himself to be heated at it by the thirst of gain, or too great eagerness to shew his skill and to obtain the victory ; he who is as busy and attentive at it as if he were occupied about a matter of the highest concern : with him play ceases to be a recreation ; it is a toilsome, childish employment ; it is excess. He thence collects no refreshment to his powers, but squanders away in an unworthy manner the very spirits that survived his previous labour.

Lastly, the most innocent kinds of dissipation and recreation become prejudicial, when we so accustom ourselves to them, that we can scarcely bear a priva-

tion of them, or when we thereby lose our relish for more serious and more momentous objects. In either case we miss the only rational and legitimate aim we could propose by it; I mean, the rest that should refresh us after labour, and invigorate us for the alert renewal of it. In the former case, if we so accustom ourselves to certain dissipations that we can scarcely endure their absence, we unnecessarily increase the number of our wants; and, since it is not possible for us to supply them at all times according to our wish, we thus expose ourselves to various kinds of uneasiness and vexation, which in their effects are in direct opposition to the benefit we propose by recreation. In the latter case, if by too frequent a use of certain distracting amusements we lose the taste for more serious and momentous objects, we manifestly do ourselves an injury, inasmuch as we are thereby tempted to negligence and sloth in the management of these important and momentous matters, or to a total heedlessness and unconcern about them. We must, however, somewhat more circumstantially shew the various mischiefs that arise from the too frequent and inordinate use of even innocent dissipations, and the danger attendant on it.

In the first place, as I have already noticed, the affairs of our vocation are too often neglected for it. A man accustoms himself to look upon them as incumbrances which he bears, and must bear, merely from necessity, and which he rids himself of as often and as speedily as he can without the most evident disadvantage.

disadvantage. Instead of attending to them with all possible assiduity and diligence, he previously directs a part, perhaps the greatest part, of his attention to the pleasures and dissipations he is running to meet. For enjoying these more frequently and fully, he at times leaves his most important businesses to be transacted by others, who seldom manage, or can manage them with the same fidelity and prudence as the person himself. This is equally applicable to the mother and the father of a family; to the merchant and scholar, as well as to the artist and mechanic; and such a conduct in all conditions of life must be attended by more or less disorder and confusion; it must often be attended by the total ruin of families. And this so much the more, as by the great share he takes in all kinds of dissipation and diversions, and by the various connexions he enters into with others on these occasions, he is commonly tempted to run into such expences as bear no just proportion to the means he possesses, or the income on which he may safely reckon; or which, even if our outward circumstances are not injured or impaired by them, prevent us from fulfilling the duties of christian bounty in their whole extent, and from doing so much good as we might and should have done in a more retired mode of life. A loss that not only robs us in this world of the purest, the divinest pleasure, but also of the most glorious retributions in the future.

The too eager pursuit of dissipations and social pleasures have, secondly, with very many persons, a

cruel influence on the education of their children. That the education of children is a matter of the utmost importance and arduous application, and that it is chiefly the business of parents, and not merely of tutors or servants, I take for granted as an undeniable proposition; and if any man were so unhappy as to doubt it, I should pity him with all my heart; but I should give myself little trouble to set him right, because in all probability my pains would be lost. Is it then your duty, you, whom God has ordained as parents, is it your duty, your most arduous duty, to educate your children, that is, to form their hearts and minds, and make them wise and virtuous; how can you properly comply with this duty, if you give full swing to your attachment to all fashionable dissipations and pleasures; if you leave your children so often and so long from your sight; if all this while you leave them to themselves, or to the charge of others? I will allow, that the pleasures you pursue are harmless. But, in the mean time, to what dangers are your children exposed! Probably they are surrounded by vicious persons, who put on the mask in your presence, and wait with impatience for the moment when they need be under no restraint. At present, the minds and the hearts of these innocents, whose welfare is so dear to you, lie open to every bad impression, and there is no one by to guard them from seduction. Now probably falls the seed of some fault, some ill quality, or some vice, into their tender hearts, which takes root in secret, and in time brings

brings forth a deadly fruit. Now the fairest blossoms of wisdom and virtue, that already begin to expand, are blighted and withered by a pestilential breath. Suppose, however, that they are not surrounded by vicious persons, yet are they commonly by such as have not the just and delicate sentiment of the true, the beautiful and good, so necessary to the due formation of a youthful heart; who rarely are free from false maxims, from superstitious errors and prejudices of every kind, and who scarcely ever observe that exact propriety in their discourses and actions which sensible parents observe in the presence of their children. All of these circumstances which cannot but be prejudicial to your children, and are often most fatal to them. And can you, in such circumstances, frequently and without necessity absent yourselves from your children; and without uneasiness and a smarting conscience pursue idle dissipations and pleasures, which neither a concern for your health, nor the duties of real friendship, require at your hands?

A third evil that arises from an abuse in these matters is, that a man thereby becomes habituated to unworthy gratifications. I am not to be informed, that we are terrene creatures; that we cannot be solely employed on invisible and spiritual objects. Yet we are not totally earthly. The better part of our being, the part of us that remains for ever, is not dust; it is the offspring of God; it is designed for a heavenly life. If we make what is earthly and

temporal our main concern ; if we are always busied about such things alone ; if we even devote to them the little time that remains to us from our ordinary affairs : then must we of course by insensible degrees become earthly-minded. Our rational, our immortal soul must necessarily be injured much, be biaſſed ever farther and farther from its proper deſtination, and be ever more unfit for the ſuperior and heavenly life to which it is called. And how can too frequent diſſipations have any other effects than theſe ? Will not the attention of thoſe who are attached to them be ſolely directed to ſenſual and outward things ? Are not various preparations requiſite for appearing in great circles with propriety and advantage ? Do we not thus get the habit of ſetting a greater value on whatever belongs to dreſs, to decoration, to furniture, than they deſerve, and to hold them for more important things than they really are ? Are they not the ſubjects of moſt converſations and diſcourſes ? Does not the extravagant value that is had for them very frequently excite envy, jealouſy, and ſtrife ? Do they not ſo univerſally prevail in moſt companies, as to make it not rarely a matter of offence to ſpeak of weighty, profitable, moral, and religious concerns, and cauſe ſuch ſubjects to be conſidered as incompatible with rational mirth ? But is not ſuch a way of thinking pernicious in the higheſt degree ? Does it not expoſe us to the danger of loſing ſight of God and religion, and the end of our being, in ſhort, every thing that is great and noble ? Does it not
entice

entice us to a hundred actions that degrade the man, and are contrary to the vocation of the christian? Does it not deprive us of all comfort in misfortune? Does it not render death and eternity, which yet we cannot shun, most dreadful? Is it not manifestly at variance with the temper that is to prevail in the kingdom of the just, and shall we not be rendered by it ever more unqualified for being received into their society hereafter?

Hence, lastly, it happens, that too intense a pursuit of dissipation deprives us of the time necessary to the practice of private devotion, and gradually draws after it a coldness and indifferency towards all religion. Our knowledge, our faith, our hope, our virtue, and piety, must be assiduously nourished and supported by the reading of holy scripture and other good books, by reflection and contemplation, by self-examination and prayer, if we would have it to stand out against the attacks of error, of unbelief, of doubtfulness, of disappointments and vice, and to render us wise and happy. To this end the public exercises of devotion and worship, how excellent so ever they are in the main, are not of themselves sufficient. The chief part of what we have to mind in this respect must be performed in retirement. But do you perform this, and can you perform it, you, who so sedulously run after all sorts of dissipation and pleasure? Do you, at least, apply as much time to the augmentation of your knowledge, to the improvement of your heart, to the invigoration of your faith,

to the confirmation of your hopes and your piety, as you consume in the gratification of your appetites for sensual pleasure, or to what you term the duties of good breeding, and the keeping of company? Do not frequently several days glide by, do not at times whole weeks pass away, without one serious reflection that you are christians and designed for eternity; without once examining the state of your mind, and your course of life; without passing one or more hours in such meditations as are profitable to your immortal spirit, and may fit you for the life to come? No wonder, if, with such a conduct, your faith yield to every objection and doubt, your virtue to every temptation, your hopes to every danger; if you dare not venture to manifest your veneration for God and Jesus Christ to the face of the unbeliever or the scorner, and among the friends of vice to maintain the cause of virtue. No wonder if you either become yourself a contemner of religion and the slave of vanity and vice, or that you halt and waver between truth and error, and are continually running from good to bad, from one opinion to another, without ever acting upon just and solid principles. Is not such a condition however extremely hazardous, and have you not ample cause to regard and to avoid, as prejudicial and ruinous, all that plunges and keeps you in it?

These surely are considerations highly adapted to convince every reasonable man, that too frequent dissipations are exceedingly detrimental to us, and
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that they are inseparably combined with various perils. Should I be so happy as to rouse you to reflect on this matter, and to cause you some alarm on these injuries and this danger; then turn to your advantage the following rules of discreet and christian conduct.

Impartially consider at times the emptiness, the vanity, the irksomeness, of most kinds of dissipation and pastime, though people in general set so high a value on them. Can you think so freely and undisturbed amidst them, can you speak so familiarly and frankly, and so safely appear in your natural frame, as you ought, were they actually to be the recreation of your mind? Do you not commonly find yourself obliged to watch with far more attention over yourself, and to observe all your words and gestures, than in the most important affairs, if you would neither affront any one, nor expose yourself to ridicule? Are you not very often reduced to the necessity of straining all the faculties of your mind in the most unpleasant manner, to fill up the vacuity of conversation by a thousand frivolities? Do you not in many other instances feel an irksome constraint? In how many kinds of dissipation and pastime may not the passions be stirred up, whether the love of lucre, or ambition, or anger, which are equally hurtful both to body and mind, and which consequently have no right to the appellation of recreation and solace? And wherein at length consists the so much vaunted pleasure of the generality of great companies,

nies, the generality of public and private entertainments? All men eagerly run in quest of this pleasure, but no one finds it; and yet no one is honest enough to say that he has not found it, because he is afraid of contradicting the judgment of the rest, and of being accused of a want of taste. Therefore every one boasts, against his conviction, of a pleasure he has not enjoyed, or only in a low degree; and by these means alone are most kinds of dissipation and amusements supported in the unmerited reputation which prejudice, misrepresentation, and a false shame have conferred upon them.

Another rule of conduct is this:—Often and seriously reflect on the inestimable value of time, and the extreme velocity of it. How much I pity the man who is for ever in search of fresh means of pastime! Time alas flies sufficiently swift; it admits of no detention. And yet you want to drive it on! you want to give it fleeter wings! Will you hold the same opinion by and by, and how soon may not that happen, when the short space that is granted you draws near to its end; when you have no longer to reckon by years and months, but must count by days and hours? Will you think thus, when you are first to give an account to yourself and then to the judge of the world, of your employment of this time? Woe to him, who, on striking the balance of his reckoning, finds that he has not only bestowed some of it at times on his necessary recreation; but has often daily lavished away large portions of his
time

time in worthless impertinencies, and thereby neglected the opportunity of laying up a treasure in heaven! I must speak still plainer. Woe to him who finds on his death-bed, that he has passed almost every evening of his short life, that is, almost all the time his business left him free, in idle companies, in unprofitable, and often sinful converse, in play, or in any other loitering manner, derogatory to the dignity of the man and the christian! What reproaches will he not then make himself! How much will he deplore his murdered time! How ardently, but how vainly, will he wish that he had employed the greater part at least of his leisure on weightier matters, in the improvement of his knowledge, in the practice of virtue and piety, in preparation for his life to come!

A third rule of conduct is this: — Of all dissipations and diversions, chuse out such as are most innocent and useful. I have not the least intention to forbid you amusement in general, or social amusement in particular. God and religion require not this. But they will have us to make a prudent selection from among the various kinds of pleasures we may enjoy. And herein allow me to give you some suggestions. The pleasures of domestic life; the pleasure which tender and rational parents find in conversing with their children, in forming their minds and hearts, and even in sharing in their innocent amusements and sports; intercourse with a few honest and upright friends, where, free from restraint

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or reserve, we may hold profitable and agreeable converse, where we need not care if our ignorance or our weakness appear, and may shew ourselves in our real disposition, where none will reproach us even if our discourse should be dull; the perusal of such books as require no great exertion of mind, which have but little relation to our ordinary affairs, and may enrich us with many different kinds of knowledge, or strengthen us in our generous and virtuous notions; the contemplation of nature, the mild and silent sentiment of its beauties, which we share with our friends, and in sharing elevate; what pleasures are these! How pure, how innocent, how diversified, how fitted to procure agreeable recreation to the mind and new vigour to the body! Learn to understand and to enjoy these pleasures, and you will want no admonition against the abuse of the rest. I will, however, just propose to you one still nobler kind of recreation. Visit, at times, the forlorn, the poor, the indigent, the widow and the orphan; not for the purpose of satisfying your curiosity; but go to them with good advice and substantial succours. Mistake not this for a melancholy recreation. It affords to a generous and humane heart, indeed not in all, but in most cases, far more pleasure than displeasure; and the recollection of the good we have done by it, of the comfort and joy we have thus dispensed abroad, will become a permanent source of the most agreeable emotions.

Lastly,

· Lastly, be jealous of your real freedom. Let nothing make you slaves. No sort of dissipation and amusement should ever become so necessary to you, that you cannot forego it without uneasiness and pain. You cannot tell but that your circumstances may so alter that you must absolutely give it up. The wise man, the christian, makes himself ready for all events; and on that very account is his happiness the surest, and his pleasure subject to the fewest alterations. Oh strive to be such wise men, such christians. Strive after the approbation of God and your conscience, as after the purest and richest source of refreshment and peace. Consider duty and pleasure not as wholly different and conflicting things; but seek and expect true pleasure chiefly from the delight and fidelity wherewith you fulfil your duty. Regard yourselves constantly as strangers and sojourners in this world, and esteem and treat at all times the present according to the connection in which it stands with the future. This, and this alone, will render you wise, delighted and happy.

SERMON XXIII.

*The Value or the Importance of the Doctrine of our
Immortality.*

O GOD, eternal, inexhaustible fountain of life and happiness, life and happiness incessantly flow from thee on all thy creatures in heaven and on earth; and we, thy children, thy eminently endowed and favoured children, we expect everlasting life and everlasting happiness from thee! Of this thou thyself hast certified us by thy son Jesus. Of this thou hast thyself given us the most infallible testimony by his resurrection from the dead. And in the sentiment of it we rejoice together this day in thy presence; yes, in this will we rejoice before thee forever. Oh praised, ever praised be thy glorious goodness, by which we are born again to this lively hope, which has given us such grounds for consolation and joy, and opened to us such prospects in a life to come! O God, what solutions
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hast thou not thus given us! What light hast thou not shed upon our path of life and upon all that befalls us! What energy hast thou not granted us to goodness, what comfort in afflictions, what assurance in death! How confidently and cheerfully may we not now meditate on thee, our creator and father, our lord and rewarder! How easily bear all the troubles of life! How resolutely accomplish every duty of it! How serenely see its end approaching! How assuredly expect the wages of righteousness and fidelity at thy hand! Yes, we are happy as men, and far happier as christians; and that which we at present are, is only a noviciate, only a foretaste, only a preliminary to that which we shall be hereafter! Oh then that the consciousness of our high appointment, the sentiment of our present and future happiness, and joy in thy fatherly grace ever animated our hearts, attended us every where, and rendered our whole lives an incessant song of praise for thy loving-kindness! No, far, far be all discontent and murmurs, all anxious cares, from us whom thou hast appointed to an everlasting life! Far, far be it from us to be slothful and weary in well-doing, or ever to stand still on the way of virtue, while thou allowest us to hope for everlasting rewards! No, to walk uprightly and cheerfully before thee, readily to be and to do and to suffer; whatever in pursuance of thy will we ought here to be and to do and to suffer; and to render ourselves constantly more susceptible and worthy of the blessed immortality: let

this be the mark after which we shall ever strive and ever be approaching nearer. To the promotion of these aims bless the meditations and the religious exercises that are now to employ us, and accept our prayers through Jesus Christ, in whose name we farther address thee, saying: Our father, &c.

JOHN xi. 25, 26.

I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.

THE sentiment of our immortality is unquestionably the most blessed of all sentiments: the hope of a better and everlasting life, the sublimest hope of which our nature is susceptible. And when, my pious hearers, should this sentiment more expand our hearts, when this hope more rejoice and comfort us, than on such days as this? Is not the festival of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead the festival of our immortality? Is not his heavenly, his divine life a pledge of our future superior life, our everlasting felicity? Is not the resuscitation of our bodies indissolubly connected with the resuscitation of his body? Do not his exaltation and glory certify

certify us of the state of retribution that awaits us hereafter? Yes, Christ has brought life and undecaying existence to light through his gospel! he has deprived death of its terrors, and the grave of its dismaying aspect. He has put out of doubt the important doctrine of our immortality and of our future state of retribution; it is now no longer the bare wish of the unhappy or the dying; no longer a difficult, perplexing problem in the schools of the learned; no longer a faint conjecture of the wise; but a demonstrated truth, confirmed by divine authority; an essential part of the knowledge and belief of many millions of persons; a truth that is inseparably connected with the christian's whole system of thought and reflection, which is become a principle of his understanding and a predominant feeling of his heart, which may indeed be shaken and obscured, but can never be entirely extinguished or rendered totally impotent, and from which the unlearned as well as the learned, the most confined as well as the most liberal thinker, may to the full draw wisdom, virtue, consolation and bliss. Oh, my dear brethren, if we, if the world were indebted to the risen Jesus for nothing more than this belief and this hope, how could we, how could the world ever adequately thank him for it? But do we understand and feel likewise the entire value of this benefit? Are we sensible how happy we are become by it? or may perhaps the long possession and enjoyment of this benefit conceal from us a part of its

value? Well then let us devote an hour in bringing to mind the greatness of it, and thus endeavour to awaken our hearts to grateful joy. We will consider the weight of the doctrine of our immortality and of a future state of retribution. This will be rendered inestimable to us by the assurance of our Saviour in the text: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die."

The doctrine of our immortality and of a future state of retribution is important to our mind; important to our heart; important in regard to our conduct; important in the enjoyment of satisfaction and pleasure; important under the pressure of afflictions; important in the hour of death. Six particulars which we now propose somewhat circumstantially to investigate.

How important is not this doctrine to our mind! What difficulties, what mysteries does it not solve! What obscurities does it not dispel by its light! What a safe clue through all the mazes of divine dispensations and human fortunes does it not afford us! Is man entirely dust; is his spirit as well as his body destroyed in death; has he nothing to hope for after it: how shall I explain what happens in the world, what befalls mankind, what occurs to myself? Wherefore those diversified, copious and extensive arrangements that I discover in the natural and moral world for the preservation, for the improvement,

provement, for the perfection of mankind, if they be to live only a few years or a few days on earth, and then cease to be? Wherefore the great and magnificently promising dispositions, capacities and powers that lie concealed in man, and which are so frequently not at all, and never entirely unfolded, if he be ordained for this terrestrial life alone? Wherefore all the wants, all the trials and afflictions, all the chastisements by which he is obliged so painfully to learn to think and live, if both thought and life are utterly to cease, before he has finished these studies? Wherefore the anxious solicitude about hereafter, the longing looks into futurity, which accompany him at every turn, and so oft prevent him from enjoying the present, if there were no futurity for him? How mysterious would not his condition be, how incomprehensible his destination! — And when I see one nation highly favoured, and another neglected; there radiant light, here thick darkness, there happiness, here misery, there liberty, here slavery and bondage prevail; when I perceive myriads of human beings cut off in their childhood and youth, so many suffering what they have not deserved, so many never rejoicing in their life; when I see so many wise and virtuous persons persecuted and oppressed, so many fools, so many tyrants and profligates prosperous and honoured, so many great and generous actions unrewarded, so many crimes unpunished: how can I reconcile all this with the wisdom and goodness and impartiality of the ruler

of the world ; how can I believe his existence ; or think him the most perfect being, unless another life, unless a state of retribution awaits us ?

But now, my dear brethren, that we are assured of this other life, this state of retribution by Jesus, how is not every thing unravelled ! What light is not now diffused over all these difficulties ! Now no arrangements of God are too great and too costly for rendering man fit for his exalted, everlasting appointment. Now there is no disposition, no capacity, no power in us, that will not be sooner or later, here or there expanded and put into action. Now no discipline is too strict, no chastisement too harsh, no affliction too severe, for preparing the human being for his higher perfection and happiness. Now he learns nothing in vain ; renders himself expert in nothing to no purpose ; acquires no good quality, which he may not hereafter employ for ever. Now he has reason to provide more for the future than for the present, to live more in the future than in the present ; since that is infinitely more important to him than this. Now he need not be surpris'd at the unequal distribution of the bounties and favours of God, between nation and nation, between one man and another. They stand all on the first stage of their existence, and eternity is rich, is inexhaustible in means to make them amends ; every one will sooner or later attain to his appointment. Now we need not doubt of the wisdom and goodness of the ways of divine providence ; since they extend far
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beyond the boundaries of this life, and futurity will shew them to us as all irreproachable. Now we may see without being perplexed so many blossoms of human life and human virtue wither, and so many charming fruits drop off before they attain maturity; they will bloom again and bear nobler fruit in a future life. Now we may see, without murmuring, the innocent, the upright suffer, and profligates and tyrants triumph; the sorrows of the former will hereafter be turned into joy, and the triumph of the latter into shame and confusion. Now no good act goes unrewarded; no crime unpunished. Darknefs will hereafter give way to light; every difficulty be removed; every knot untied; and whatever at present may look like disorder, confusion, injustice, will be manifest to us as preparation and means to the most beautiful order, to the completest harmony. And what an important, consoling doctrine is not this to our mind! How must it not facilitate and rectify its thoughts and its judgments! From how many mistakes secure it! How safely lead it to the knowledge of truth!

The doctrine of our immortality and a future state of retribution is highly important to our heart. How pants not our heart, the heart of every thoughtful, every sentimental person, how pants it not after immortality! With what horror does it not start at the thought of total annihilation! And what goods, what enjoyments of this terrestrial life are commensurate with the desires, with the aspira-

tions of our heart? What can completely and for ever satisfy it? What secret uneasiness frequently accompanies the fullest enjoyment of it! What still greater, purer, more lasting joys and blessings does not our heart desire and long for! Of what comprehensive, ardent, active love towards God and man does it not feel itself susceptible! And how often are not its noblest feelings, its most blessed emotions weakened, suppressed or even actually changed into sources of pain and trouble by the limitations of our present state, by our connections with outward things!

And must not our heart rise and expand with the certain hope of immortality? Are we immortal: what desires, what sentiments, what expectations are now too bold? What dispositions, what capacities, what generous aspirations can we have that will not be unfolded, not be employed, not be gratified? Where is the feeling, sentimental soul which in that better world will not find the purest, noblest nourishment for its virtuous sensibility; where the zealous, cordial friend of God and man, who there will not be animated, inflamed with the most exalted love? And what human sensibility is capacious enough, entirely to contain the transports of that superior state? Transports that neither disgust nor languor weaken; that no pain, no trouble embitter; which no oppressive satiety, but calm and cheerful satisfaction attends. No, be calm, be joyful, my heart, in thy strivings after duration, after higher felicity!

felicity! Thou pantest not in vain after immortality; thou longest not for nought after higher possessions, after purer joys! Thou wilt attain thy object, be it as exalted as it may. Thou wilt entirely feel and enjoy, what at present thou only conceivest to be possible and desirable.

And what a ravishing sentiment of our nobility and our dignity must not the thought of our immortality shed into our heart! What an influence must it not have on the judgment we pass on ourselves, on the reverence we owe to ourselves, on our whole temper and frame of mind! To feel ourselves immortal, implies to feel ourselves great and noble; capable of doing and enjoying all that is beautiful and good and excellent; capable of proceeding from one degree of perfection to another, and of becoming ever wiser, ever better, ever happier from eternity to eternity. O exalted, blissful sentiment, take entire possession of our hearts, shut all their avenues to every groveling thought, every fordid appetite; and penetrate and fill them with thoughts, with feelings and aspirations that are worthy of thee!

How important therefore, thirdly, must not the doctrine of immortality and the future state of retribution be in regard to our virtue; how important in all temptations to sloth and to sin! How often will not that virtue faint whose prospects and hopes are bounded by this short and uncertain life, whose fruits must perish in the grave! How often decline

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the contest with lusts and passions, or sink under their attacks, since the prize of victory is so transient, and to-day or to-morrow, with the victor himself, must moulder in the dust! And how should the man, to whom futurity affords nothing to fear and nothing to hope, resist the temptations to sin and to sloth in goodness, when he can commit the wicked act to which he is tempted in secret, when he can indulge the sinful lust that allures him without detriment and without disgrace, and when he cannot perform the good deed without loss, without trouble and fatigue, without exposing himself to danger? What shall give him strength and courage to sacrifice his property, his pleasures, his vigour, even his life to duty, or to the benefit of his brethren, if he have no compensation to expect for these sacrifices, and must lose all with his life? How seldom then will ambition or any nobler principles be able to supply the place of the belief of our immortality and future remuneration!

No, to thee, o Jesus, who, by thy resurrection, hast brought me to believe in my immortality, and begotten me again to the hope of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for me, to thee I am chiefly indebted for inclination and energy to goodness! Invigorated by this faith, by this hope I can get the mastery of myself, overcome the world, be more than conqueror, and persevere unto the end. Is my soul immortal; does a better, a superior life await me
after

after death : then I can lose nothing in the service of virtue, in the service of God. Virtue rewards her votaries with advantages and joys, that neither death nor the grave can ravish from them ; God recompenses his faithful servants with everlasting rewards. No, let the path I have here to walk be never so steep, never so rugged : undeviating and undismayed I will pursue it even unto the end ; since it leads to perfection, to bliss ! Let the fight I have to fight, be never so hard : firmly will I hold out ; since I am sure of the prize, of the victory, and this prize is worthy of the struggle ! Let it cost me never so much to gain the mastery over myself, to subdue my lusts, to become wise and virtuous : never shall I purchase these advantages too dear ; since I work not for a few days or years, I work for eternity ; the mastery I now obtain over myself, the wisdom and virtue that I here acquire, I shall never lose, they will hereafter form the basis of my greater liberty, of my superior wisdom and virtue ! Let my duties be never so arduous, require never so much attention and exertion, never so much renunciation of my ease and convenience ; let them exhaust my powers and overwhelm me with their burden : never shall I repent my zeal and my fidelity, never shrink from the task ; since thereby I exercise my faculties, thereby learn to use them according to the will of him who conferred them on me, to the benefit of my brethren, and so render myself capable of higher duties, of greater matters in the future world ! This is the

time

time for sowing. The more carefully, the more faithfully I cultivate the field that is here allotted me; the better the seed I cast into it; the more abundantly I sow: so much the more fruit and so much the richer fruits shall I reap of it at the great day of harvest. No, I will do good, and never be weary in well-doing; since in due time I shall reap without ceasing.

The doctrine of our immortality and of a better, superior life after death is, fourthly, important, in regard to the enjoyment of satisfaction and pleasure. How gloomy, without this prospect, would not the enjoyment of all, even the noblest, pleasures and satisfactions be to the thoughtful man; and how cheerfully and comfortably may he not resign himself to them, when animated by this prospect!

Now I enjoy the sight of the fair universe of God; see and admire on all hands the traces of his sovereign wisdom and bounty; find there the noblest nourishment and employment for my understanding and my heart; discovering there sources of knowledge and delight that are inexhaustible, and from which I long to draw for ever. But must I then, to-day or to-morrow, for the last time view this theatre of the divine glory? Must all these beauties sink from before me into never-ending night? Must my thirst after knowledge be only excited, but never allayed? No, I need not be afraid of this deplorable fate. A superior, an immortal life awaits me. There will new scenes, still grander theatres
of

of admiration open to my view; and I shall contemplate them with a stronger sight, with superior powers of mind. Eternity is unbounded; the kingdom of God is immense; and my continuance shall have no end. What does not this allow me to hope!

Now I enjoy the pleasure, the investigation of truth procures me. I perceive at a distance some traces, some rays of it; am on the way to approach it nearer, and to discover it more completely; and enjoy by anticipation the ravishing sight. But, must I then, when I am come nearest to it, for ever lose all hope of actually attaining to the knowledge of it? Be robbed forever of all the fruits of my intense reflections, of my toilsome researches? No, I am immortal; a superior life awaits me; there I shall behold the truth, which I now only descry in the dawn, in its full display, shall pierce into its sanctuary, and secure to myself its possession forever.

Now I enjoy the pleasure of beneficence. But how seldom can I enjoy it as I wish! How limited are my abilities and my means! What totally different acts of beneficence can I conceive, and wish to perform as my greatest happiness! And must I then, when I have scarcely tasted this pleasure, and am become withal more capable of its enjoyment, lose all means and ability to it, and mingle with fluggish matter, acting without consciousness and design, without sentiment? No, I am immortal;
bene-

beneficence must and will be my everlasting employment; a state awaits me, where I may more freely addict myself to this divine propensity, satisfy it more fully, and spread far more joy and bliss around me.

Now I enjoy the pleasure of generous friendship and virtuous love. Never do I see without cordial delight the friend of my heart, and every communication of our perceptions, of our feelings, of our sorrows and our joys connects us closer, makes us dearer and more indispensably necessary to each other. And is this generous friendship, this virtuous affection to be of only a momentary duration; is it to be destroyed forever in death? No, I am immortal; a state awaits me, where never-ending love, the purest love, prevails, where the best, most virtuous sentimental persons are all of one heart and one mind.

Now I enjoy the pleasure of devotion; the most exalted of which the human creature is susceptible. My spirit raises herself to her creator and father, rejoices in him, reposes on him, feels herself great and happy in the adoration of him, and pants after nearer communion with him. And shall I be bereaved of this pleasure, when I am best acquainted with its value, and am become most capable of its completer enjoyment? No, I am immortal. Nothing can dissolve the intimate, the blessed relations wherein I stand towards to my creator and father. Everlastingly shall I approach nearer to this most
perfect

perfect being; everlastingly draw from this inexhaustible source of light and life and knowledge and felicity.

Yes, enjoy, o man, o christian, enjoy all the innocent, generous pleasures and delights that are vouchsafed thee in this mortal state; enjoy them with a contented, a chearful heart, and let not the enjoyment of them be embittered by the idea of a short and uncertain duration. Thou art immortal; and thy pleasures and delights are immortal too. They are the pledges of purer pleasures, of superior delights that await thee in a better world; foretastes of the greater, more lasting bliss which is there prepared for thee!

If the doctrine of our immortality and of a future state of retribution be important in respect to the enjoyment of the pleasures and satisfactions of this life, it is of no less importance in respect to the afflictions and sorrows that befall us in it. And indeed, my dear brethren, what should comfort a man in the various disappointments and sufferings of this life, what should teach him to bear them with patience and fortitude, if he had not a better futurity to expect? Were he to suffer without object, without utility, and at last sink under his sufferings and expire for ever? Were his sufferings an ultimate end, and not means to a higher end? By this supposition the entire weight of affliction lies on him; he is tortured by the recollection of the past, by the sentiment of the present, and the dread of approaching sufferings.

ings. Thus he could never truly enjoy his life. Each disaster that befalls him is real, permanent misfortune; every loss he meets with is to him irreparable; every pain that corrodes him tends solely to destruction and dissolution. The cup of sorrow that is presented to him is bitter; and no drop of comfort alleviates its bitterness. It is not wholesome medicine, it is not health and life; it is pure pain and torment that he drinks out of it. He suffers for no purpose but to suffer; is sick, to no purpose but to languish under the burden of a withered and emaciated body; is poor and indigent, only to bear the load of poverty and indigence; meets a constant succession of obstacles and difficulties on his way, only to pursue it with cares and trouble; is wretched, only to be plunged in misery; dies, only to remain in death! How must not then his sufferings oppress him, and how easily, how soon will they not entirely overwhelm him!

But what a totally different aspect do they not assume, when we are animated by the hope of immortality and a future state of retribution! Now our afflictions are not ultimate ends, but only means to superior ends. Now we suffer, not for the purpose of suffering, but, by being exercised in sufferings, to be corrected, and rendered capable of greater perfection. Now no calamity overtakes us, that will not hereafter be to us a source of blessing; no misfortune that will not promote our benefit; no pain that will not be attended by joy. Now we lose nothing for

which we may not hope for compensation or amends. Now every path of life, which God calls us to pursue, however dark and rugged it may be, may and will conduct to happiness. Now no opposition, no danger, no abortive expectations, no impediments and difficulties need surprize and affright us: since all this is consistent with the state of discipline and exercise in which we live; and all this brings us nearer to our high destination. Now every affliction is sweetened and alleviated by our prospects in the better world. We may now even glory in tribulations; consider and revere them as means to our perfection; give thanks for them as benefits to our heavenly father, and, from inward conviction, say with the apostle: "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us!" "If we suffer with Jesus we shall also reign with him: if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him!"

And when at length the hour of death draws nigh—and how soon, how unexpectedly may it not come on!—When therefore the hour of death draws nigh, how important must not then the doctrine of our immortality and of a future state of retribution be! To die, and have nothing before us but night, impenetrable, unterminating night; to die, and to lose all our capacities, all our powers, all our goods and possessions, all our pleasures and comforts entirely and for ever; to die, and to part for ever from our friends, and among them perhaps the faith-

ful partner of all our cares and all our joys ; to die, and to know that all we have done and borne and suffered, all our skill and knowledge, is to be entirely fruitless and unserviceable ; to die, and to meet total annihilation, and after a few short hours or moments to be no more, and with all our hopes and prospects to become a prey to the grave : what a doleful, horrible state for a man who is ever so little capable of thought and sentiment !

Oh happy we, my dear brethren, happy we, that Jesus, by his resurrection has deprived death of this tremendous aspect, that he has unveiled futurity to us, and brought life and immortality to light ! Yes, it is the lofty, the divine faith of the christian, the belief in immortality, and a better everlasting life, that darts light into darkness, that brightens and cheers to us the valley of the shadow of death ; that inspires us with consolation and hope and confidence, when we are abandoned by every other comfort and every hope seems folly. Fortified by thee, o holy faith, we may resolutely meet this formidable adversary, may boldly encounter and conquer all his terrors, and have nothing to fear from his threats. We hear our Saviour, the vanquisher of death and the grave, calling to us : — “ I am the resurrection and the life : he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live ; and he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” Death therefore is not in reality what it appears to be ; not annihilation, not the end of my existence, not the termina-
tion

tion of my life and my activity, not the irreparable loss of all that I am and have and can do. No, it is only a transformation, only the transition into a superior state, only the passage to greater perfection and happiness. No, only my earthly tabernacle crumbles into dust; my spirit returns to its creator and father, and expects life and bliss in communion with him. No, the night that surrounds me in death will give way to an effulgent day; the loss of what is visible and transitory brings me to the possession of what is invisible and eternal. My nobler intellectual faculties, my intrinsic excellence, death neither will nor can destroy; and neither death nor the grave will separate me for ever from my friends, the beloved of my heart, with whom I was connected by wisdom and virtue. No, I go to enter on a state, whither all my good qualities and actions will attend me; where I shall better employ all my capacities and powers; where I shall ever do and enjoy more good; where I may and shall ever be and become, from eternity to eternity, more wise, more virtuous, more excellent and more happy! And shall I anxiously tremble at the approach of death? Shall I hesitate to follow his summons, since he calls me to greater felicity? No, let his arrival be to me the arrival of a harbinger of peace; his voice the voice of a friend, conducting me to my superior destination and opening to me the passage into my true, my celestial country!

Of such importance, my pious hearers, is the doctrine of our immortality and of a future state of retribution, revealed by Jesus and solemnly confirmed by his resurrection from the dead; of such importance is it to our understanding and to our heart, of such importance in the enjoyment of pleasure and under the pressure of afflictions, of such importance while living and when dying! Ye christians, who are come hither this day to solemnize in the holy communion the memorial of Jesus, and all you who confess his name, oh be joyful in christianity which has brought these doctrines to light and placed them beyond all doubt! Confess, be sensible to its entire value, its benign influence on all your thoughts and judgments, views and hopes. Give thanks to God, give thanks to his son Jesus Christ, for the unclouded light that enlightens you, for the certainty that pacifies your minds on the most important subjects. Adhere firmly to these sacred doctrines; make yourselves ever more and more acquainted with them; let them be continually present to your mind, let them be your constant companions and guides. Think, talk, live uniformly as persons who are assured of their immortality, and expect everlasting retributions.

Fortify yourselves here at the table of the Lord in this blessed faith, in these pious and lofty dispositions. From hearts replete with confidence and joy our countenances shall speak our emotions: We are immortal, we are on our progress to a superior, a better

better state; as surely as Jesus lived, so surely shall we also live, live through him and with him, eternally live, and in the communion of his life be eternally happy! Yes, we are immortal, everlasting retributions await us: this sentiment must give more weight and dignity to all that we are and do, and cause us to think and act more nobly and more consistently with our high vocation. We are immortal, everlasting retributions await us: this sentiment must exclude every sordid inclination from our heart, defend us from every temptation to sin, and make us willing and accomplished to every good word and every generous act! We are immortal, a better, a superior life awaits us: this sentiment must sweeten every joy that God vouchsafes us, and alleviate and render tolerable every affliction he calls us to suffer! We are immortal, a better, an everlasting life awaits us: accompanied by this consoling thought, encouraged by this glorious prospect, we will resolutely pursue the path that leads us to it, regardless of its troubles and inconveniences, undismayed see its end approach; and when we come, to-day or to-morrow, to stand on the verge of the grave, we will not, like the unbeliever, start and tremble, but, looking unto Jesus, who has gone before us, and, relying on his promises, with confidence and joy pass over into the better, the everlasting life! Amen.

Easter-day, 1782.

SERMON XXIV.

The Value, or the Importance, of the Hope of a blessed Immortality, considered as the principal Source of our satisfaction and serenity of Mind.

O GOD, thou greatest and best of beings, invisible indeed in thine essence but evident in thine effects! — Thou who art our father by having produced us out of nothing, and more especially by having begotten us again to the hope of life in Christ Jesus by his resurrection from the dead — teach us, we implore thee, to pay all due reverence to thee, our creator and redeemer. That we may conceive justly, though imperfectly, of thy perfections, and express humbly our sense of them. Give us power to transcribe the imitable part of thy nature into our own. Incline us to look up to the complete pattern of thy beloved son, till we arrive at some faint resemblance of the deity by aspiring at the perfection of humanity. Give us the will to obey all thy commands, and to rest satisfied in all thy dispensations ;
that

that we may with as much constancy, chearfulness and alacrity comply with the designs of thy providence on earth as the purer spirits do in heaven. Let us imitate their perfections here, that we may be made partakers of their happiness hereafter. — Be pleased to give success to all our honest endeavours to acquire the necessaries and conveniences of this life, and the wisdom to discern that they ought never to be obtained by such methods as are destructive of the more solid and permanent satisfactions of another. Look down with mercy and compassion upon all our failings, upon all our follies: and give us too such tender dispositions of mind, that we may exert a spirit of humanity and forbearance in all our dealings with our fellow-creatures. Teach us, by an habitual exercise of reason, to distinguish between the proper and perverse use of the objects which surround us, that our passions may be kept in a due subservience to the ends for which thou hast implanted them. Suffer us not to be lulled into any sinful security. If the still small voice of mercy cannot reach us, alarm us with the terrors of thy judgments: break the heart that will not bend; and lead us by any effort, however unwelcome or uneasy, through that mystery of iniquity which thou hast permitted, into the glorious liberty of thy sons, o God! — Pity, father, and pardon and assist our weak attempts to address thee as we ought. Accept this humble act of duty and obedience. Indulge us kindly when we ask aright, and deny us mercifully what we ask amiss. And,

that we may be fure to ask fuch things as fhall please thee, give us leave to include our petitions in the name, words, and as far as we are able in the fpirit of that beloved fon in whom thou art well-pleafed ; referring the iffue of all our hopes and aims ultimately to the direction of thy good pleafure and providence. Even fo, Lord, it is fit for us, weak and wretched as we are, to fubmit all our defires and views to the guidance of thy fupreme controul, eternal, everlafting king ! enshrined in glory which cannot be approached, invested with wifdom and power which no arm can refift, no tongue exprefs, no thought conceive. Our father, &c.

I COR. XV. 19.

If in this life only we have hope in Chrift, we are of all men, moft miserable.

QUIET and fatisfaction being two grand objects of our defire ; and, as fo much pains are taken to acquire them, it is the more to be lamented, that we do not with greater frequency and care make ufe of that principal fource of true refofe and fatisfaction, the hope of a blefled immortality. If you attach your thoughts to this earth ; if you confine
your

your hopes to the short moment of this terrestrial life; if you take this state of discipline and exercise for the ultimate scope of your being; if you regard barely the present, and lose sight of the future: then it is no wonder if you perceive disorder, confusion, and misery on all sides around you; it is no wonder that you should be tormented by doubt and solicitude, that you seek for the true calm and repose of your spirit in vain. Only soar above that which is visible and transitory; do but raise yourself in thought to the future world; make yourself acquainted with the eternity that awaits us: and the greatest part of the difficulties that perplex you will soon vanish away; you will perceive the wisest arrangement, the most admirable beauty in the constitution of the world and of your present state; you will find ample cause for contentment in all circumstances, and for bearing all the difficulties of this life with firmness and resolution. The considerations with which I mean, at present, to support your piety, will, I hope and trust, by the divine assistance and blessing, furnish you with more light and certainty on this matter.

I will represent to you the certain hope of a blessed immortality as the principal and purest source of tranquillity and satisfaction, and lay before your minds the inestimable value of the doctrines and promises the gospel delivers to us, with regard to futurity. And how can I better execute this design than by comparing the dark and melancholy life, and the dismal end of a man without hope, with the bright
and

and cheerful life and the comfortable end of a christian, who, relying on the promises and believing in the resurrection of our Saviour, is in expectation of a blessed immortality? Let us, therefore, set these two classes of men against each other, and, accompany them through the principal scenes of their lives; we shall clearly perceive which of them has the advantage of the other. We shall find, that even in this respect we have sufficient reason to exclaim, with the apostle in our text: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

To the man who knows nothing of futurity, who has no hope of immortality, all nature is a sealed book, and he is the greatest of all mysteries to himself. The design of his existence is incomprehensible to him; and of the purposes for which the other creatures that surround him were formed, and which so far exceed mankind in number, magnitude, and beauty, he knows still less. Every thing he sees and hears is to him an ænigma, to the solution whereof he can find no key. Represent to yourself a philosopher, who knows nothing of the gospel, and from whom futurity is concealed, profoundly contemplating the heaven and the earth and himself, and that you hear him discourse on these important objects in his comfortless solitude: what a doubtful, what a desultory, and disinal language he holds! Methinks I hear him exclaim, in a doleful voice, Why is the heaven so beautifully adorned, and to what end is this magnificence which nature so profusely displays
wherever

wherever I turn my view? What is the purpose of this great, this immense and ingenious structure? How gloomy, how painful to me is this prospect, so charming in itself, since I, perhaps now for the last time, enjoy it, and at all events shall shortly be deprived of all sentiment for ever! Were I shut up in some dark and dismal dungeon, had the day never shone upon my dwelling, my misery had then been tolerable: but here, like some malefactor, I sit imprisoned in a gorgeous palace, and can find nothing delightful, nothing agreeable in it, as expecting every moment the summons to death! — And what mean the faculties I feel within me? How am I benefited by the capacities I possess, but which I cannot employ? I behold many beauties, much magnificence, many astonishing effects before me. I am curious to investigate and understand them. But they are all incomprehensible to me: it is too high for me, I cannot attain unto it. My abilities fail me, and the light itself is darkness to me. — It is true, nature is beautiful; she is pleasant and charming; she invites my senses to abundance of pleasure and joy. But why, then, am I so restless and uneasy? Why cannot all these goods and beauties satisfy my mind? Whence proceeds the want I feel amidst this abundance, and the sentiment of which so often disturbs my liveliest pleasure, and always renders it incomplete? Why is my inquisitiveness never to be satisfied? Wherefore can I never cease from wishing? Whence comes the disgust that so quickly succeeds

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to enjoyment, and deprives all I earnestly longed after, in a moment, of its worth? Has the creator, then, called me out of nothing for my punishment? Has he given me such capacities, such desires, for the augmentation of my misery? To what purpose such great preparatives for the few and uncertain hours of life? — Thus does the hopeless mortal entangle himself in reflection. He finds himself in the most delightful garden; but it is all a labyrinth to him, to him it loses every charm from his want of a clue to guide him through it.

Before the christian, on the other hand, who expects immortality and an everlasting life to come, all these difficulties vanish away. He sees that it is a wise and bountiful God, who has placed him on the globe of the earth. He discovers the principal scope of things, and sets his mind at rest. The hope of futurity gives every thing, beautiful and great, he sees in the world, a heightened colour and a new display. The view of the boundless creation, that utterly perplexed and confounded yonder unhappy being, inspires the christian with admiration, and leads him to adore the Most High in serenity and satisfaction. In a sacred transport he exclaims, with the Psalmist:—

“ Lord, how glorious are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches!” Here I perceive eternal work: here I find materials for incessant discovery; here I see sources of knowledge and joy, whence rational beings may draw for ever, without any fear of their failing.

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How gloomy to me would be the contemplation of beautiful nature, how sad the sentiment of my powers, how troublesome my curiosity, how fertile in vexation my infinite desires, if I had to dread, in a few moments, the utter extinction of knowledge and enjoyment! But thou hast ordained me, o God, to life, to a life that shall know no end. At present my capacities are too great to exhibit themselves in all their strength. The body of death surrounds me, and fixes narrow limits to the workings of my mind. But soon shall I be freed from these bonds. My soul will soar aloft, and mount into the realms of light. She will rise at the resurrection of the just, united to a glorious, a spiritual, an incorruptible body. Then, o God, then shall I first behold thy works in all their grandeur, in all their pomp and beauty; then shall I be for ever employed in the investigation of them, and never be weary of admiring thy wisdom and power; then will all my desires be satisfied, and all my wishes accomplished. This is not the place of my final destination. It is but preparatory to a far better and more glorious state. Here it is my business, by generous occupations, to begin to qualify myself for the purer delights that await me in that world, and even what I call troublesome and imperfect in my present condition must, if I but properly apply it, promote my future perfection. Thus does the christian unravel the design of his being and the tendency of his powers; and thus does he dissipate the darkness that surrounds him on

earth, by the light of the gospel, which discloses to his view the fairest prospects in eternity.

Knowledge and virtue are, indeed, in and for themselves, and without regard to futurity, the strongest supports and the richest sources of our happiness. How, without knowledge, should we satisfy the curiosity of our minds? How, without virtue, should we tranquilize our hearts? How should we tame our turbulent passions, how should we controul them when they contend with each other, and bring them to a rational equilibrium, if we were destitute of knowledge and virtue? Let us now compare the mortal without hope with the christian that expects eternity, and see which of them has the greatest means and the greatest encouragements, to build his happiness on this foundation, and to render his life pleasant by knowledge and virtue. We will here allow them both to speak their natural sentiments, and thence it will plainly appear which of them has the advantage of the other. It is true, knowledge is ornamental to the mind; thus speaks the man whose hopes are confined to this life. I experience, that what thinks within me is capable of mounting above visible objects, and of piercing into the combination of things. I feel a great pleasure when I increase my perceptions, and can discover the traces of the wise author of nature. But how foolish and unprofitable is this my employment! Wisdom cannot be acquired without much toil. Truth never appears to her votaries till after many successful researches;

searches; one may fall into a hundred errors sooner than discover one truth. We must dedicate both day and night to the study of the latent operations of nature, ere we can acquire but a slight knowledge of her secrets. Mean time, the mind grows weary: its powers diminish; the body is weakened by strenuous exertions of it, and I become daily less capable of relishing the pleasures of sense. And what is, at length, the result of all my pains? After a few moments are past I shall be no more, and my laboriously acquired knowledge will likewise be no more. That which thinks in me, and often fondly soars above the clouds, will in a few days be lost to existence. The great discoveries I am striving to make will vanish into thin air, and my lofty imaginations, and my exalted conceptions, will be enveloped in the shades of everlasting night. Such is the language of the man who has no views beyond the grave. His endeavours after knowledge must necessarily appear ridiculous to himself; and he has little or nothing to encourage him in the prosecution of it.

No less feeble are his motives to virtue, and his purpose to follow her precepts will as easily fail. He withers like a flower that springs up in a parched soil, or on a stoney ground. Though great the native beauty of virtue, yet is it not sufficient to render the man who looks upon death as the period of his being constant in the love and the practice of it. Self-interest and the hope of advantage are the principal springs of human actions. Few men, however,
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are so enlightened as to perceive the combination of virtue with self-love and with real advantage. It costs a man labour and toil before he can arrive at a certain aptitude in goodness. He has many obstacles to surmount, and many difficulties to encounter, if he would fulfil his duties with exactitude, and conduct himself in all circumstances like a true christian. Riches and honours and days of ease, are not always the companions of integrity. How often, on the contrary, is it attended by poverty and scorn! Nay, is it any thing uncommon for the brightest virtue to be attacked with animosity and persecuted with vengeance? And yet it is impossible, without virtue, to acquire tranquillity of mind. Vice, on the other hand, is often arrayed in charms: she holds out, to her followers, power and authority, opulence and respect; she promises them abundance of pleasure. And yet vice renders us unhappy, and, so long as we are slaves to it, it is impossible for us to be calm and contented. Therefore, if a man would flee from vice; if he would love virtue; if he would thus live contented and happy: he must have certain impelling motives to do so. But do you imagine that any one, who has no punishment to fear in futurity and no reward to expect, is in a capacity to vanquish all temptations to evil, and devote himself to the service of insulted virtue with her mean appearance? Certainly not. Her beauty might probably attract him; he might even determine to follow her precepts: but how long would his resolution last? The first violent

lent temptation would put it to flight. Were he frankly to explain himself, it is thus he would speak: What will it profit me if I earnestly strive to be virtuous? What avails this unremitted attention to all my thoughts, my desires, and actions? These violent conflicts with my propensities and passions? How difficult it is to conquer oneself! And what benefit, what fruit, have I at last to expect from the victory? My probity will be taken for affectation, my piety will be imputed to melancholy; and I shall sit solitary in the dust, while others, of laxer principles, are lolling in the seats of honour! What have I to provide for but my body and my temporal affairs? Why should I quarrel with the amusements and delights that so many others enjoy? Shall I embitter my life by the restrictions of temperance, and for the sake of an imaginary intellectual pleasure, deny myself the more sure and substantial pleasures of sense? I have nothing to fear or to hope after death! So speaks the hopeless mortal: thus will his purposes to follow virtue be enfeebled. Thus he allows himself to be seduced by the wages of sin; and discontent and vexation, perplexity and fear, and every disastrous consequence of vice, at once take possession of his heart. From want of hope, he neglects the principal and purest sources of earthly happiness, and will always be becoming more unhappy than he was.

Quite otherwise is it with the christian, who expects immortality. He daily endeavours to augment his knowledge and to improve in virtue, and thus

daily promotes his true felicity. He can never be wanting in encouragement to firmness and zeal in his generous endeavours; and the futurity which is ever in his view, renders all he undertakes, in this design, not only easy but pleasant. How pleasant, he says in the simplicity of his heart, how pleasant to me are the meditations I indulge on the perfections of my God and father, the greatest and best of beings! What a pure delight streams through my soul, when I consider his ways and admire his works! How it exalts my spirit when I perceive the wisdom of the creator in his creatures, and trace out the marks of his greatness! How reviving my meditations on my divine redeemer, and his consolatory office! My knowledge indeed, in all respects, is very imperfect and weak; but this shall not dishearten me from constantly labouring, with renovated ardour, at its extension and improvement. In the matters of most importance I have the gospel for my guide, and am safe from all deception. By that I perceive an eternity approaching. The real knowledge I shall here collect, is out of the power of that spoiler death. Hereafter, in the world of spirits, I shall pursue my researches; what is false will evaporate from my attainments, and what is solid and just will form the basis of my higher perfection. Thus does the hope of futurity animate the christian; and the pleasure he procures from the contemplation of religion and nature will be ever increasing, as he has no need to fear it will ever be lost.

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The same influence, likewise, has hope upon his virtue, as the other source of human happiness. It renders him inflexible against every temptation to iniquity; and he renounces all with joy when he thinks on the future world. How easy, how blessed, he exclaims, is the service of my God! and how gracious is the Lord whom I serve, as so richly to requite my feeble endeavours in goodness, as to reward them for ever! No, my sincere assiduity to please him is not in vain. Godliness has the promises of this life and of that which is to come. The Lord commands me to believe that he is the rewarder of them that seek him. Cost what it will to gain the victory over myself, yet what glorious consequences attend the triumphs I shall obtain! Whoever, thro' the spirit, mortifies the deeds of the body, he shall live, he shall live for ever, his works shall follow him, and he will enjoy the fruit of his labour. Virtue, even at present, affords me the sincerest pleasure, and of this pleasure it is out of the power of death to rob me; it will for ever continue and for ever increase. And shall I allow myself to be turned aside from the path of rectitude and make shipwreck of my future happiness, for riches, for worldly honours, for sensual gratifications, for fugacious trifles? No; rather "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Such are the reflections of the christian, in expectation of a blessed

immortality. Though knowledge and virtue be a grievous burden to him who is destitute of hope, yet are they the sources of the most refined and exalted joys to the man that is sure of eternal life.

To proceed in our comparison of the hopeless mortal with the christian expecting everlasting happiness in the belief of the Saviour risen from the dead. Let us, thirdly, contrast their sentiments and demeanour in the day of adversity. How hard misfortunes bear on him who knows no other and no better life than this! So long as riches and honours and worldly joys, fall copiously to his share, he may find the means of concealing his wretchedness and his deplorable condition from himself. The dazzling glare of terrestrial prosperity may obfuscate his mind, and hinder him from steadfastly fixing his eyes within, and from feeling acutely the want of hope. But he is now harassed with disappointments and troubles. The fascinating charms of honour and respect that surrounded him vanish away: the rapturous frenzy, that for some moments prevented him from viewing his dismal prospects in futurity, is come to an end. He is now thrown back upon himself. He now sees clearly the emptiness and vanity of all things visible and earthly: he experiences how insufficient the possession and enjoyment of them are to the contentment of his infinite desires. Where shall he now find rest? Where will he seek comfort and solace? Since he is ignorant of the comfort which religion
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and the hope of immortality afford us, it is impossible for him to be completely at peace. All his ground of consolation consists in these sad ideas : It is thus with me ; and all my lamentations cannot alter my fate. And what now will be the effect of these ideas ? Will the afflictions he suffers lose their disagreeable and noxious qualities ? Will this cause them to abandon the attack ? Will he learn to consider and use them as means to a superior kind of happiness ? No ; if they be great they sink him into a certain insensibility, into a state alike devoid of pleasure and of pain ; and even this insensibility is very apt to be destroyed by intense and keen reflection, and to be succeeded by the most cruel anguish of mind. The mortal, who has nothing to hope for beyond the grave, thus has the full weight of misfortune to bear, without any means of alleviating his burden. If he lose his outward advantages, or possessions, he loses his all ; he knows of nothing that can repair his damage. The sources of his happiness are stopped ; how then can the enjoyment of it continue ? If he lose his friends, he loses them in his opinion for ever : his loss is irreparable ; and it is not to be wondered at, if an incurable sorrow takes possession of his soul, and he gives himself up to despair.

Consider, on the other hand, the christian in misfortune, and see how patient, how firm and how chearful, the hope of futurity makes him ! Indeed, he likewise feels afflictions when they come upon

him, and they frequently force him to shed bitter tears: he tenderly bemoans the loss of his friend; it hurts him when he is unjustly deprived of his honour, and he is obliged to undergo the cutting effects of contempt: it affects him when he is despoiled of his property, and thereby deprived of the means of generously affording relief, and the exalted delight it occasions: it gives him concern when he is prevented, by bodily infirmities or pains, from being of service to his neighbour and of use to the world; it cuts him to the quick when he sees virtue despised, and the noblest actions go unrewarded, or indeed repaid with injuries. In the mean time, however, he does not cease to be happy. He has learned how to moderate his grief from the doctrines of religion, and to procure himself comfort in the greatest misfortunes. Is he scorned and persecuted for his godliness and piety; he rejoices in this, that he suffers with Christ, as he knows that he shall also reign with him hereafter, and that “the light afflictions of this present time are not to be compared with the glory that shall hereafter be revealed in us.” Does he lose his temporal possessions; he is assured, that no man can take from him the testimony of a good conscience, the pleasure of virtue, and the grace of his God. He despises the advantages and treasures of the world, and fixes his view on the great reward the righteous judge shall give him at that day. And should the injustice of mankind compel him to abandon his
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country, and to wander, a wretched vagabond, on the earth; even this likewise he has learned how to bear. He looks up to a city whose builder and maker is God; he disregards whatever is visible, but directs his attention to the things that are not seen, and his conversation is in heaven. Are his friends taken from him by remorseless death, or does some secret dispensation remove him far from those whom his soul holds dear; the expectation of futurity can even mitigate these bitterest of sorrows. No distance, no separation, no death, can part him for ever from the friend of his heart. He will find him again in the kingdom of the just: he will there renew the bonds of amity with him, and, in that glorious state, nothing can disturb their generous and virtuous friendship. Thus the hope of the christian can never be put to confusion. It alleviates to him every calamity, which overwhelms the hopeless and plunges him in utter despair.

Let us, lastly, contemplate these two persons, while lying on the bed of death, and consider their different exits from the world. Approach the unhappy man who feels himself dying, and yet is totally destitute of all hope of another and better life. See how anxiety and dismay distort his visage, how he wrings his hands from perturbation and distress, what desponding looks he casts on the persons around him! Death appears to him in his most dreadful form, he is to him a king of terrors, and, poor man, he has no armour to put on against this

foe, nothing to comfort him in this most awful moment. He sees himself turning to dust, he sees the grave and corruption before him, and dare not hope that from this prison he shall ever be ransomed. The thought of his annihilation strikes a chillness through his soul, and fills it with unsurmountable terrors. Whatever has hitherto administered to him pleasure and joy, is now flown from his imagination and vanished for ever. He now, for the last time, sees the orb of day, the all-reviving sun, and is in expectation of an eternal night. His friends take leave of him for ever, and their charming converse, as he thinks, will never cheer him again. He must quit all things without any hope of acquiring more!— Can you figure to yourselves a more deplorable condition than this?

On the other hand, observe the christian, who, believing in the resuscitated Saviour, looks for a blessed immortality. How edifying are his last moments, and how calmly he meets death and eternity! Death is to him a messenger of peace; he announces to him deliverance and freedom; he conducts him to life, to a far better and completer life than the present. Why should he not willingly follow his call? Why should he not readily exchange this life for the other? He loses nothing that will not be restored to him or infinitely overbalanced. He has already a foretaste of the joys that await him; and, the nearer his end approaches, his countenance brightens, and his soul is more cheered. He hastens

to the place of his destination with a pious impatience, and may address his sorrowing friends with comfortable assurance: Weep not for me, o my friends, I shall soon embrace you in another life; continue to trust in your great Redeemer!" Thus dies the christian, full of hope, and enters into the joy of his Lord.

Such is the vast difference between the hopeless mortal, and the christian that expects a blessed eternity. Such are the incomparable advantages the one possesses over the other. To the former all nature is an unfathomable mystery, and the purport of his own existence is beyond his view: the latter knows to what he is ordained, and the creation is to him the mirror of the perfections of its author. Knowledge and virtue, the sources of our happiness, are shut against the one, and he has little or nothing to induce him to apply to them for repose: to the other, to the christian, these sources of pleasure stand constantly open; and in the knowledge of truth and the practice of virtue, he finds the most permanent joy. The former sinks under the weight of misfortune: the latter rejoices even in tribulations, and no accident can divest him of his happiness. The former loses all courage in death, and shudders at the approach of his dissolution: the latter, the just man, has even hope in his death, and first begins properly to live, when he seems to be dying. Must you not confess, then, my brethren,
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that, as christians, we possess infinitely greater advantages than the unbeliever? Must you not allow, with the apostle in our text, that we should be the most miserable of all mankind, if our hopes were bounded by this life, if, after it, we had no other, no better to expect? How many causes, therefore, have we to extol and commemorate our risen Redeemer, who has brought life and undecaying existence to light by his doctrine? How can we be grateful enough to him for the victory he has obtained over death and the grave, for the glorious revelation he has given us of futurity! Does not such a teacher, such a benefactor, merit all our veneration? Does he not merit our entire reliance, our most willing obedience? What groveling sentiments shall we not betray, how much should we abhor ourselves if we despised the gospel of the son of God, if we undervalued his promises, and rejected the felicity to which we are called? No, no; we have the happiness of being christians; we have the hope of everlasting life. Let us prize this happiness as it deserves; let us walk worthy of this hope. Let us break forth in shouts of triumph to our glorified Redeemer, who has delivered us from the dread of annihilation, and given us the assurance of everlasting life. But let us also shew, by our whole deportment, what lofty expectations we have. How ill would it become us, christians, to seek our rest, our satisfaction, our happiness, in the things
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of this world, since we are ordained to eternity! How ill would it become us, to be inconsolable at the loss of our earthly possessions, or of our dearest friends, like the heathens who are destitute of hope! How irrationally should we act, if we should only provide for the body, to the neglect of our soul! How bitterly shall we hereafter lament our foolish choice, if we prefer the hard bondage of vice to the easy service of virtue, and so lose the pure delights and the eternal felicities of heaven! Oh animate then yourselves to a generous and holy conduct, ye christians, created and redeemed to an immarcessible glory! Set loose your hearts from every thing fugacious and earthly. Never attach your desires and views to the objects on this side the grave. Raise yourselves often in thought to eternity; endeavour to excite and confirm in yourselves a heavenly mind, and let your whole behaviour be regulated by the future world. Evince in all things, even in the most calamitous events of life, that you are christians, who look not so much on the things that are seen, as on those that are not seen. Do honour to the religion you profess, by a steady and chearful virtue, and take fast hold on the hope that Christ has given you. It will not fail you, even in death; and you will enter rejoicing into the kingdom of your God.

Easter-Day,

SERMON XXV.

Of spiritual Experiences.

O GOD, our gracious father, that thou hast called us to christianity is a benefit for which we can never sufficiently thank thee! A benefit, which in regard to knowledge and morals, to means of improvement and peace of mind yields us the greatest advantages over the rest of the inhabitants of the earth! A benefit which might and would afford us as great advantages over them in regard to wisdom, to virtue, to real felicity, if we employed it aright! But of this not all of us, — alas, perhaps only few of us, can boast. No, christianity is certainly not what it might and ought to be to us! No, we are not yet become by it so wise, so good, so chearful and happy, as we might! We now confess and feel it, o merciful father; we are now ashamed before thee of our ingratitude and our negligence;

negligence; we now wish to become better christians, and to experience more of the blessed efficacy of the christian religion. Oh let this confession, this sentiment, this remorse be truly salutary to us and our wishes be actually accomplished. Teach us to understand christianity in its true nature and end, let it be thoroughly important to us, open our hearts to its divine, efficacious influence, to its all-quicken- ing spirit, and let it dwell and govern in us, and re- form us into such persons as are christians indeed and in truth! Bless to that end the discourse of thy servant! Let his remonstrances find admission, adhere deeply in our minds, and there effect much good and happiness! We pray thee for it as thy children and as the followers of thy son Jesus, addressing thee farther, in filial confidence, as he prescribed: Our father, &c.

JOHN, vii. 17.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.

THERE are three ways of arriving at the knowledge of truth and certainty: reason, faith, and experience. Reason, in her inquiries, lays down certain general propositions, received of all men, and absolutely irrefragable, as her groundwork; she connects and compares known truths together, and thence, by a series of just consequences, derives others, which were either not at all, or not clearly enough known to her before; she traces things up to their first principles, and from them demonstrates and explains them.—Faith relies on the testimony of others: it examines the accounts that are given of any matter, and the credibility of the witnesses by whom they are reported; it compares the different parts of the history together, and with the circumstances wherein they are said to have happened; and whenever it finds a sufficient capacity and integrity in the witnesses, and a correspondence in their narratives, it yields its acquiescence.—Experience, lastly, instructs us of the things that fall under our knowledge, or
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of the imprefſion and effects they produce on our eyes, our ears, or the other organs of ſenſe; ſhe gives us alſo to obſerve the inward motions and alterations that ariſe either in our mind or body, and thus teaches us to form a judgment both of our natural and our ſpiritual or moral ſtate. Would we then render our knowledge as perfect as we may, we muſt take all theſe three different ways for knowing the truth, and for being certain of it. This is neceſſary and uſeful, not merely as to human knowledge, but likewise in regard of religion. We ſhould endeavour to obtain, not only an hiſtorical, but alſo a rational and experimental knowledge of every truth, as far as its nature and our ſituation will allow. The more numerous the evidences we have of any matter, the greater will our certainty of it be, and the more completely ſhall we be ſatisfied about it. There are indeed doctrines in religion, which we can only know through faith; and the truth of them, in reſpect of us, depends ſolely on hiſtorical narrative. But others, and thoſe the greateſt number, are of ſuch a nature, that they are likewise to be known by reaſon and experience; and, in ſuch caſes, we may very advantageouſly blend theſe ſeveral ways for arriving at the truth. Revealed religion is chiefly founded on the narratives and the teſtimony of perſons who lived many ages before our times. Theſe perſons relate to us, in their writings, the lamentable conſequences produced by ſin in the condition of mankind, and

the wise arrangements established by God for the correction and restoration of it; they discover to us the counsels and determinations of the Most High; they inform us of the service he requires of us, and of the conditions we must fulfil, if we would partake of his favour and be happy for ever. These narratives are too important by far for being received and adopted by us, without examining the authority on which they stand. We should therefore discuss the characters and the credibility of the narrators on whose authority they depend, and thus endeavour to gain a certainty of their truth. Thus we arrive by the first way at knowledge and certainty; thus faith arises in us. But our knowledge may be still more perfect; it may be brought to a higher degree of evidence and certainty, if we pursue the other way, and consult reason. Though reason might not have discovered the doctrines of revealed religion by her own penetration, yet may she pronounce upon them after having been once informed of them. She may deduce many of them from the first principles of human knowledge; she may shew us their various and close connection with other truths already known; she may reconcile the seeming contradictions between them; she may present us with new evidence in behalf of their truth; in short, she may draw many useful and important consequences from them. Her concurrence makes these doctrines the more acceptable, and our certainty of them must be so much the greater. But here

here we are not to stop. In regard to religion we should likewise take the way of experience; we should endeavour to become certain of its truth and excellency by our own sensations. On this experimental knowledge of religion all indeed depends; since nothing can supply the want of it, and because all the other kinds of knowledge, unless they are connected with this, are incapable of rendering us happy. We must, however, be extremely cautious on this head, lest we deceive ourselves, and fall on such paths as are very dangerous both to ourselves and others.

That I may warn you of this wrong course, I have determined to treat somewhat circumstantially of a matter that has so great an influence on our tranquillity and happiness, and to set it in as plain a light as the short time allowed to these discourses will permit. The words of Jesus, which I have read to you, present us with a fit occasion for these reflections. What can he mean but this: If you suffer the doctrine which I deliver to you, in the name of God, to have its due effect upon you; if you follow my precepts, and reduce them to practice, you will infallibly feel their godly power; you will thus become better, more tranquil and more pious; you will perceive, by experience, that my doctrine has a celestial origin; that I am not a mere philosopher, but address you as a messenger from God. Our Lord intimates, therefore, that a man may acquire an experimental knowledge of

the truth of religion, and that it is an excellent means of being fully assured of it.

Let us now investigate the nature and quality of these spiritual experiences, and at the same time remark the principal rules to be observed in judging of them, in order to preserve us from the ordinary mistakes.

The term spiritual experience is generally used in a very indefinite sense, and they who boast the most about it have frequently the most obscure and erroneous conception of it. They give this appellation to every feeling that is rather strong, every extraordinary motion of the blood, without first examining whence these feelings and emotions arise. They continually confound the imagination and experience together, and often look upon the most natural changes in their body and mind as something extraordinary and supernatural. When they are desired to explain their experiences, or to shew whence they arise, they evade the question by declaring the whole of the matter to be incomprehensible. But were they at the pains to inquire a little into their own nature, and inform themselves somewhat of the manner wherein the mind acts upon the body, and the body upon the mind: then many of the incomprehensibilities, at which they astonish themselves and others, would fall to the ground, and they would obtain a complete solution of what they at present regard as an inexplicable mystery. When we speak of experiences in common life,
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every one who understands the language knows what we mean by it : we denote nothing else by it than that we feel the effects of particular things, and are conscious of it. Thus we experience, for example, the power of the sun, the property of the air, the violence of the wind, and the like : that is, we feel the effects that these things have upon us, the alterations they produce in our bodies, and we are conscious of it. Apply this now to spiritual experiences, and you will have a plain and just comprehension of them. What are they but the feelings of the good effects religion has upon us, of the happy changes it works in our sentiments, our judgments, our inclinations, our actions, and our pleasures? This idea is perfectly clear. It coincides with the nature of our mind ; and we need only attentively consider what we call spiritual experiences, for finding that they are no otherwise to be described. I will explain myself farther on this matter. The doctrines of religion have not only an enlightening, but also an affecting and convincing power. They are intended not only to rectify our understanding, but also to correct our inclinations. They are intended to purify our hearts, to settle our views and affections, and move us to good and virtuous resolutions. If then they produce in us such effects, our knowledge is lively ; or, which is the same thing, we get an experimental knowledge of the power and efficacy of the doctrines of religion. A few examples may best serve to illustrate

this. Every devout christian considers the gracious dispositions of God towards sinners; he pursues, with silent attention, the wise and kind methods which the Most High has ordained for reclaiming and restoring the human race; he admires the greatness of the love displayed in our behalf: he makes the application of it to himself. "Me likewise, unworthy as I am," says he to himself, "even me hath God loved; even on me has he shed his compassions!" These thoughts affect him; and fill his heart with the sincerest returns of love to his infinite benefactor. He has therefore an experimental knowledge of the force of what religion teaches us of the love of God. And how? He feels the good effects that idea has upon him, and is thereby moved to pious resolutions. So is it likewise with the other doctrines of religion. When, therefore, the consideration of the indecency, the loathsomeness, the pernicious consequences of sin, and the exceeding great displeasure God has towards it, creates in us an actual abhorrence of all kinds of vice; when the consideration of the beauty and amiableness of virtue, the reasonableness and excellence of the law of God and Christ, and the great obligations we are under to our creator and deliverer, inspires us with a predominant inclination to all good: we then experience the sanctifying efficacy of these doctrines. When the consideration of the wisdom, omnipotence and goodness of God, the idea of his holy and irreproachable government,

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and his watchful care over the devout; when reflections on the nature and design of our present state, and its connection with the future eternity, alleviate our distresses, tranquillize our heart, make us firm and courageous in misfortune, and teach us to trust in the help of the Lord: then have we an agreeable experience of the efficacy of these consolations; we feel how powerful the support of religion is to mankind in afflictions. Spiritual experiences consequently are, in general, nothing more than the consciousness of the salutary effects which the maxims, the rules of conduct, the affecting and consoling arguments of religion produce in us. These effects however arise from two different causes: one being the proper and peculiar force of religion, and the other the particular assistance of the spirit of God.

The doctrines of religion have in and of themselves a natural power to move and to convince all those that embrace them, and to direct their conduct this way or that. This power they have in common with all other truths. No sooner have we obtained a plain, just, vivid, and certain knowledge of some important truth, but immediately it has likewise a stronger or weaker degree of influence on our heart, producing in us either joy or sorrow, hope or fear, pleasure or displeasure, and impelling us to act consistently with the perceptions we have gained. Now, as the doctrines of religion are in their nature much greater, much more elevated and

important, than all others; as they stand in the closest connection with our present and future happiness; as they ground their authority on a revelation from God: so must they necessarily have a greater power to act upon the will, and it is impossible for us to behold them with a certain degree of perspicuity and vivacity, and to apply them home, without feeling that they have an effect upon our desires and aversions, our inclinations and abhorrences, without being moved to follow the information we have acquired, and to make it the rule of our whole deportment.

This natural power of the doctrines of the gospel, is however enhanced by the particular support which God will grant us to our moral improvement and to the performance of our duties. Holy scripture informs us, that God frequently operates in a remarkable manner on the hearts of mankind and by the methods of his providence puts them in such a frame, that truth can display itself to them in its full force. This happens principally at the beginning of conversion. Then the spirit of the Lord by his word, by certain favourable circumstances in which the person is placed, or in some other way unknown to us, removes the deep-rooted prejudices of the sinner against his service and against true devotion, and thus takes away the impediments which had hitherto withheld him from the love of truth and from obedience to it. We may comfort ourselves likewise in other important

circumstances, which we cannot however accurately define, of the particular aid of the supreme being, and we may in general believe, that the spirit of God will assist every sincere christian in a more extraordinary manner, whenever the ordinary means of salvation should not be sufficient to support his doubtful faith, or his conflicting virtue.

Since therefore our natural capacities as well as the peculiar force of the doctrines of religion, and the particular operations of the holy spirit concur to produce in us what we call spiritual experiences : we are not to wonder, that we are often deceived when we would state the peculiar cause of these or the other emotions and alterations that arise in us. We neither know the way in which our spirits act, nor the manner of God's proceedings so thoroughly, as in all cases properly to distinguish them, and clearly to explain them. We shall, however, avoid many mistakes, we shall rightly judge of our moral state, and uncommonly facilitate the practice of religion, if we observe the remarks and precepts I shall now lay before you.

In the first place, we are not to take every good emotion that arises in us for the particular act of the holy spirit. God is indeed all in all. To his influence all creatures are indebted for the continuance of their existence and their lives. His providence extends no less over spirits than over bodies. He supports the faculties of our minds by his mighty will ; he elevates and strengthens them when

and how he pleases. On him we entirely depend, and without him we can do nothing. But God acts not without means where ordinary means are sufficient; he performs no miracle without a weighty cause. He deals with us as with rational beings: he will have us to use the capacities he has given us; not treating us as machines, which require continually to be pushed on, or to be wound up for reaching their proper effect. He therefore that takes every livelier kind of thought, every acuter feeling excited in a delicate mind in reflecting on some important truth, for the consequences of an immediately divine influence, he plainly declares thereby that he understands not the nature of the human soul, that he is accustomed to make incomprehensible mysteries of things that are deducible from natural causes, and that he is infected by fanatical principles. We must indeed, as I have already remarked, attribute all that we think or do to God, as the father of lights, from whom all good gifts originally proceed; but we do no honour to the holy spirit, we render our piety suspected, and make religion itself contemptible, when we ascribe to its operations all the emotions of our hearts, which are not unfrequently inordinate and impure enough. This erroneous idea has already given occasion to many abuses among christians. They that suffer themselves to be blinded by it, generally hold their perceptions, their undertakings and their actions, to be much greater and more important than

than indeed they are; and it is by no means uncommon for such people to attribute to themselves a sort of infallibility; at least they cannot easily endure contradiction. They imagine it impossible for them to mistake when they follow their inward impulses; and the single assertion, It is so in my mind, stands them instead of all reason for their opinions.

In the second place, we must carefully distinguish between the influence our natural constitution, and our outward circumstances, have upon our exercises of piety and our moral conduct, from the operations of religion and the spirit of God, and not take them for spiritual experiences of a peculiar order. You know, my brethren, that our soul is most intimately connected with our body; and that no considerable alteration can happen to the one, but a correspondent alteration is to be perceived in the other. When every part of our body is in health, when the mixture and motion of its juices go properly on, when we feel neither pain nor languor, then our mind is alert and active in all its functions; it operates freely, and without impediment, and it costs us no trouble to think with order and precision. Reason then prevails over all the inferior powers of our soul, and we contemplate the truth in an unclouded light, though not with violent passion. But, on the other hand, if disorderly or extraordinary alterations arise in our body: our way of thinking is presently altered and our mind no longer acts in so regular a manner as it was wont to do.

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For instance, if our senses be affected by agreeable objects; if we find ourselves in a delightful country, where nature presents herself in her complete magnificence, and all living creatures rejoice; if our heart be affected by the sweet melody of harmonious sounds: then our juices take a quicker motion; we are transported with joy, our thoughts flow on in a more rapid succession, and with increasing vivacity and vigour; and, if we then reflect on the sublime doctrines of religion, the pleasure we feel in them must of necessity be uncommonly great, they must often be perfectly extatic. On the other hand, if our body be attacked by any disorder; if the juices become thick, and the blood creep heavily and sluggishly along in the veins; if the nerves become relaxed and feeble: the effects upon the mind will be proportionate to these circumstances. We shall find it laborious to think with order and continuity; our thoughts will slowly succeed each other, with repeated interruptions; they will always have something obscure about them, and we shall endeavour in vain to render our ideas so clear and lively as at other times. The most important, the sublimest truths, will then make little impression on us. We may hear or read the most elegant sentiments and descriptions, and yet be cold and indifferent to them. We shall flee from joy, and resign ourselves to a predominant melancholy. The same thing may almost be advanced of the outward circumstances in which we are placed. When we
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lead an unfollicitous, a convenient and tranquil life; when we can enjoy the delights of friendship, and the agreeable conversation of a well-cultivated acquaintance: our thoughts will certainly flow more freely, our feelings will be more lively, and we shall consider and practise religion with greater chearfulness and ardour, than when we are oppressed by cares for food and raiment; when we are in low and adverse circumstances, when one misfortune lays siege to us after another; or when we are obliged chiefly to frequent melancholy and dejected persons. So great is the influence our state of body and our outward condition have on the agency and operations of our mind. May we not then be liable to mistake, when we represent these alterations which so naturally arise, and are so easily explained, as supernatural dispensations, as extraordinary events? May we not deceive ourselves when we esteem any sentiment rather livelier than common, any more joyous emotion, as immediate consolations from on high, or as raptures imparted from heaven? May we not vex and torment ourselves in vain, when we consider the indifference and comfortlessness which take their rise in the disease of the body as a dereliction of God, or as a token of his displeasure and his wrath?

Neither are we, in the third place, to reckon a particular degree of vivacity of sentiment as an essential ingredient of spiritual experiences. This is a hurtful prejudice of many christians, to whom however,

ever, we cannot deny a sincere affection for goodness. They insist too much on sensual and violent emotions, and think their private acts of devotion are not of the genuine sort without them. Their sorrow for sin must be accompanied by scalding tears; their joy in God and his salvation must be rapturous and extatic; their aspirations after eternal felicity must be ardent and transporting, before they can be satisfied with their frame of mind. A rational detestation of all iniquity, an actual abstinence from it, a voluntary and considerate design of uniformly persevering in the service of God and virtue, a calm reliance on the perfections and wise providence of the Most High, an immovable expectation of the future glory, is not enough for them. Their blood must have at least as much share in their devotion as their rational understanding, and perhaps a greater, for rendering them satisfied with it. How much useless pains do not such persons often take for rousing within them those sensual and vehement sensations! How uneasy, how agitated, how distressed, are they not, when they cannot raise them to such a height as they wish, and which they often regard as indispensably necessary! Such a christian, for instance, with more sincerity than judgment, betakes himself to prayer in his solitude; he humbles himself before God on account of his manifold sins; he confesses the unrighteousness and infamy of his conduct; he abhors his failings and transgressions; he calls on
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the Lord for compassion and pardon. Sin is, above all things, grievous to him; he wishes for nothing so much as to be freed and purified from it; he forms the most serious resolutions never more to obey his irregular lusts, but to live a life of righteousness and piety; he devotes himself, with all his heart, to a willing and faithful obedience to all the commands of God. In this manner he has a rational and just experience of the efficacy the doctrines of religion possess of bringing their confessors to contrition, and of arming them against wickedness and sin; and he may safely rest in this, and strenuously set about reducing his pious resolutions to practice. But he is too much accustomed to sensual ideas and feelings to be satisfied with it. During his prayer he has felt no violent anguish on account of his sins; he has had no feeling of the horrors of hell; his tears would not flow so copiously as he could have wished; his assurance of grace was not quite so sensible, and did not move him so forcibly, as in other circumstances and at other times. All this appears to him suspicious; he laments over his hard and insensible heart; he bewails his deplorable dereliction of God; he reprobates the imperfection of his devotion; he imagines that God has turned away his face from him, and that he is utterly forsaken of heaven. These thoughts plunge him into the deepest distress, and render the good effects which religion had operated in him, at least for a length of time, intirely

tirely fruitless. Tormenting anxieties and troubles take possession of his soul; and nothing will restore him to tranquillity and peace till he be able to call forth those tears, and excite those sensible emotions, those violent feelings, which he has hitherto endeavoured in vain to produce. Then, for the first time, he experiences, according to his idea, the bitterness of sin; then tastes peace with God and trusts in his forgiveness; then he seems to hear the Almighty say to him, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."—But, how liable to error is such a conduct as this! Does religion then consist in these sensual feelings, in a more rapid or more sluggish circulation of the blood and the animal spirits, or in clear and just perceptions, firm and unforced resolutions, and sincere endeavours to walk in general after its precepts? Are we not to worship God in spirit and in truth? Is not the christian worship a reasonable service? Must we found our tranquillity, our comfort, and our hopes, on things that are not in our power, that depend on the fluctuating state of our bodies, of our health, our outward circumstances, and frequently even on accidents? Are we to make the discharge of our duties unnecessarily irksome and oppressive, and thus even hinder our progress in virtue? Are we to live in a perpetual turmoil and confusion, and never enjoy the pleasing tranquillity which true virtue provides for her friends? No. The more rational, gentle, and quiet our experiences of the power of religion be, the less
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fenfual and accidental they are : fo much the better and more infallible are they.

Fourthly, we fhould neither prefcribe our perfonal experiences and feelings as a rule for others, nor make the experiences and feelings of others a law to us. The effects which the doctrines of religion produce in different perfons, are, as we have already noticed, as various as their temperaments, their fagacity and other circumftances ; indeed, not essentially, but yet in quality and degree. With one perfon they are more lively and fenfual ; with another, more rational and intellectual. Many have received from nature a foft and pliant heart, and are moved on all occafions in the moft fenfible manner ; their fenfes and their imagination are ever alert and bufy. They have an influence on all their actions. Do they confider their failings and fins ? Sorrow pervades their foul, and burfts from their eyes in a torrent of tears. Do they reprefent to themfelves the grace of God, the love of the Redeemer, or the blifs of heaven ? They are loft as it were in the moft delightful admiration, and their joy proceeds to extafy. But, do not fuch chriftians deceive themfelves, when they imagine that the degree of sorrow, or of joy, to which they attain, is a general and effential characteristic of true chriftianity ? Are they not over-hafly in their judgment, when they reckon all for unconverted and vicious perfons, who in thefe refpects cannot equal them ? We muft therefore never conclude, from what we feel
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and experience, that all sincere worshipers of God and Christ ought to feel in the same manner and to the same degree. No more should we take the experiences of others for the unqualified model of our imitation. Many a sincere christian, by not attending to this rule, has embarrassed himself in the greatest difficulties. He reads, or he hears, that this or the other saint, in his penitence, fell into an uncommon and continued sorrow; that he felt an extraordinary remorse, and for a long time was inconsolably afflicted, and, day and night, lamented and bewailed his sins — and the like. From want of knowledge, he conceives this to be a necessary part of real repentance, and that he must experience the very same before he can properly say he is converted. Accordingly he torments himself so long, till he thinks he is come up to the pattern before him; let his nature and constitution oppose itself as strongly as it may. But can such violent and unnatural feelings deserve the name of spiritual and godly experiences of the power of religion? Can you possibly imagine, my brethren, that these agitations can be agreeable to the author of our nature, who requires of us a voluntary worship and a rational obedience? Certainly not. He has indeed patience with these infirmities; but they are contrary to his designs, in opposition to his will, and can only tend to the prejudice of him that entertains them.

Lastly, in these spiritual experiences we should never forget the enlightening of our mind, and the
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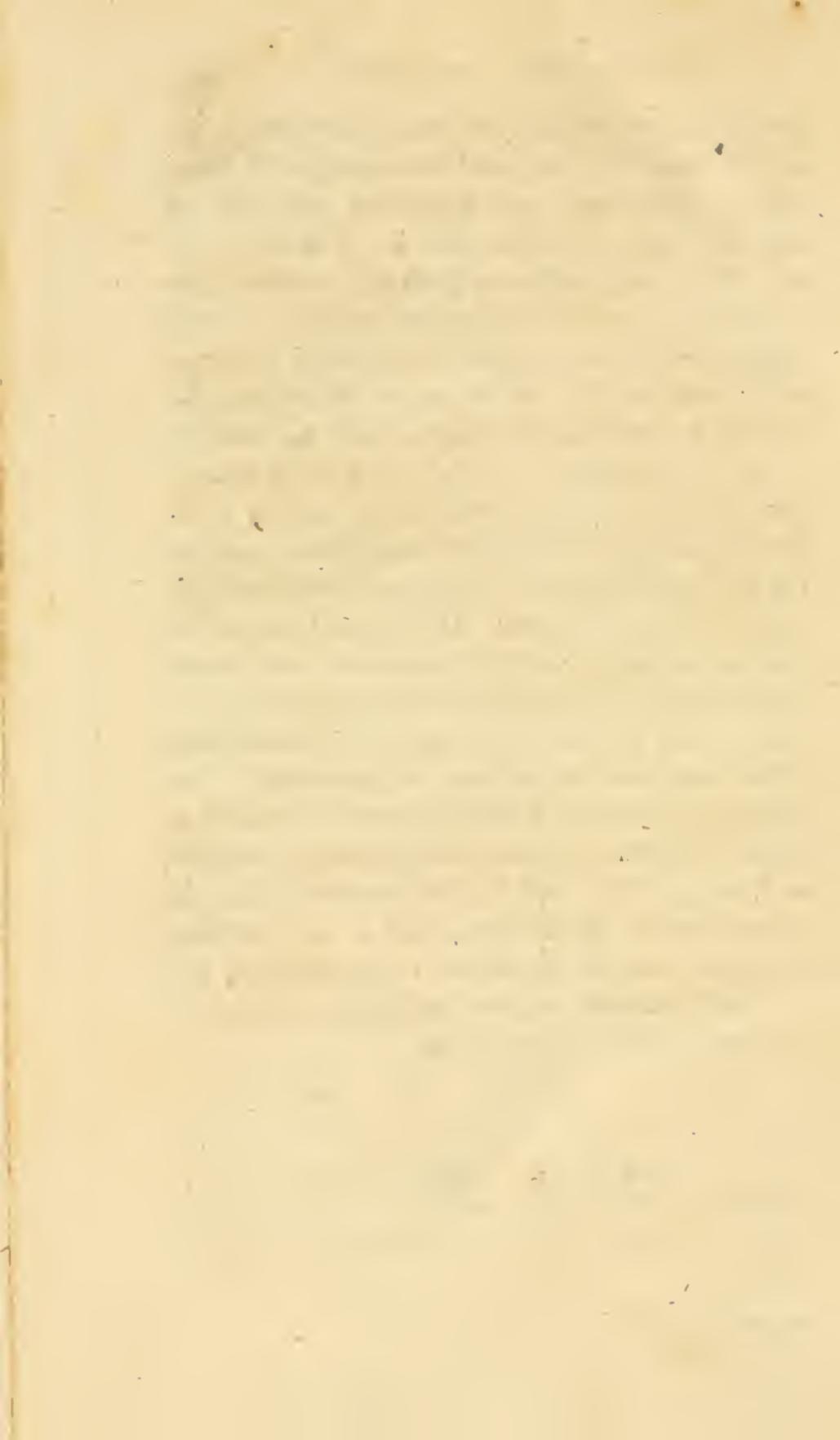
use of our reason. This is a common failing with numbers of christians. They are so much employed in exciting sensual feelings in themselves, and in obtaining what they often falsely term spiritual experience, that they give themselves little or no concern about cultivating the nobler part of their being, their rational mind, and bringing it to a higher degree of perfection. They prefer the violent ebullitions of their blood to the tranquil operations of reason, and seem to be all sensation. Their knowledge is therefore generally very obscure and imperfect; they regard the augmentation and improvement of it as merely a bye-work of little importance. Their feelings are to compensate the injuries of ignorance and error: they think sentiment the safest guide. Nay, they go so far as to scorn the suggestions of reason, are extremely careful how they use her precepts or follow her light. Such notions directly lead to fanaticism, and to all the extravagances attendant on it. So soon as we reject the use of reason, we are perpetually in danger of being deceived and misled by our own hearts. Experience and fancy are very nearly allied: how are we to discriminate them from each other, unless we are assisted and guided in our judgment by an enlightened and trained understanding? And what is all our religion and virtue, if it be not founded on knowledge and certainty? Can we emancipate ourselves from the bonds of superstition; if we act not from argument, but merely from impulse? In-

deed, the more clear our knowledge is, the more justly and solidly we accustom ourselves to think ; so much the more gentle and orderly will our emotions be, so much the more rational and consistent our spiritual experiences. But it even brings us nearer to perfection ; it gives our worship and our virtue a real value ; it renders our conduct harmonious, and thus fits us by degrees, for that pure and exalted devotion in which the inhabitants of heaven are employed.

These, my pious hearers, are the principal rules we should observe, in regard to spiritual experiences, if we would be safe from the extravagances of superstition and the follies of fanaticism. You will much mistake my meaning however if you draw from it this false conclusion ; that all that is said of spiritual experiences arises from fancy, and that the bare knowledge of religion is sufficient to salvation. No, none can be a true christian, who does not experience the divine efficacy of the doctrine which he confesses and manifest the fruits of it in his whole deportment. Your knowledge, christians, must be lively and active ; it must moderate your affection for earthly things ; it must purify your hearts and direct all your inclinations to worthy objects ; it must reform, renew, amend, and regulate your entire demeanour, if you would be rendered happy by it. Try yourselves by these marks, and rest not in the outward privileges and tokens of christians. If you can reflect upon sin without hatred and aversion ;

sion ; on virtue and piety without esteem and love ; on the favour of God and the example of Jesus, without admiration and gratitude ; the bliss of heaven without aspirations after it ; if all these have but a feeble or no influence at all on your resolutions and actions : you are then of the number of those hypocrites who deny by their works what they confess in their words. Would you avoid the dreadful lot, which, as such, you must expect for eternity, expand your hearts to the salutary effects of the religion of Jesus. Let the doctrines it teaches us be powerful in you. Follow their suggestions, and testify the integrity of your faith by an unremitted diligence in all good works. Call upon God for his powerful assistance in these endeavours, and beware of grieving the spirit of grace by pertinacious opposition. Thus will you know, as our Saviour declares in the text, that his doctrine is from God. You will experience that it has the power to render its sincere followers virtuous, holy, tranquil, chearful, and happy ; that it will support you in all trials, and comfort you in all afflictions ; that it will not abandon you even in the shades of death ; and that you will hereafter obtain the actual possession of that vast felicity it assures us of.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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