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S E R M O N S
ON THE
MISSION AND CHARACTER OF CHRIST,
AND ON
THE BEATITUDES:
COMPREHENDING WHAT WERE PREACHED
BEFORE

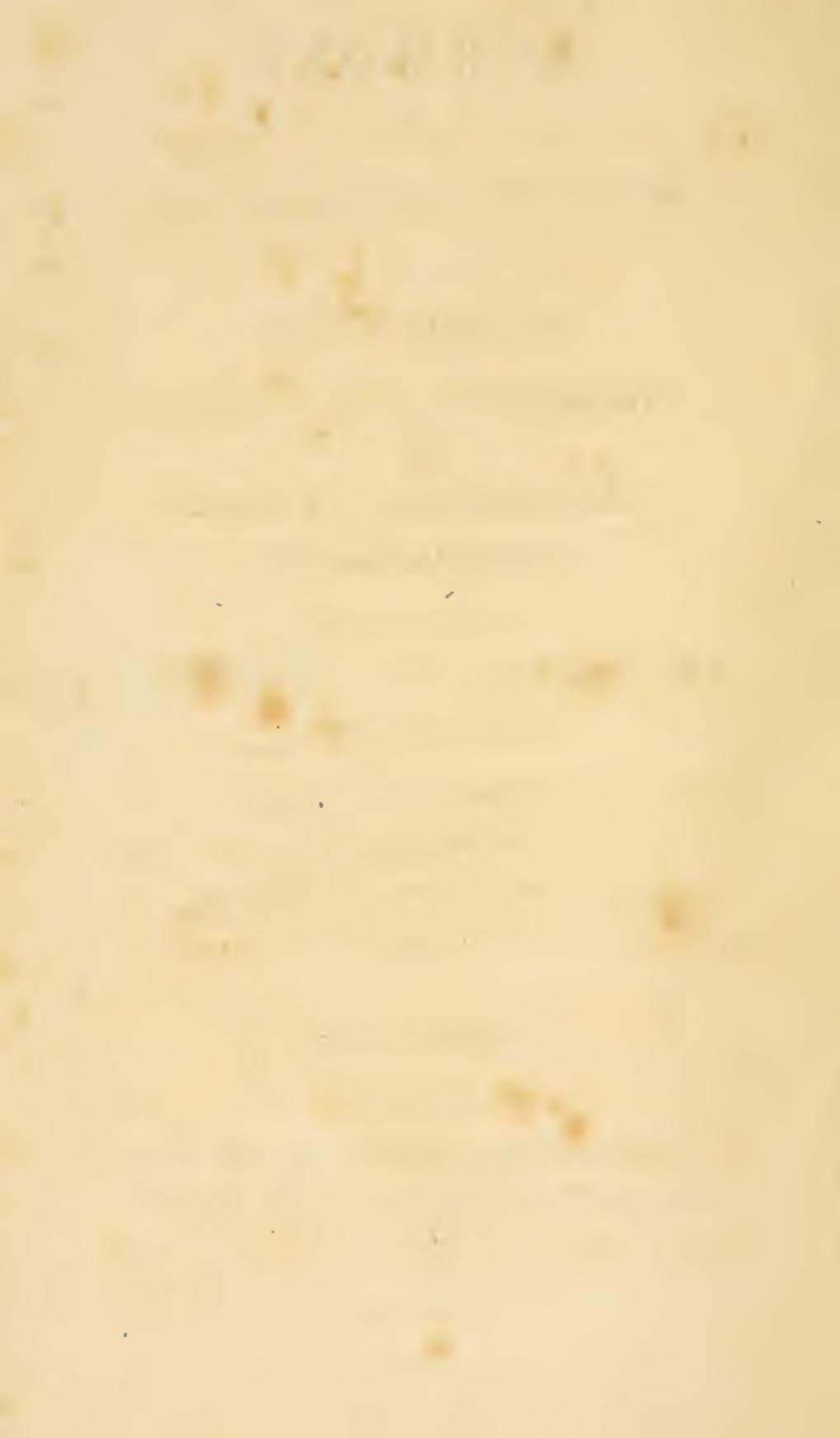
THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,
IN THE YEAR MDCCCIII.

AT THE LECTURE
FOUNDED BY THE LATE JOHN BAMPON, M. A.
CANON OF SALISBURY:
1803
BY JOHN FARRER, M. A.
LECTURE
OF QUEEN'S COLLEGE,
RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF
ST. CLEMENT EASTCHEAP AND ST. MARTIN ORGARS,
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1804.



TO
THE RIGHT REVEREND
GEORGE
LORD BISHOP OF LINCOLN,
AND
DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL CHURCH,
LONDON.

MY LORD,

IN publishing these Discourses I am prompted by a powerful motive to the liberty now taken of inscribing them to your Lordship. It was by a former Work of a kindred nature that I had first the happiness of engaging your notice: And I am anxious to embrace the opportunity thus afforded, of making my public acknowledgement for the creditable station in which you have lately placed me. The value of your Patronage is to me much enhanced by the consideration, that

in the field of Christian Theology your Lordship holds a distinguished and venerable name. The Benefit conferred by so respectable a Patron reflects an honour on the Receiver himself, and also stamps a credit on his Professional Exercises.

I remain,

My Lord,

With profound respect and gratitude,
Your Lordship's most obliged
and most obedient Servant,

JOHN FARRER.

ST. CLEMENT'S, LONDON,
1804.

P R E F A C E.

THE Subject of this Volume comprehends an extensive range in Divinity, as, when considered in its different views, it embraces both the Testimonies of Christian Faith and the Elements of Christian Doctrine. On this account the Author trusts that it may be regarded as no unsuitable Thesis for that Course of Lecture Sermons, which he has been appointed to preach before the University of Oxford.

Without attempting a more systematic form, the method here pursued is to take for the grounds of the several Discourses certain Texts or Portions of the Prophecies of Isaiah and of the Gospels, which appear to be most replete with argument on the subject proposed. This plan may be thought more favourable to unity of design in detached or single Sermons, than in a Course of Sermons considered as a Whole. Yet in this point of view he presumes his work is not materially deficient, as from the order here adopted some appearance may be traced of regular progression,

progression, from the Evidences to the Principles, from the Principles to the Duties, from the Duties to the Motives, of the Christian Religion.

It may readily be conceived, that a subject of this nature cannot always without disadvantage be exactly apportioned to a prescribed number of Lectures or a limited measure of Discourse. This he hopes will be accepted as his apology to the University for taking a larger compass in his work, when presented to the Public, than he had opportunity of doing, when delivered from the Pulpit. It may be proper to state, that two additional Sermons are inserted, namely, the Second and the Fifth, adapted to the two great Solemnities of the Christian Year, the Nativity and the Passion of our Lord. And the Portion of discourse on the Beatitudes, which was delivered in two Parts, is amplified into a series of Sermons corresponding to the subjects of the several Beatitudes.

At the same time he hopes, that this Enlargement of his Plan will be admitted as some excuse for the unavoidable delay of the publication.

EXTRACT
FROM THE
LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT
OF THE LATE
REV. JOHN BAMPTON,
CANON OF SALISBURY.

—“ I give and bequeath my Lands and Estates to the Chancellor, Masters, and Scholars of the University of Oxford for ever, to have and to hold all and singular the said Lands or Estates upon trust, and to the intents and purposes hereinafter mentioned; that is to say, I will and appoint that the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford for the time being shall take and receive all the rents, issues, and profits thereof, and (after all taxes, reparations, and necessary deductions made) that he pay all the remainder to the endowment of eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, to be established for ever in the said University, and to be performed in the manner following:

“ I direct and appoint, that, upon the first Tuesday in Easter Term, a Lecturer be yearly chosen

“ chosen by the Heads of Colleges only, and by
 “ no others, in the room adjoining to the Print-
 “ ing-House, between the hours of ten in the
 “ morning and two in the afternoon, to preach
 “ eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, the year fol-
 “ lowing, at St. Mary’s in Oxford, between the
 “ commencement of the last month in Lent Term,
 “ and the end of the third week in A&t Term.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that the eight Di-
 “ vinity Lecture Sermons shall be preached upon
 “ either of the following Subjects—to confirm
 “ and establish the Christian Faith, and to con-
 “ fute all heretics and schismatics—upon the di-
 “ vine authority of the holy Scriptures—upon
 “ the authority of the writings of the primitive
 “ Fathers, as to the faith and practice of the pri-
 “ mitive Church—upon the Divinity of our
 “ Lord and Saviour Jesu Christ—upon the Di-
 “ vinity of the Holy Ghost—upon the Articles
 “ of the Christian Faith, as comprehended in the
 “ Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds.

“ Also I direct, that thirty copies of the eight
 “ Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be always
 “ printed, within two months after they are
 “ preached, and one copy shall be given to the
 “ Chancellor of the University, and one copy to
 “ the Head of every College, and one copy to the
 “ Mayor of the city of Oxford, and one copy to
 “ be put into the Bodleian Library ; and the ex-
 “ pence

“ pence of printing them shall be paid out of the
“ revenue of the Land or Estates given for esta-
“ blishing the Divinity Lecture Sermons ; and
“ the Preacher shall not be paid, nor be entitled
“ to the revenue, before they are printed.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that no person
“ shall be qualified to preach the Divinity Lec-
“ ture Sermons, unless he hath taken the Degree
“ of Master of Arts at least, in one of the two
“ Universities of Oxford or Cambridge; and that
“ the same person shall never preach the Divi-
“ nity Lecture Sermons twice.”

A LIST of PERSONS who have preached the BAMP-TON LECTURES from their first Establishment.

In

- 1780. James Bandinel, D. D. of Jesus College.
- 1781. Timothy Neve, D. D. of Merton College.
- 1782. Robert Holmes, M. A. of New College.
- 1783. John Cobb, D. D. of St. John's College.
- 1784. Joseph White, B. D. of Wadham College.
- 1785. Ralph Churton, M. A. of Brazen-nose College.
- 1786. George Croft, D. D. of University College.
- 1787. William Hawkins, M. A. of Pembroke College.
- 1788. Richard Shepherd, D. D. of Corpus Christi College.
- 1789. Edward Tatham, D. D. of Lincoln College.
- 1790. Henry Kett, M. A. of Trinity College.
- 1791. Robert Morres, M. A. of Brazen-Nose College.
- 1792. John Eveleigh, D. D. Provost of Oriel College.
- 1793. James Williamson, B. D. of Queen's College.
- 1794. Thomas Wintle, E. D. of Pembroke College.
- 1795. Daniel Veysie, B. D. of Oriel College.
- 1796. Robert Gray, M. A. of St. Mary Hall.
- 1797. William Finch, LL. D. of St. John's College.
- 1798. Charles Henry Hall, B. D. of Christ Church.
- 1799. William Barrow, LL. D. and F. S. A. of Queen's Coll.
- 1800. George Richards, M. A. of Oriel College.
- 1801. George Stanley Faber, M. A. of Lincoln College.
- 1802. George Frederick Nott, M. A. of All Souls' College.
- 1803. John Farrer, M. A. of Queen's College.

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PRINCETON

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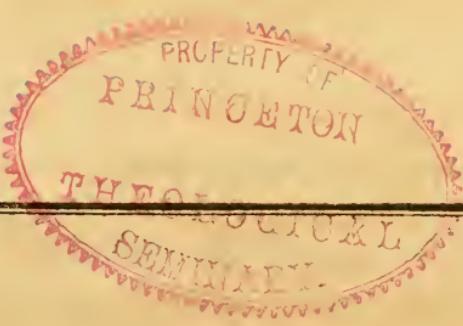
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SERMON I.

ISAIAH ix. 6.

For unto us a Child is born ; unto us a Son is given : and the government shall be upon his shoulder : and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

THE subject, that I propose for this year's course of Lectures, is the Mission and Character of our blessed Lord, as prophetically delineated in the Old Testament, as historically recorded in the New. This theme, it must be admitted, is not calculated so much to vindicate the doctrines of our religion against the Infidel and Heretic, as to elucidate those doctrines for the Orthodox Believer. I trust however that it falls sufficiently within the compass of our Founder's views; inasmuch as it embraces the more essential Articles of the Christian Faith; and as far as it tends to shew the unity and harmony of Revealed Religion through the several Covenants that were made with man, it contributes one species of evidence to the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures.

That great mystery of godliness, which it was the purpose of our Saviour's mission both to manifest and to accomplish, had been presignified from earliest times to man. At that very hour, when God denounced upon our first progenitors the sentence they had incurred by their fatal disobedience, he was pleased to give them a ray of consolation in the gracious promise then vouchsafed, that one of their progeny should bruise the head of their insidious and malignant foe, should relieve them from the punishment that was due to their transgression, and should re-establish peace between God and Man^a.

And though, in consequence of their unhappy fall, a thick veil of moral darkness overspread the world for a continued length of time, yet the God of mercy and of truth was pleased, through a series of ages to make a gradual communication of that light, which was finally to break forth into perfect day. That light was imparted first to one Person, then to one Family, afterwards to one Nation, and finally to all Mankind. And as it extended in compass, so it also increased in brightness. Through the several ages of antiquity we may trace a progression of di-

^a Gen. iii. 15.

vine light and truth. In heathen climes the whole horizon was overspread with the deepest shades of night. On the Patriarchs a starry radiance broke amid the general gloom. On the children of Israel a lesser light arose like that of the moon, the symbol of the Legal Economy, which in its shadowy rites and ceremonies was a reflection of the greater light that rules the day. In the Prophets a dawn began to gild the heavens, the welcome promise of the coming brightness. And at length in Jesus Christ, the light and life of men, the Sun of Righteousness arose to cheer and animate a slumbering world.

To the Patriarch Abraham, the Father of the Faithful, and the Friend of God, was given an intimation of this great Minister of grace and truth, when God declared to him, that with him he would establish an everlasting covenant, and that through him should all the nations of the earth be blessed ^b. This promise he by a lively faith was enabled to comprehend. He desired to see the day of Christ; he saw it, and was glad^c. He saw it with prophetic eyes, and he rejoiced in that happiness, which through one of his lineage was to be diffused over all people.

^b Gen. xvii. 7. xxii. 18.

B 2

^c John viii. 56.

And

And the virtual sacrifice of his only Son, which at the command of God he scrupled not to offer, he most probably understood for a prophetic emblem of a real sacrifice in time to come, the precious only Son of God, to be offered a sufficient ransom, a full satisfaction for the sins of the world.

The whole economy of the Law of Moses, whether moral, ceremonial, or political, may be regarded, as indeed it was designed, for a shadow or emblem of the Christian Dispensation. And Moses himself expressly taught the children of Israel to expect another Law-giver sent immediately from God, to whom they were to pay obedience; “The Lord your God will raise up unto you a Prophet from among you, of your brethren, like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken^d. ”

The same intimations were repeated by the Psalmist, who was called from the sheep-fold to rule his people Israel. Illumined by the Spirit of divine truth he frequently made allusion to some exalted personage in time to come, who should be the Shepherd of the spiritual Israel, and should hold a divine dominion over the sons of men.

This promise was more clearly and more

^d Deut. xviii. 15. Acts iii. 22.

copiously

copiously delivered by the series of Prophets, who rose to comfort Israel; of these more especially by Isaiah, who for the striking delineations, which he gives of the Messiah and his kingdom, is styled by way of eminence the Prophet of the Gospel. And therefore, not attempting any wider range through the spacious field of prophecy, to this copious source of evangelical truth I shall principally resort for such illustrations as my subject may require.

Among the sacred band of Prophets the first in excellence, as the first in order, is Isaiah. In the beauty and sublimity of his language, in the weight and dignity of his argument, he stands above his brethren unrivalled and alone. Through the whole of his writings he engages the common interest of men under both dispensations of the Law and of the Gospel. Invested with authority from heaven he impartially admonishes or reproves his people; and according to the state of religion and piety among them he declares to them the mercies or the judgments of God. Yet in this minister of Heaven the true and loyal Israelite is continually seen. Even while he supports the high character of the Prophet, he never suppresses the affections of the Patriot. Addressing himself more

immediately to his countrymen, he rejoices in their virtues, he laments over their apostasies; he looks on their prosperity with complacence, on their calamities with condolence. Though called in his prophetic office to unfold the destinies of Tyre and Egypt, Syria and Babylon, and all the more distinguished nations of the ancient Eastern world, yet the fortunes of Israel still engross his principal regard. Though enabled to contemplate the long series of ages yet unborn, yet he continually views them as they bear a reference to the house of Abraham. Their various vicissitudes of fortune, their elevations and depressions, their dispersions and restorations are the chosen themes of his prophetic song. It may therefore be reasonably supposed, that every pious and loyal soul in Israel would be encouraged by his admonitions, and warned by his reproofs, would be moved in prosperity to love and gratitude, in adversity to resignation and repentance.

But interesting as he must have been to his own people, he engages a still deeper interest among the whole family of Christians. For while in the literal sense his prophecies apply to the temporal house of Israel, in their spiritual and more important sense they finally point at the Kingdom or Church of Christ, the genuine house-

household of the faithful, the true Israel of God. While he refers immediately to a Prince, who should sit on the throne of David, and reign over the house of Judah, he must be understood to designate a Prince of the same royal stock, whose dominion should not be circumscribed either in time or space. These two important views are continually blended through all his prophecies. Repeatedly as he treats of the characters and fortunes of his countrymen the Jews, his vision almost invariably extends to the Christian economy. Whatever be the intermediate object, this usually constitutes the final aim. Thus in the general prophecy, with which he opens his ministry, after lamenting the degeneracy and corruption of his people, he exhorts them to repentance and amendment of life, as the necessary means of obtaining the forgiveness and clemency of God. A prospect of so great a change in the hearts and habits of the people he contemplates with prophetic eye in that new Economy of grace and truth, when the spiritual Sion shall be redeemed with judgment, and Jerusalem shall be called the City of righteousness; and he anticipates that happy time in the last ages of the world, when the true Kingdom of God shall be fully established upon earth, when all nations

shall flow unto it, and shall pay a willing homage to its righteous and peaceable dominion^e.

Of the same complexion is the passage, of which my text is the concluding part. This portion of his prophecies was delivered in the early part of his ministry, as appears from the context, at a time when the realm of Judah was disturbed by the confederate arms of two hostile Kings. In the height of the terrors, which the Jews then experienced, he gives them assurance of immediate protection from the God of their fathers; and he foretels a change of fortune, to take place before another generation should be past, when both these enemies should be totally subdued, and Judah, though distressed and reduced to imminent danger, should survive and prosper under the tutelary care of Heaven. Herein he alludes more immediately to the succeeding reign of Hezekiah, who saw these two confederate states overthrown by the overwhelming stream of the Assyrian power; while he and his people were relieved from this terrible inundation, when it overflowed the land of Palestine, and approached even to the hill of Sion^f, by the protection of that Almighty

^e Isaiah i. ii.

^f Isa. viii. 7, 8.

King, who said unto the deep, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further ; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed ^{s.}

But in the close of this prophecy he extends his vision beyond the temporal kingdom and the transitory reign of Hezekiah to a spiritual kingdom under an eternal King : both which he represents in terms too lofty to be applied to any temporal potentate or dominion, and which could not be fulfilled in any other person but in that Anointed of the Lord, who is the final theme of all divine revelation. It is to this closing portion of the prophecy that I would engage the present attention of this learned Audience.

And here it may be convenient to premise, that our common translation of this passage is neither so clear nor so correct, as it is generally found to be ; and therefore I shall resort, as I see occasion, to a version better calculated to give the sense and spirit of the Hebrew Seer.

In the beginning of this chapter the Prophet had declared, that the land, which was then overspread with gloom, in consequence of temporal calamities, should afterwards be gladdened with extraordinary light. *Nevertheless there shall not hereafter be darkness in*

^{s.} Job xxxviii. 11.

the land which was distressed. Though in the former time, when the prophecy was given, he had debased the land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtahali; yet in the latter time he would make it glorious, even the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the nations. Herein he expressly points out the region, that in future days would be distinguished by the dawn of the gospel revelation. For in this region did our Saviour enter upon his divine mission, in this did he principally exercise his ministry of grace. To this region therefore do the ensuing words more especially belong; *The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, unto them hath the light shined.* This undoubtedly applies to him who is called in prophetic language, “The Sun of righteousness with healing on his wings^h;” and who was afterwards acknowledged, even in his infant years, at his first presentation in the temple, for “a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israelⁱ. ”

The Prophet now in different images describes the various blessings that would ensue from this divine visitant: *Thou hast multiplied the nation; thou hast increased their joy.*

^h Malachi iv. 2.

ⁱ Luke ii. 32.

The multiplying the nation was the promise originally given to Abraham, and repeated to the Patriarchs in succession. And though literally fulfilled in the numerous posterity of Abraham by natural descent, it was most effectually accomplished in the far more numerous progeny by spiritual birth in those, who were his children by the adoption of grace, and heirs of the promises by the righteousness of faith; that is, in all those, who are of the household of the Church of Christ. The promise of this blessing is repeatedly made in the prophets. Thus to the spiritual daughter of Sion Isaiah says, in allusion to the mode of sojourning by the Israelites in the wilderness, “Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let the canopy of thy habitations be extended; for on the right hand and on the left thou shalt burst forth with increase; and thy seed shall inherit the nations, and shall inhabit the desolate cities^k. ” Now this was to be accomplished in the diffusion of the gospel beyond the pale of Israel, the adoption of the Gentiles into the covenant of promise, and the progression of Christian light over all the nations of the earth. In like manner the increase of their joy, the con-

^k Isa. liv. 2, 3.

tinual theme of Isaiah in the latter series of his writings, is the peculiar character of the gospel; which was glad tidings of great joy to all the world, since it imparted to mankind the means of recovery from the bondage of sin and death, it opened to them the hopes of reconciliation and favour with Almighty God, and brought life and immortality to light.

They rejoice before thee as with the joy of harvest; as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. Two images are here introduced to express this gladness of the soul; the one from rural, the other from military life. Having found a plenteous harvest of every thing essential to their spiritual nurture, and partaking in the prize which ensues from the Messiah's conquest over his enemies and theirs, the people of the Lord are filled with joy and gratitude, and are ready to express it in public hymns of praise.

For the yoke of his burthen, the staff on his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, hast thou broken, as in the day of Midian. For the greaves of the armed warrior in the conflict, and the garment rolled in much blood, shall be for a burning, even fuel for the fire. By these united images, of breaking the weapons of tyranny, and of burning the accoutrements of battle, the Prophet boldly

boldly signifies the full attainment of conquest, the complete establishment of peace; an animated picture of that divine dispensation, which would finally prevail over every carnal and every spiritual foe, and would be distinguished as a reign of universal and eternal peace.

The Prophet, having stated some of the blessed fruits of this divine economy, proceeds to declare the Minister, by whom these blessings should be conveyed; and this he does by several titles descriptive of his character and mission; in which, though he represents him as a Prince of the house of David, yet he ascribes to him marks of dignity and authority far superior to such as distinguish any of the sons of men.

For unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given. This solemn declaration must be understood in union with a foregoing prophecy, given immediately for the present consolation of Judah, but looking for accomplishment to a distant age; *Behold a Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and she shall call his name Immanuel¹.* A miraculous birth portended a more than ordinary person, no less indeed than the Son of God; and the name

¹ Isa. vii. 14.

assigned him bore a testimony to the dignity of his character, as it signifies *God with us*, or in the language of the gospel, that incarnate Word, in whom dwelt bodily all the fulness of the Godhead ^m.

The person thus to be born into the world is ordained for the highest offices of authority and power: *The government shall be upon his shoulder*: which phrase corresponds with the words of that salutation, with which the Angel hailed the Virgin Mary for the mother of our Lord: “ He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever: and of his Kingdom there shall be no end ⁿ. ”

The Prophet then designates the character of this exalted Potentate by appropriate and expressive names. The first of these is, *Wonderful*. By which may be understood, that he should be distinguished above all other Prophets and Ministers of heaven by most miraculous notices and powers. At his birth he was revealed unto the world by the song of Angels, and by the light of an extraordi-

^m Col. ii. 9.

ⁿ Luke i. 32, 33.

nary

nary Star. Thus at the dawn of the spiritual, as once of the natural creation, the morning Stars sang together; and all the Sons of God shouted for joy^o. And at his initiation into his mission, the heavens were opened, the divine glory descended upon him, and a voice from heaven proclaimed him the beloved Son of God. And through the term of his abode on earth the dignity of his person and character was repeatedly attested by the ministry of Angels, by the conversation of departed Saints, by the attending glory of the Divine presence, and by the approving voice of Heaven. But this title was most evident in the miracles that he wrought himself, which were great and numerous and manifold. Thus in the beginning of his ministry he turned water into wine; from the small supply of a few loaves and fishes he fed many thousands in the wilderness; he was liberally employed in healing every kind of sickness and disease. Before his presence every malady of human nature fled; the blind received their sight, and the deaf heard, the palsied were restored to soundness, and the fevered to health, the lepers were cleansed, the demoniacs were dispossessed, and the dead

^o Job xxxviii. 7.

were raised. These wonderful powers were not only in themselves unquestionable evidences of his divine mission and authority, but they derive additional force from their concurrence with the voice of ancient prophecy, which ascribes all these powers to the Messiah. And therefore when he was questioned whether he was the person long foretold in ancient revelation, he appealed to the works on which he was then employed, as giving evidence of his mission, and at the same time illustration of his character.

With the title of *Wonderful* is combined that of *Counsellor*; which implies that he knew the councils of God, and that he had authority to impart them unto men. All this is signified in the title, that is given him by the Apostle and Evangelist, of the ΛΟΓΟΣ or the Word of God; which comprehends not only the counsel determined in the mind of God, but also the same expressed in the economy of his grace to men. It is also signified in other passages, and indeed it pervades the whole tenor of the gospel revelation; which represents him as having come from God, to open to mankind that mystery of divine grace, which had hitherto been kept secret, or at most only partially divulged, from the foundation of the world.

Important are the truths, which this divine Counsellor has therein brought to light. He hath taught us to consider God as a spiritual Essence, who is therefore to be worshipped in a spiritual manner; inflexibly just, yet abounding in clemency and benevolence. He hath taught us also to know ourselves, as fallen indeed from that divine image, in which we were originally made, yet still retaining so much interest at the throne of grace, as to engage the Son of God himself to take our nature upon him, that he might become our Mediator and Advocate with his heavenly Father: in which capacity he has undertaken, as a Prophet, to teach us our duty by repentance and obedience; as a Priest, to make atonement and intercession for us by the price of his own blood; and as a King, to govern us by his laws, to place us in a state of grace, and to open to us the gate of everlasting life.

In these two names of *Wonderful, Counsellor*, he is represented as the energy of divine power, and the effusion of divine wisdom. But he has a title to a still more distinguished name, as he partakes of the divine essence. He is called *The Mighty God*. In this fulness of divinity he is characterized by Isaiah in other places; especially in the open-

ing of the latter series of his prophecies, which has a more express relation to the Messiah and his kingdom. For therein he foretels a Messenger, who should prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness, and should declare to Judah, *Behold your God^p!* And in this fulness of divinity he is represented by St. John in the opening of his gospel: He was not only in the beginning with God, but he was God himself. And in that high character he bears the attributes of a Creator and a Preserver: "All things were made by him, and without him existed no created thing^{q.}" Of himself our Lord declares, that "he and his Father are one^{r.}" Of him St. Paul expressly says, that "he is over all, God blessed for ever^{s.}" In his Epistle to the Hebrews he declares, that God hath now spoken to us by his Son, superior to the Angels, and partaking of the essence of the Godhead, by whom he made the worlds, by whom he upholdeth all things, and whom he hath appointed Heir of all things^{t.} And thus he is still more forcibly represented in the book of Revelations: He is seated with his Father on his throne of eminence, he is dignified with this name inscribed upon his ves-

^p Isa. xl. 3, 9.^q Rom. ix. 5.^q John i. 1, 2, 3.^t Heb. i. 1, &c.^r John x. 30.

ture and his person, *King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.* And he takes to himself this peculiar title of supreme divinity, “ I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, who was, and who is, and who shall be, the Almighty ”.^u By which he signifies that his existence is from eternity to eternity, that the whole system of the universe originated from his power and wisdom, is sustained and governed by his providence, and is finally directed to his will. Thus to him may be applied these peculiar attributes of the Deity, as expressed by the Apostle, that “ from him, and through him, and to him, are all things ^x. ”

The name that follows next is, *Everlasting Father.* If we take this word in the customary sense, it seems to repeat what is comprehended in the preceding term, that he is self-existent through all eternity, and that he is the source and origin of all things. But a more distinct and expressive sense will be drawn, if we understand it as accepted by some learned men, *The Father of the everlasting age;* that is, the Founder of an Economy that shall have no end ; namely, that Economy which is called in Scriptural lan-

^u Rev. i. 8, 11. xix. 16.

^x Rom. xi. 36.

guage, The Kingdom of Heaven ; that Dispensation of divine grace and truth without limit or period, which the Messiah would establish in the world. In which respect it stands in contrast with the constitution both civil and religious of the Jews ; which was limited to a certain people, and was to subsist for an appointed time. The eternity, as also the universality of this kingdom, is repeatedly foretold in the Psalms and in the Prophets ; “ Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for thy possession.”—“ Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever : the sceptre of thy kingdom is a sceptre of righteousness.”—“ They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth ^a.”

Thus also the Prophet, when to the carnal and temporary institutions of the Law he opposes the spiritual and eternal institutions of the Gospel ; “ All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, and the flower fadeth ; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever ^b.” And this is fully delineated in a

^y Ps. ii. 8.

^z Ps. xlv. 6.

^a Ps. lxxii. 5, &c.

^b Isa. xl. 6, 7, 8.

vision to Daniel, which, after describing several temporal dynasties rising and falling in succession, represents one advancing like the Son of Man, invested with the clouds of heaven. “And there was given him dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away; and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.” With this agrees the term with which our Lord continually designates his dispensation. The Kingdom of Heaven implies a constitution widely different from the partial and transitory monarchies of men. Though it begins on earth, it shall extend to heaven; though it commences in time, it shall endure to eternity.

The last of these titles is, *The Prince of Peace*. The foregoing names bear abundant evidence of his kingly dignity: This delineates the peculiar feature of his kingly character. The allusion might be drawn from Melchisedec, King of Salem, whose personal name denoted, King of righteousness, as his official title signified, King of peace; for these two qualities the holy Scripture frequently combines in representing the true kingly character.

^c Dan. vii. 13, 14.

In both which capacities this ancient Prince is represented by the Apostle for a type of Christ^d. Again, the allusion might be taken from Solomon the son of David, whose reign corresponded with the signification of the name, since there was peace in Israel all the days of Solomon^e. Indeed the several passages of the Psalmist, which convey a benediction to his immediate son and successor on the throne of Israel, have a prophetic application to a greater than Solomon, the true Prince of Peace. “ He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth^f.”

And the same character of peace Isaiah gives of the Messiah’s happy reign; “ He shall judge among the nations, and shall convince many peoples. And they shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more^g. ” And in a subsequent passage he gives a fuller picture of the peaceful reign of the son of Jesse, when he represents all the more ferocious animals of the

^d Gen. xiv. 18. Heb. vii. 1, &c.

^f Ps. lxxii. 6, 7.

^e 1 Kings iv. 25.

^g Isa. ii. 4.

creation as laying aside their nature, and associating with those that they are wont to persecute ; “ The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling shall come together ; and a little child shall lead them ^h. ”

In language like to this was the Prince of Peace introduced into the world. For the Angels in their gratulating song sung peace on earth, and good will towards menⁱ. This character he assumes when he styles himself the Son of Peace ^k. And when he is departing from the world, he offers his Disciples peace, as the most valuable bequest which he had to leave^l.

Now this gracious character he maintained herein, that he was the Minister of reconciliation between heaven and earth, he re-established peace between an offended God and a guilty race of men. By coming among us in our nature he restored that chain of harmony between the upper and the lower world, which had been broken by the first apostasy of man. And in his last labour of love he surrendered himself a peace-offering

^h Isa. xi. 6.ⁱ Luke ii. 14.^k Luke x. 6.^l John xiv. 27.

in our behalf ; and by this precious ransom he procured for us the covenant of eternal peace.

The same gracious character he also maintained by promoting and establishing a spirit of harmony and concord among mankind. This he did in the first instance by that rule of righteousness, which he promulgated as the bond of equal dealing between man and man ; “ Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them.” And this he did in a more impressive way by giving energy and compass to that ancient law, “ Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself ;” which rule he explained by inculcating those peculiar duties of his religion, the forgiveness of injuries, the love of our enemies, the rendering of good for evil, and the impartial distribution of benevolence and charity to all. And this he also did in the most impressive way by the virtue of his own example, which was one continued expression of grace and peace to men. For all his days on earth were spent in doing and diffusing good ; and his life at length was yielded a peace-offering for the world.

In sequel to these titles, descriptive of the Messiah, Isaiah thus proceeds : *Of the increase of*

of his government and peace there shall be no end; upon the throne of David, and upon his Kingdom; to fix it and to establish it, with judgment and with justice, henceforth even for ever. In which words, beside expressing the peculiar characters of his kingly government, that it shall be advanced in peace, and that it shall be established in righteousness, he describes the progression of his kingdom in the world. And herein, though he represents the Messiah seated on the throne of David, and reigning over the kingdom of Israel, yet is it well understood what this throne and kingdom in the spirit of prophetic language mean; a dominion, not in the body, but in the soul; not over that nation only, to whom the covenant of the Law was given, but over all people in every clime and country under heaven, to whom the kingdom of the Gospel is proclaimed. This spiritual government shall continually increase, and shall go on conquering and to conquer, not with the sword of war and violence, like the kingdoms of this world, but with the sceptre of peace and righteousness, till it embraces all the peopled earth; till “the kingdoms of the world are become the kingdoms of our God.” And when all temporal governments have disappeared, when the world itself is brought to dissolution,

dissolution, it shall stand without impair; unchangeably the same, it shall never have an end.

The Prophet now concludes his sublime embassy of grace with stamping the sanction of God himself upon it; *The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will do this.* The Lord of armies both in heaven and earth hath expressed a zeal for the establishment of this heavenly kingdom: and the same Almighty Power, who decreed all this, will infallibly perform it.

May the zeal of the Lord in decreeing and in performing such great things for us enkindle in our souls a corresponding zeal to glorify him for his goodness to the sons of men! And how shall we glorify him otherwise, than by gratefully receiving and assiduously improving his inestimable gift? “In this was manifested the Love of God to us, that he sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him^m.” Let us gratefully acknowledge the Son, that is sent us for so blessed a purpose, in the several characters in which he is presented for an object of our faith, and for a guide and pattern of our obedience. Let us devoutly contemplate all that series of miracles, which

^m 1 John iv. 9.

attest his mission and illustrate his character. Let us receive all his doctrines as the certain oracles of divine truth, and obey all his precepts as the faithful directories of our hearts and lives; continually bearing in mind that most important truth, which in his own resurrection he has demonstrated to men, of a general resurrection to another life ; when all, who have been zealous in their allegiance to him through the present state of discipline, shall be received into his heavenly Kingdom, and shall reign with him for ever and ever.

S E R M O N II.

ISAIAH liii. 5.

He was wounded for our transgressions ; he was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him ; and with his stripes we are healed.

AMONG the several prophecies of Isaiah, which represent the mission and character of Christ, a more particular consideration is due to that portion of which my text is a part ; as it not only gives an historical description of our Saviour's sufferings, but also unfolds that great mystery of godliness, the expedience of those sufferings for the peace and happiness of men. This prophecy is distinguished in the writings of Isaiah, as it stands independent of all temporal and national themes. Nevertheless, to understand it with more advantage, it may be of use to take a brief review of that series of prophecy which goes before it, as far as it bears a more express relation to the gospel economy. In the latter division of his sacred book the Prophet appears

pears in his most engaging character, as a Herald of blessings to the people of God. The blessings, that he foretels, combine both a temporal and a spiritual good. While in the letter he represents the deliverance of the Jews from the oppressive yoke of their Babylonian Conquerors, and the restoration of the Hebrew government and law, in the spirit he conveys to the understanding of the sincere believer a far more important and valuable truth, the deliverance of all mankind from the bondage of sin and death, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God, both militant on earth and triumphant in heaven.

In the name of God he publishes consolation to his people ; he declares to Jerusalem, that her warfare is fulfilled, that her sins are expiated, and that blessings double to her sufferings await her from the hand of the Lord : All which was accomplished on the spiritual Jerusalem, the true City or Church of God, by the Captain of her salvation, when he overcame the powers of death, and opened unto men the gate of everlasting life. He announces a Herald, who should go before the face of the Lord in the wilderness, to prepare the way for his coming ; which was accomplished in John the Baptist, who prepared

pared the people for their spiritual King by the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. In opposition to the carnal covenant of the Law, which was frail and transient as the grass or the flower of the field, he proclaims the spiritual covenant of the Gospel, which was to endure to all eternity. He publishes glad tidings, the appropriate name of the Gospel economy, to Sion and Jerusalem, and he calls upon the cities of Judah to behold their God. He states his authority both to avenge himself of his enemies and to recompense his faithful subjects. At the same time he represents the gracious nature of his tutelary government, under the image of a Shepherd very tenderly attentive to the welfare of his flock, supporting the sick and weak, and affording sustenance to all^a.

In a subsequent passage he describes the mild exercise of his authority; "He shall not cry aloud, nor lift up his voice in the streets;" the tenderness of his government toward those, who would have sunk under the full severity of discipline; "The bruised reed he shall not break, and the dimly burning flax he shall not quench;" and his persevering zeal in diffusing his kingdom over all

^a Isa. xl. 1—11.

the world ; “ He shall not fail, nor be dis-
couraged, till he have set judgment in the
earth, and the isles shall wait for his law.”
He declares him to be called for a righteous
purpose, to be a covenant to the people, and
a light to the nations ^b.

Through the course of these prophecies he
invariably shews this Minister of grace, as
supporting the authority of a King, yet
mingling this authority with grace and gen-
tleness.

In the prophecy now before us he repre-
sents him in a very different light, in every
circumstance of humiliation and depression, of
sorrow and suffering. At the same time
however he repeatedly takes occasion to sug-
gest, that in his humiliation there would be
field for triumph, that in his sufferings there
would be argument of joy. Even in the
opening of this mournful narrative he declares
in the name of God his final exaltation and
prosperity :

*Behold, my Servant shall prosper; he shall
be raised aloft and magnified and very highly ex-
alted. As many were astonished at him; (his
countenance was so disfigured, more than that of
man; and his form more than the sons of men;)*

^b Isa. xlii. 1—7.

so many nations shall look upon him with admiration; before him shall Kings shut their mouths: For what was not before declared to them, they shall see; and what they had not heard, they shall attentively consider.

Notwithstanding all his afflictions, he should eminently prosper; notwithstanding all his ignominies, he should be very highly glorified. As in his sufferings, the severest and most terrible that were ever laid on man, he should be a temporary theme of astonishment to many of his own nation, who would expect to see the promised Messiah in the style and character of a prosperous and triumphant King; so even in his sufferings he should be a perpetual theme of homage to many nations, to many princes of the Gentiles. For they should see the light of heavenly truth opened to them by the Son of God, of whom they had received no promise before, as had the people of Israel; and in the humiliation and sufferings of a degraded and crucified Saviour they should contemplate the means of exaltation and happiness to all the sons of men.

This however, when it was first promulgated, was a theme by no means engaging to any class of men. To the Jews it was a

^c Isa. lii. 13, 14, 15.

stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. Accordingly the Prophet thus enquires; *Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?* By which he signified, that the doctrine, which the Messiah was to impart, would obtain at the time but small belief in the world; that the purpose, which he was to accomplish, of establishing the kingdom of our God upon earth, would not immediately be made manifest to men. Thus he came unto his own, and his own received him not. Prejudiced by ambitious hopes of seeing the Messiah seated on the throne of David, and giving to Israel pre-eminence among the nations, they could not comprehend him in the shade of humility in which he came among them.

And yet the Prophet has represented in expressive images the lowliness of station, in which he was to appear: *For he groweth up in their sight as a tender plant, and as a root from a thirsty soil.* Though actually a branch from the noble stem of Jesse, though a cion from the royal stock of David^d, as he is described in another prophecy, yet should he to the eyes of men originate from a very lowly root, and be nurtured on the unpromising soil of indigence and obscurity.

^d Isa. xi. 1.

He hath no form nor comeliness, when we shall see him ; nor is his countenance such, that we should desire him. Despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; as one that hideth his face from us; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. This indeed is no other than a history of his manner of life on earth from his entrance on his ministry to his departure on the cross. He had no semblance of superior dignity and worth to engage the regard of men : He had no endowments of pleasures, riches, and honours to attract the desires of the world. Unacknowledged and disesteemed by Pharisees and Sadducees, by Chief Priests, by Elders, and by Scribes, he acquired attention only in the humblest walks of life. Through all his active labours he was exposed to calumny and detraction ; and when we come to the history of his passion, was there ever any sorrow like to his sorrow ?

The Prophet now more explicitly declares the sorrows and sufferings, to which he would be exposed ; and at the same time he very largely and repeatedly opens the causes, for which they would be laid upon him. Though he seemed in the eyes of men to be judicially smitten by the hand of God, yet he did not endure this severity of judgment for

any transgressions of his own. It was for guilty man he suffered. To effect our peace with God, he surrendered himself to the chastising hand of justice; and to heal our wounds, he submitted to be severely wounded.

Surely our infirmities hath he borne, and our sorrows hath he carried; while we thought him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities: The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have strayed; we have turned aside every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. It was exacted, and he was made answerable; yet he opened not his mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. From confinement and from judgment was he taken: and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of my people was he stricken. And his grave was appointed with the wicked; and with the rich man was his tomb. Although he had done no wrong, neither was there any guile in his mouth; yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief.

^c In the several quotations from Isaiah through this series of discourses, the Author has paid a deference to the valuable version , of

I do not interrupt this prophetic narrative; as it very clearly exposes the whole history of the Messiah's sufferings, of which his Disciples were eye-witnesses; and at the same time it declares again and again, what was not immediately obvious to the understandings of his Disciples, the great doctrine of atonement, which our Saviour by his sufferings wrought for guilty man. On him

of Bishop Lowth; but has not invariably followed him. For instance, in this portion, he has retained the phrase of the old Translation,—*to bruise him; be bath put him to grief*, as having more of the solemn simplicity of Isaiah than—*to crush him with affliction*. He has retained the term, *Who shall declare his generation?* rather than, *bis manner of life who shall declare?* as the latter of these renderings limits the clause to a particular sense, which in the old Translation as well as in the Original is left more indefinite. The Prophet's idea may have been, according to the Bishop's acceptation, “Who shall come forward at this hour of trial to attest the general innocence and integrity of his life and conversation?” But with equal shew of reason we may understand it to have been, “Who shall attest his divine origin? Who shall publicly acknowledge that he is the Son of God, or that his mission and doctrine are of God?” He has ventured however to adopt the Bishop's rendering, *And with the rich man was his Tomb*, on grounds for which he must refer the Reader to the Bishop's note upon the passage. Yet he must not omit to notice, that this rendering is controverted by Parkhurst in the last edition of his Lexicon, under the article נֶבֶת. But whatever be the difference of opinion among Interpreters on grammatical and verbal points, the leading sense of the passage is clear, and the general application of the prophecy remains unaffected.

was laid the burden of our sins. He was the peace-offering designed to reconcile us to God. He was the Lamb of God, that was sacrificed to take away the sins of the world. And here it deserves our serious attention, that whenever the Prophet touches on the punishment inflicted on this innocent Person, he reverts to the cause for which he endured it; as if he were anxious to impress on all, who should afterwards believe his report, the doctrine of a Saviour's suffering for the sins of men. Though innocent himself both in word and deed, yet according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God it behoved him to suffer, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God".

Before we proceed, it may be useful to take notice of some circumstances in this eventful prophecy, which were particularly fulfilled. When led as a lamb to the sacrifice, he opened not his mouth. To all the contumelious charges of the Jews, when he stood before the High Priest, before the Roman Governor, and before Herod, he answered nothing. "When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to

^f 1 Pet. iii. 18.

him

him that judgeth righteously §."—“ He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich man was his tomb ;” or according to the common rendering, which implies, though not so distinctly, the same thing, “ and with the rich man in his death.” Though he suffered an ignominious death with the wicked, being crucified between two Malefactors, yet was he distinguished by an honourable grave. For on the evening of his death there came a rich and honourable man, namely, Joseph of Arimathea, who with the Governor’s permission took the body down from the cross, and respectfully laid it in his own new tomb.

From these his sufferings the most beneficial consequences would accrue to men; and the blessings, which he so dearly purchased for others, would redound to the high consolation of the Sufferer himself. *When his soul shall be made an offering for sin, he shall see a seed, that shall prolong their days; and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Of the travel of his soul he shall see, and shall be satisfied. By knowledge of him shall my righteous Servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.*

¶ 1 Pet. ii. 23.

Having rendered his life a propitiatory sacrifice for sin, he shall see, and shall be completely satisfied in seeing, the fruit of his travels in that spiritual progeny, that holy nation, that peculiar people, composed of the faithful of every clime and lineage under heaven, who through him shall be born to spiritual life, and be rendered Sons of God by adoption, and co-heirs with him of immortal happiness. Under his ministrations the gracious purpose of the Lord, the redemption and salvation of the world, shall be successfully accomplished. For having borne their iniquities, he shall cancel all their guilt; and by the merit of his own obedience he shall render many righteous^b; that is, the multitude of true Disciples, who by a vital faith confide in his merits, and acknowledge him for the Redeemer and the Lawgiver of men.

For all these meritorious sufferings he shall find an abundant recompence: *Therefore will I distribute to him a portion in the great; and in the mighty shall he share the spoil: Because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors; and he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.* Because he submitted to offer up

his soul a ransom for us, and, though innocent himself, to suffer punishment with malefactors ; because he undertook those two great offices of atonement, of a Sacrifice to bear the sins of men, and of a Priest to make intercession for a transgressing world ; He therefore should acquire to himself an extraordinary conquest in those multitudes of people, who should constitute his kingdom both militant on earth and triumphant in heaven. All which is in close correspondence with the argument of the Apostle ; “ Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and hath given him a name which is above every name ; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and those in earth, and those under the earth ; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Fatherⁱ. ”

Having thus examined through its several clauses the design and object of this most important and interesting prophecy, I pro-

ⁱ Phil. ii. 8, &c.

ceed

ceed to explore the general instruction to be collected from it.

And first, it establishes the truth of our Religion; inasmuch as it so distinctly and circumstantially states, many ages before his birth, the character and sufferings of him, who is the Author and Finisher of our faith. In this it is pre-eminently distinguished from all other prophecies, being clear of every temporal theme, and exclusively appropriated to our great Redeemer. It describes, what indeed can be applied to no other man, an innocent Person by the counsel of God judicially smitten for the guilty, a Prince by his sorrows promoting the happiness of his people, and by his patient endurance of sufferings extending his kingdom over the nations. Hence this has been the prophecy, which has taken the greatest effect in converting the Heathen, in confirming the wavering Believer, and in reclaiming the Apostate.

In the time of the Apostles it was successfully applied to the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch by the deacon Philip. Directed by an Angel he encountered this stranger on his return from some public act of worship at Jerusalem, and found him piously employed in reading the Prophet Isaiah. When Philip asked

asked him, whether he understood what he was reading, he professed his ignorance, and besought his assistance to understand it. It was on this extraordinary passage that his attention was engaged. The first inquiry was, whether the Prophet spoke of himself, or of some other man. There was nothing in the life of Isaiah, that gave it any shadow of application to himself; and it equally fails of application through the whole history of the house or state of Israel. Then it was that Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at the same Scripture, as the ground of the faith which he had authority to teach, he preached unto him Jesus. In him this word of God was verified, and not one tittle of the prophecy had failed. Which bore such conviction on the Ethiopian's understanding, that he was ready to acknowledge Jesus for the Son of God. And when they came to water, he was immediately baptized in his name*.

In like manner on this prophecy more especially the Defenders of our faith have laid the greatest stress, in the evidence, which they draw from the prophecies at large, of the truth of our religion. And an instance is on record in our own country, of the Pro-

* Acts viii. 26, &c.

fligate and Infidel from a serious perusal of this passage being reclaimed, and from an open disavowal, not only of the Christian Religion, but of every moral and religious principle, being brought to confess that Law-giver and Redeemer, to whom he had done continual despite through life; acknowledging that Man, who was wounded for his transgressions, and bruised for his iniquities, and on the merit of his sufferings soliciting the remission of his sins.

Again, While it establishes the truth of our Religion in general, it stamps a sanction on that peculiar tenet of our holy Faith, the atonement, that its Author made for the universal sins of men. That man stood in need of some propitiation was a sentiment very general in the ancient world; since it not only was believed among the Hebrew race, who retained a more correct knowledge of the fatal disobedience of our first Progenitors, but may also be traced through the various corruptions and idolatries of the Heathens; as may be collected from the rite of sacrifice, which almost universally prevailed under every modification of ancient faith and worship. In accord with this opinion was that system of sacrifice established by the Mosaic ritual: Whereof the Apostle thus observes, that “almost

most all things by the Law were purified with blood, and without shedding of blood was no remission¹." Among a multitude of institutions to this effect was the daily sacrifice both at morn and eve of a spotless lamb at the door of the tabernacle or the temple; as also was the yearly observance of the Passover, when a spotless lamb was slain in every family, to constitute a feast holy to the Lord. This in its immediate view was to commemorate the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian bondage, when the Angel of the Lord in his ministry of avenging justice passed over the houses of those families, which were distinguished by the blood of the lamb they had slain. But it evidently points to a far more valuable sacrifice, connected in like manner with a far more important deliverance; the blood of which was to be of sufficient price to stay the accumulated wrath of Heaven, to make atonement for the guilt of man, and to render God propitious to a ransomed world.

The doctrine, thus conveyed in emblems through the Law of Moses, is more expressly signified by the Prophet of the Gospel Isaiah, especially in the prophecy now before us, which very clearly and explicitly teaches

¹ Heb. ix. 22.

the propitiatory sacrifice of the gospel covenant. While he gives a very feeling relation of the sacrifice of a Person, that was innocent himself of every guilt, he continually reverts to this great doctrine of religion, that he suffered all for the transgressions of his people, to atone for their sins, and to obtain and ratify their peace with God.

When therefore he appeared on earth, as was written of him in the volume of that prophetic book, to fulfil the whole will of God^m, his Harbinger the Baptist displayed him to his disciples in this most important function of his mediatorial character; “Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the worldⁿ!”

Of this part of his character our Lord himself did not very openly speak through the course of his ministry, as it was one of those mysteries of godliness, which could be fully manifested only in the event itself; nor even then could be sufficiently understood, so as to make an essential part of the Christian faith, till the whole scheme of his mission as the incarnate Word of God was totally fulfilled in his resurrection and ascension. Yet in several of his conversations with his Disciples he prepared them for the reception of

^m Ps. xl. 7. Heb. x. 7.

ⁿ John i. 29.

this

this important truth ; more especially, as the time drew near, he repeatedly told them, that he must go up to Jerusalem, and be exposed to all manner of ignominious and cruel usage, and finally be put to death, as he signified, by the cross ; to which however he generally added, that this dominion of death should be but for a short time over him ; for on the third day he should rise again.

When the appointed hour was come, every tittle of what the Prophets had formerly, and himself had recently, foretold, was fulfilled upon him. He was betrayed by his own familiar friend into the hand of his enemies ^o. He was persecuted with all manner of cruel and ignominious usage. He was numbered with the transgressors. He was lifted up from the earth for the healing of those that looked upon him ^p. They pierced his hands and his feet ^q. They parted his garments among them ^r. A bone of him was not broken ^s. And, They looked on him whom they pierced ^t. More especially was this prophecy fulfilled, which represents him wounded for our transgressions ; and bruised for our iniquities. As a victim on an altar, so our Redeemer on

^o Ps. xli. 9. ^p Numb. xxi. 9. John iii. 14, 15.

^q Ps. xxii. 16. ^r Ps. xxii. 18. ^s Exod. xii. 46.

^t Zech. xii. 10.

the cross poured out his soul unto death, a full, perfect, and sufficient ransom for a transgressing world.

This dread event the Disciples witnessed with confusion and dismay. They had long expected him to come forward in the style and character of a temporal King, and to have enjoyed a long continued reign of prosperity and glory. And though he repeatedly disclaimed all ideas of such an elevation, and had frequently foretold his painful and agonizing death, yet they could never reconcile themselves to the thought. “That be far from thee, Lord ^a!” said Peter, when he was once alluding to this mournful theme. How much therefore may we suppose them to have been overcome with despondence, when it really came to pass! Deprived of their head they were as sheep without a shepherd ^x. And that ray of hope, which he had given them of his rising again, seems to have been totally lost in the dismay that they now endured.

But this despondence was not to continue long. Though he yielded for a time to the powers of death and hell, he yielded only, that he might effect a more decisive con-

^a Matth. xvi. 22.

^x Zech. xiii. 7. Matth. xxvi. 31.

quest. On the third day the tomb, to which he had been consigned, surrendered its temporary prisoner, and he rose in triumph from the dead. They then recollect the prophecy, that he had given them of this great event, and again they were collected, as sheep around their Shepherd. While gladdened with the sight of their departed Lord, they began to comprehend the mystery that had taken place. And soon after his ascension, while they were assembled together on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Ghost fell on them, and their eyes were opened. The purpose of his death, which had hitherto remained under a veil, was now fully manifested unto them. And being now sent to preach the Gospel both to Jews and Gentiles, even to all the world, they more especially dwelt on the theme of Christ crucified. The Cross, hitherto a mark of odium, was the most distinguished badge of their profession; and they brought it forward in all their discourses, as the sign both of their faith and of the benefits thence derived.

This among others is the peculiar doctrine of St. Paul, whose labours in the office of an Apostle are better known to us than any of the rest. He preached Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, but to them which are

called to the faith, both Jews and Greeks, the wisdom and the power of God^y. And on this he copiously dwells in his Epistle to the Hebrews; in which he explains the whole economy of sacrifice and intercession according to the Law of Moses, to be a type or emblem of the great propitiation by the blood of Christ, who by this one offering of himself has perfected for ever them that are sanctified^z.

And to this the Apostle John continually reverts in that vision of the Revelations, in which he saw heaven opened, and the whole company of heaven attendant round the throne of God. Though he represents the Son of God in all the fulness of celestial happiness and glory, yet through the whole of this book he represents him with a reference to his mediatorial character, as the propitiation for the sins of men. Thus in the beginning of his divine volume he calls him “the faithful Witness, the first begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth; who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us Kings and Priests unto God and his Father^a.”

^y 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

^z Heb. x. 14.

^a Rev. i. 5, 6.

And in the course of the vision, when this divine Person undertakes to open the mysterious book of God, he calls him the Lamb, that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his blood, out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation ^b."

It remains for me now, in conclusion of this discourse, to deduce an application to our own improvement both in the doctrine and the practice of godliness.

In point of doctrine, this prophecy tends to establish and to regulate our faith in all those articles of our religion, which it is most expedient for us to know, whether of God or of ourselves.

It sets before us all those attributes of God, in which consists the excellence of his nature: the holiness of God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and therefore cannot regard us in our sinful state with complacence, nor without some expiation admit us into favour: the righteousness of God, who would not suffer sin to pass without a severe atonement: the mercy of God in accepting a ransom in our stead; and the wisdom of God, in adopting so wonderful

^b Rev. v. 9.

a scheme of making his mercy to harmonize with his justice.

In like manner it sets before us the misery of man in consequence of that corruption, which he derives from the original sin of his first Progenitor, and which in his natural state he continually aggravates by his own alienation from God and goodness. At the same time it opens to us the gladsome prospect of recovery from our unhappy state, through the merits and mediation of our divine Redeemer: by whom, if we resort unto him in sincere and vital faith, we have the assurance of every good and precious gift, which the Father of mercy can bestow upon us; the pardon of all our sins, the assistance of divine grace to promote our recovery, the hope of justification in the sight of God, of adoption into his household, and acceptance into his inheritance.

But beside this impression on our faith, it has a commanding influence on our practice. For we must not expect to have any portion in the blessings, which our Redeemer by his precious blood hath purchased for us, unless we verify and substantiate our faith in his merits, by repentance from all those sins, from which he came to save us, and a diligent endeavour to conform to his character and

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to cultivate his law in all manner of holiness of heart and life. Weak and helpless as we are in our natural state, yet by the assistance of that holy Spirit, which he has rendered propitious to our earnest prayers, we are enabled to do whatever is essential to our spiritual weal. His grace is sufficient for us; and from those, who devoutly seek it, it will never be withholden; from those, who diligently improve it, it will never be withdrawn.

In the first place, it teaches us to repent of our sins. If they are so odious in the sight of God, and have thrown upon us so great a weight of guilt, as to require the propitiatory sacrifice of one, so dear in his sight, and in himself of such transcendent dignity and holiness, it surely concerns us to mourn severely for our sins ourselves, to confess them before God in fervent supplication of his mercy, and, as far as we have grace to enable us, to forsake and abandon them for ever. It concerns us also very frequently and very strictly to examine ourselves, whether we have made any progress in our repentance, more especially of those sins, to which from habit or constitution we are most inclined; to be vigilant and circumspect in all our conduct, and to make a sacrifice of every

affection repugnant to the law and will of God.

After engaging our repentance from every sin, it urges the cultivation of every virtue. And first of humility towards God: If it was expedient for so great and so innocent a Person as the Son of God to suffer an agonizing death, in order to make atonement for our sins, shall we presume on our own righteousness to engage his favour, or to merit his reward? Of resignation to the will of God: If Christ his only Son condescended on our account to do and to endure the whole will of God, shall we hesitate on our own account to do and to endure whatever he requires? Of thankfulness under blessings and of patience under sufferings: If Christ, a Person of unblemished innocence and of transcendent worth, submitted to forego the happiness of heaven and to suffer the extremities of evil in our nature, shall we, who are unworthy, be unthankful for unmerited favours? shall we, who are guilty, presume to murmur when we suffer for ourselves? Of readiness to suffer for righteousness sake: If our blessed Lord, for the purpose of fulfilling all righteousness, was content to endure the cross, and to despise the shame, shall we, who profess ourselves his disciples,

disciples, hesitate to take up our cross with him, and to submit to all those partial evils, which we may be called to undergo, in vindication or testimony of virtue and religion ?

It urges us to peace and charity with our brethren. If Christ so loved us, as to lay down his life a peace-offering for us, ought not we also to love one another? And how shall we more adequately express this love, than in studying to maintain a spirit of unity and benevolence among all those, who have a common interest in his precious sacrifice, and in labouring by exhortation, by example, and by intercession, to restore them to the peace and love of God ?

It urges us to purity both of heart and life. If Christ " hath given himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works," shall not we be careful and vigilant to purify ourselves, even as he is pure, so that we may be in a condition " to present our bodies, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, to God ?"

To conclude, It presses on us a frequent and thankful remembrance of his death, in the manner that he has appointed, by par-

taking of his Supper in the congregation of the faithful. For we cannot be true in our allegiance to him, unless we obey him in his positive, as well as in his moral injunctions, more especially by doing this in remembrance of him. And this, though apparently no more than a positive duty, will be full of moral improvement; since it will make a more sensible impression on our mind, of that Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world. And while it operates on our faith, it will also animate our practice: it will dispose us, more carefully to examine our hearts and lives, to renew our repentance for all our former sins, to confirm our good resolutions of leading a new life, and to give the whole application of our faculties to be poor in spirit, to be pure in heart, to be at peace with God, and to be in charity with all men.

If thus with the eye of faith we look upon that Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world, we may hope hereafter to behold him face to face in the realm of heavenly bliss, and to be admitted into the number of that blessed multitude, who join in this divine doxology: “Unto him, that loved us, and washed us from our sins

sins in his own blood, and hath made us Kings and Priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever?
Amen^c!"

^c Rev. i. 5, 6.

S E R M O N III.

ISAIAH lxi. 1, 2.

(LUKE iv. 18, 19.)

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me. He hath sent me to publish good tidings to the meek; to bind up the broken-hearted; to proclaim deliverance to the captives; and the opening of the prison to the bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

IN these animating words the Prophet Isaiah announces the most valuable benefits, which a gracious Providence can confer on man. They must therefore be particularly welcome to all those, who have an interest in the tidings they communicate. A mighty Year of grace, deliverance, and happiness is proclaimed; which the Prophet represents by an allusion to the periodical observance of every fiftieth year, as ordained by the Law of Moses, when the trumpet of Jubilee sounded through the land, and liberty was proclaimed to all its inhabitants, and they returned every man to his own

own family^a; in other words, when every debt was cancelled, every slave was freed, and every inheritance reverted to its original house.

Before we examine these words in that point of view, wherein they more immediately interest ourselves, it may be convenient to inquire, how they were understood by the people to whom they were originally given. From that preeminence of character, which Isaiah bore in Israel, the cotemporary Jews might at first imagine, that he spoke immediately of himself. They could not be strangers to those high notices, with which he had been privileged above his Brethren, in seeing the Lord in his temple, and being touched by the Seraph with the hallowed fire^b. They might therefore be prepared to suppose, that as the Spirit of the Lord was upon him in this embassy of grace, so he was himself the person thus especially anointed by the Lord, for the purpose not only of proclaiming, but also of administering every valuable gift. But this acceptance they must have relinquished, if they considered the tenor of the prophecy with a reference to the complexion of the time when it was given. The blessings which

^a Lev. xxv. 8, &c.

^b Isa. vi. 1, &c.

it enumerates imply a deliverance from some very great and general calamities, of which they had no experience in the days of Isaiah; for the age in which he flourished, except for some few transient clouds, was a season to the Jews of eminent prosperity. It must therefore of necessity be referred to some future period, when the Prophet's ministry was closed.

It was no uncommon usage in the prophetic style for the Prophet to assume the character of the Agent, when he was no other than the Harbinger, of heavenly counsels and dispensations. And thus unquestionably must we understand Isaiah in this place. He presages blessings, not to be administered immediately by himself, but to be accomplished afterwards by some other Minister of the divine will. He could not but foresee a formidable train of evils, which by the righteous judgment of God were to involve his people, when the measure of their sins was full. But this mournful theme was more congenial to the plaintive Jeremiah, than to the elevated spirit of the Son of Amos. Taking most complacence in images of public peace and happiness, he passes his eye with a rapid glance over the calamities of his country, that he may fix it on those years of brighter fortune,

fortune, when the Sun of Israel should again arise, and the glory of the Lord should again be diffused upon them.

As far as the prophecy admitted of application to temporal and national themes, it must be referred, as indeed it was understood by the Jews of a later age, to the deliverance of that people from the Babylonian yoke; a revolution marked with the most welcome vicissitude of fortune, from slavery to freedom, from misery to happiness, from exile to their country. This great event was accomplished by the ministry of Cyrus, the illustrious Founder of the Persian Empire, whom the same Isaiah had foretold by name some ages before his birth, with every circumstance, that could give dignity and splendour to a special Agent of the will of Heaven. God himself pronounces him his Shepherd, and his Anointed Prince, whom he would raise in righteousness, and hold by the right hand, to fulfil his pleasure, and to execute his counsels, to release his captives, to restore his exiles, to reestablish the commonwealth of Israel, and to rebuild the City and Temple of the Lord^c. Under his auspicious rod of empire good tidings were published to the

^c Isa. xliv. 28. xlv. 1, &c.

meek, and healing was administered to the broken-hearted, and deliverance was granted to the captives, and the prison was opened for the bound, and the gracious year of acceptance with the Lord, the year of general restitution and release, proclaimed.

But great as this deliverance under Cyrus was, the Prophet had a nobler and more important theme in view. The Jews themselves, though the veil of carnal prejudice was upon their eyes, were disposed to understand these prophetic words as descriptive of superior blessings, yet in store for God's peculiar people, under the banners of a Person to be born among themselves, of that Messiah or Anointed Prince, to whom from earliest to latest times their prophecies continually and invariably point. To this divine Personage they solicitously bent their hopes; and from his tutelary care, as they understood their Prophets, they expected every kind of national prosperity and glory, the independence of Judah, the restoration of the scattered tribes, a conquest of their enemies, and a preeminence of dominion over all the world.

When Jesus Christ appeared, he by no means answered the description, which they had fancied to themselves, of the promised Messiah;

Messiah ; nor indeed to external view did he justify the expectations, which they had fondly cherished of a temporal Prince. But invested as he was by the power of the Spirit, which approved him mighty both in word and deed, he could not but engage attention from every disposition and character of men. While he travelled through the land of Galilee, a fame of him went abroad through all the region round : and he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all^d.

In the circuit that he made in Galilee, he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath-day. And he stood up for to read, agreeably to the usage of the public service among the Jews, of rehearsing a portion of the Law or the Prophets, accompanied with an exposition or paraphrase. And there was delivered unto him the book of the Prophet Isaiah : when by a special direction of providence the book was opened on this memorable text. When therefore he began to read, he would naturally engage the serious notice of the whole assembly. Whatever prejudice they might entertain against him, (for this prejudice was

* Luke iv. 14, 15.

the greatest in his own country, and among his own kindred,) they would be curious to hear, what a Teacher, so distinguished by the voice of fame, could say upon so interesting a theme. During the pause, that ensued after he had closed the book, the eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on him.

And he began to say unto them, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” Instead of applying it to any temporal or any national deliverance, whether past or to come, he brought it home to the spiritual and universal deliverance of the world. The Spirit of the Lord, which had been upon Isaiah, was now diffused in more than double portion on the holy Jesus. He was anointed in a more divine manner ; he had tidings of superior good to preach ; and he had a far more important redemption to accomplish. And therefore, without detracting any thing from the high character of Isaiah, we may truly say, Behold a greater than Isaiah is here.

The Jews had been accustomed to receive the Scriptures in a literal and temporal sense. An Interpreter from heaven was now risen among them, who undrew the veil of shadows from the Law and the Prophets, and explained them in their full and true design, as representing spiritual themes, as delineating

better things to come. The Covenant of the Law, when rightly understood, was emblematic and predictive of the Covenant of Grace. The ceremonial service of the Law was a type or picture of the spiritual service of the Gospel. In like manner the whole Civil History of the Hebrews, in the several changes which they so oft experienced, from the discipline of adverse to the recompence of prosperous fortune, from poverty to plenty, from warfare to peace, from slavery to freedom, from pilgrimage to a settled habitation, from exile to their proper country, may be regarded as a prophetic parable of the Spiritual History of that holy Nation, that peculiar People, which constitutes the Kingdom of the Messiah in its two different states, of discipline and trial upon earth, of recompence and happiness in heaven. Of this complexion is the passage now before us. In its literal and more immediate sense it may signify the temporal deliverance of the Jews from the Babylonish yoke, and their restoration by Cyrus to their patrimonial home. But in its final and most important aim it represents the spiritual deliverance of all mankind by Jesus Christ, the true Shepherd and Anointed of the Lord, from the bondage of sin and death, and their final establishment in the spiritual Sion,

Sion, the City of the living God, in the heavenly Canaan, the true land of promise for the chosen and the blest of God.

To this intent was the interpretation of our Lord in the synagogue of Nazareth. Though the discourse itself is not recorded, yet the purport of it is sufficiently implied; and the effect which it had upon his audience is explicitly told. So great was the energy of truth in what he said, that, notwithstanding the prejudice entertained against him, a temporary sentiment of his prophetic character prevailed. "They all bore him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth."

Thus guided by our Lord himself in the interpretation of this Prophecy, let us examine and apply it in that evangelical sense which he has fixed upon it.

This embassy of grace is opened with a declaration of the authority on which it was delivered. In the character of a person greater than himself the Prophet says, *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for the purpose, for which he hath anointed me.* The Spirit of the Lord had been on the ancient Prophets through a series of ages; by which they wrought righteousness, and obtained promises; by which they performed miracles,

and foretold events to come. But if there ever was a person, on whom this divine Spirit was diffused in unlimited abundance, it was that special Minister of grace, in whom dwelt bodily all the fulness of the Godhead. Thus he is styled in prophetic language, Immanuel, or, God with us. And indeed through the whole of his ministry he shewed himself to have been not merely gifted with an extraordinary measure of divine wisdom and power, but to have been himself the wisdom and the power of God. This indeed was partially acknowledged even by the Jews, who were witnesses of his ministry. When they heard his doctrines, they testified, saying, “Never man spake like this man.” And when they saw and felt his miracles, they also testified, saying, “It was never so seen in Israel.”

Our Lord indeed was not anointed with oil, according to the letter of the Legal ordinance. But in the spiritual import of that external rite he was anointed in a manner incomparably more divine, “he was anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power.” Which may be referred to the time of his Baptism; immediately upon which the Spirit of God descended in a visible form upon him, and a Voice from heaven proclaimed,
“ This

“ This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Now this gift of the Spirit was conferred upon our Lord for that important purpose for which he was anointed ; namely, to perform all those more exalted offices, to which among Jews anointing was the inaugurating rite : of a Prophet, as he was to declare the will of God to man : of a Priest, as he was to yield a sacrifice, and to make an intercession, for the people : of a King, as he was to establish a Kingdom over men, very different indeed from the kingdoms of this world, of a divine and spiritual kind, consisting of two different states, of present grace and of future glory. And hence he derived his most distinguished name, as expressed in different languages to the same effect, of the Messiah, the Christ, or the Anointed.

After stating the commission and authority of Christ, the Prophecy enumerates the blessings which he was to administer. All these may be taken in a literal and in a figurative, in a temporal and in a spiritual sense. In the former sense they were limited to the Contemporaries and Countrymen of Jesus, in the latter they were extended to the whole Christian World. But these two senses have a close and intimate connexion ; inasmuch as the

temporal benefits, which he conferred on those within the sphere of his personal ministry, were no other than pledges and emblems of the spiritual blessings, which he distributes impartially to all ages and nations of Believers.

He hath sent me to publish good tidings to the Meek ; or as we read in our version of the Evangelist, *to preach the Gospel to the Poor.* Through all the holy Scriptures the Gospel is represented as an embassy of gladness. In this character it was repeatedly foretold by the Prophets : In this it was announced by the Angels at the birth of Christ : And thus was it invariably styled by Christ himself and his Apostles. And well does it deserve the name and character ; since it communicates the greatest blessings, which could flow from the source of every good ; comprising no less than redemption from sin, and pardon on repentance, the assisting and supporting grace of God, acceptance into his favour here on earth, and adoption into his household in the realms of heaven.

Now these blessed tidings he was pleased more immediately to communicate to the Meek, or to the Poor, for these in holy writ are frequently combined as kindred characters, and are sometimes put indifferently for

one another. The Meek in the language of the Prophet are the same with the Poor in the language of the Evangelist. And how well these prophetic words were fulfilled in our Lord appears from that appeal, which he made to the common exercise of his ministry. Among the several works of benevolence, in which he was continually employed, he mentions this the last, as giving more appropriate evidence of the true Anointed of the Lord, than all those miracles which produced astonishment among the people. Under his ministration “the blind received their sight, and the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, and the deaf heard; even the dead were raised.” But a fuller exercise of mercy still remained to testify his mission and to illustrate his character; “And the poor had the Gospel preached unto them.” Passing by the great, the wealthy, and the wise of this world, who were too much attached to the things of this life, to receive with due regard an embassy from heaven, he visited the dwellings of the lowly, he conversed with the common people, he chose his disciples from the unlettered orders of society. We are not however to understand that he looked

^e Mat. xi. 5.

with such peculiar favour on the state of poverty itself, but only as it cherished and improved a disposition most congenial to his spirit, and therefore best adapted for the reception of his Gospel. Humility of circumstance was a favourable soil for humility of mind, that root and principle of the Christian character. And therefore we may understand it was, that while he opened the treasures of divine grace to all, he offered them in the first place to the Poor and to the Meek.

And the same disposition of mind, which he favoured so essentially in his personal ministry, is still expected and enjoined as a primary qualification for becoming and for continuing his disciples. Whatever be our station or condition in society, whether high or low, rich or poor, learned or ignorant, if we would have any portion in this offered good, we must learn of him to be meek and lowly in heart. We must entertain an humble opinion of ourselves in regard to spiritual things, a devout submission to the law, and a patient resignation to the will, of Heaven. For such a character of mind is not only a positive condition, but also a virtual qualification for admission into his kingdom, whether in the state of grace or of glory. Accordingly to persons of this character our Lord assigns
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the first of his beatitudes ; “ Blessed are the Poor in spirit ; for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Another object of our Saviour’s mission was, *To bind up the Broken-hearted.* While he went about doing good, he found abundant scope for the exercise of his benevolence in alleviating the afflictions of a wounded spirit ; more especially such as exceed all human cure, as when a Sister mourns over the tomb of her beloved Brother, or when a bereaved Widow follows the corse of her only Son to the grave. In this case he was ready to administer a supernatural consolation. To the tenant of the silent tomb he said, “ Come forth.” To the Young man borne upon the bier he said, “ Arise.” Thus he effectually dispelled the Sister’s tears ; thus he turned the Widow’s sorrows into joy.

But the relief, which he thus administered to those, who were pierced to the soul for the natural afflictions of human life, was a pledge of that more extensive and more efficient relief, which he was always ready to administer to those, who were broken-hearted with a sense of their sins and a fearful apprehension of the wrath of God. To them he was always liberal of his mercies. As soon as they displayed the feeling sorrows of a contrite

trite heart, with repentance towards God and faith in him, he was ready to address them in the language of consolation and forgiveness.

And the same healing power he is ready still to exercise toward all, who labour under the same affliction, the anguish of a broken heart, arising from the consciousness of sins, and the terrors of the divine displeasure. And who among us can presume to say that he is innocent in the sight of God? Who can boast he never hath offended? If we truly know ourselves, we all have reason to lament our unhappy state. For we all without exception labour under the maladies of a corrupted nature; and to all of us indifferently belongs the confession in our daily prayers, that there is no health in us. But no sooner are we conscious of our unhappy state, than we learn for our comfort where a remedy is to be found. To those, who resort in penitence and tears to Christ, he still presents himself the true Physician of the soul. To them he is understood to say in the still small voice of conscience, "Your faith hath healed you; go in peace." To this purpose he declares in his Sermon on the Mount; "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted."

Another

Another part of our Saviour's ministry was, *To proclaim, or, To preach deliverance to the Captives.* By Captives in the primary sense we may understand all those, so frequently mentioned in the gospel history, who laboured under the burden of bodily diseases and infirmities, which arrested the liberty of action and impeded the faculties of life. No sooner did our Lord appear, than all those maladies which are incident to human nature fled. Whatever was the disease or deprivation under which they laboured, were it ever so severe or inveterate, they had only to repair to him, and at a touch, or at a word, they were instantaneously loosed from the bonds of their infirmities.

By these benevolent operations on the bodies of men, he shewed his authority to accomplish a far more important and beneficial work, the deliverance of their souls from the bondage and the yoke of sin. Having ocular proof of his divine authority, when he said to the impotent, "Arise, and walk," and to the sick, "Be whole," they could not question the efficacy of his absolution, when he said to the Captive in the spiritual life, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." To them, who were oppressed with a galling sense of their iniquities, and found no alleviation of their burden from those,

those, who sat in the chair of Moses, and assumed the authority of Masters in Israel, he addressed this language of compassion and consolation, “ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest.”

And the same deliverance he continues to extend to all the sons of men; more especially to those, who feel the burden under which they bend, and acknowledge and address him as the Deliverer of the soul. Herein we have all a common interest. Unconscious as we seem of the servitude we bear, we are all too much the slaves of our vicious passions and propensities, which are the most despotic masters that can bear dominion over us, and the most fatal enemies to our final peace. Approving in our hearts what is good, we find in our bodies no disposition to perform it. Our reason would persuade us to love and cultivate the law of God; but with a stronger sway our passions bend us to the dominion and control of sin^f. In this unhappy state we are not left without a powerful and a willing Friend. Our blessed Lord presents himself to our regard, as the means of deliverance from this deadly bondage. If we

truly seek his aid in penitence and faith, we shall be made free from sin. If we take his yoke and learn of him, we shall find rest unto our souls.

With Deliverance to the Captives is combined a correspondent image in the text of Isaiah ; *And the opening of the prison to the Bound*, or as it may be rendered, *And all manner of opening to the Bound*: which is accepted by the Evangelist, as it had been before interpreted in the version of the Septuagint, to signify the opening of the eyes, *And recovering of sight to the Blind*; a rendering, which is countenanced by a parallel passage of the same Isaiah, relating equally to the same deliverance; “ I will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations; To open the eyes of the Blind, to bring the Captives out of prison, and out of the dungeon them that sit in darkness ^{s.}.” Now this restoration of sight is one of the most distinguished of our Saviour’s miracles. And therefore this is mentioned first in his enumeration of those mighty works, to which he appeals in evidence of his being the promised Minister from heaven. In his travels through the land this energy of grace was very frequently exerted.

^s Isa. xlii. 6, 7.

Those, who had lost their sight, were cheered again with the gladsome light of day, and every thing desirable to the human eye. And those, who had never seen, were still more astonished with the welcome opening of a new sense to the perception and understanding.

In this act of benevolence he gave an earnest of his authority to recover the spiritual sight of those, who were blind in ignorance and error. This he did in his preaching to the common people of the Jews, who were destitute of all beneficial aid from those, who professed themselves to be guides of the blind and lights to them that were in darkness. He taught them, what they would have sought in vain from the Scribes and Teachers of the Law, whatever is requisite for a state of grace on earth, as an essential qualification for a state of happiness in heaven. Thus under his ministration was fulfilled the welcome prophecy of the same Isaiah; “ The people, that walked in darkness, have seen a great light : They that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, unto them hath the light shined ^h.”

And the same gracious exercise he con-

^h Isa. ix. 2.

tinues in the world by the diffusion of his holy word, and by the operation of his holy Spirit. For he came to be the light and the life of men. Hence he is called in prophetic language, “The Sun of righteousness with healing on his wings.” Ever since he rose upon the world, it has been his benevolent office to illuminate the minds and to animate the hearts of men, to remove that mist of carnal passion, which obstructs their moral sight, and to open their eyes to the perception and enjoyment of celestial truth. He directs us on the way of holiness in our journey through the wilderness of life. And he opens to our view, for the end of our pilgrimage, the City of the heavenly King, where the Pure in heart shall be for ever blest in the vision of their God.

In concurrence with these energies of grace, it was a like exertion of our Saviour’s ministry, *To set at liberty them that are bruised.* Though this is not expressed in the original text of Isaiah, it is supplied in that of the Evangelist; and is indeed no other than a kindred, if not a synonymous image, with deliverance to the Captives, and opening of the prison to the bound. To accept it in this place with some little difference of signification; by them that are bruised we may understand

derstand more immediately those unhappy persons, who laboured under a dreadful malady more peculiar to that age and land, being exposed in their bodies to the malignant operations of the Devil. Thus they were bound with his chain, they were bruised with his rod. To these unhappy objects was our Lord's compassion very frequently shewn. Amid the various miracles which he wrought, the Gospels more especially dwell on such, as he exercised on those who were possessed with devils. He set them at liberty from this most afflictive servitude, and he healed the bruises to which they had been exposed.

And in this exercise of his power toward those, who were unhappily bruised in the body, he gave a pledge of his authority to set at liberty those, who by the same tyrannic foe were bruised in the soul. For this purpose he was manifested in the flesh, that he might destroy the works of the Devil. And the whole aim of his mission was directed to overturn the dominion of this spiritual tyrant, and to break the rod of the oppressor. At his entrance on his ministry, he began a conflict with this general foe, when he resisted his temptation in the wilderness. Through the whole course of his life he carried on the same successful warfare. In his

precious

precious death he engaged in mortal combat with the powers of darkness. And by his glorious resurrection and ascension he displayed his triumph both in heaven and earth.

And as he was employed, while he sojourned among us, in a personal conflict with his enemies, so from his seat in heaven he contributes the assistance of his holy Spirit to all, who are conscious of their captive state, and sigh for redemption from the galling chain.

For though by his painful encounter on the cross he hath spoiled principalities and powers, who had so long maintained a despotic empire in the world ; yet as long as the present state of discipline subsists, these enemies of our peace are still suffered to annoy us with every kind of seduction and assault. Although not subject to their visible dominion in the body, we still are liable to the rod of their oppression in the soul. As long as we continue in the militant state of the Christian life, we are called upon to contend, not only against the common temptations of flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high placesⁱ. In this arduous conflict we

ⁱ Eph. vi. 12.

have a certain ground of confidence in the Captain of our Salvation, provided we continue with fortitude under his banner, and resolutely fight the good fight of faith. If in steady defiance of the power and the wiles of the Devil we preserve our allegiance to our spiritual King, he will give his Angels charge over us to keep us in all our ways. And when the scene of trial and of discipline is past, when he shall have put all enemies under his feet, when the powers of darkness shall be bound in everlasting chains, and sin and death shall be swallowed up in victory, we shall finally partake in the triumph of that divine Hero, who hath overcome the world.

The last of the blessings enumerated in the text, and what comprehends and completes the whole, is, *To proclaim the acceptable Year of the Lord*, or in other words, *the Year of Acceptance with the Lord*. As the proclamation of Jubilee under the Mosaic Law announced to the Jews a release from every servitude, a remission of every debt, and a restitution of every inheritance; so the publication of the Gospel announces to all the Sons of men, not only a release from the bondage of legal rites, and a restitution to that liberty in which Christ has made us free, but also the remission of sins upon repentance and faith,

faith, and a restoration to the privileges of adoption and grace, which had been forfeited by an alienation from the will of God. Thus when our Lord was born into the world, a multitude of Angels celebrated this event, as the era of a happy scene of things, "of peace on earth and of good will to men." In like manner the beloved Disciple in the front of his sacred history declares, in opposition to the gloom and shadows of the Law of Moses, that " grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." His Gospel was a publication of grace, inasmuch as it represented God, not as a Master, strict in exacting every task, and severe in punishing every failure, but as a Father, tenderly disposed toward all mankind, and solicitous for their peace and welfare, requiring of them indeed a sincere and faithful service, yet willing to forgive their transgressions upon repentance, and to supply them with assistance in what he has appointed them to do. It was also a publication of truth, inasmuch as it not only shewed more clearly the attributes of God and the nature and business of man, but as it also brought to light, what had been under the Law but obscurely signified and but partially understood, an everlasting inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven, in clearest language

promised and by infallible proofs assured to all, who seek admission into this kingdom, by repenting of their sins and believing the Gospel.

This inheritance is the crown of all other blessings administered by Christ; and to this the whole prophecy in its most important sense conclusively applies. While it more immediately represents the state of grace, it is finally descriptive of the state of glory: when glad tidings shall be published to the Poor; for they shall be invested with the treasures of the heavenly Kingdom: when healing shall be administered to the Broken-hearted; for their temporary sorrows shall be converted into everlasting joy: when deliverance shall be granted to the Captives; for they shall be redeemed from the bondage of corruption to the glorious liberty of the Children of God: when sight shall be restored to the Blind; for the film of worldly darkness shall be totally withdrawn, and they shall see God as he is in all the light of life: when liberty shall be wrought for the Bruised; for our great Deliverer shall effectually break the rod, shall decisively bruise the head of their spiritual Oppressor, and shall put all enemies under his feet: and when that great and glorious Year shall commence of universal

sal peace and happiness to all the ransomed of the Lord.

Thus are we invited to contemplate Christ in all those endearing characters, in which he is foretold by the Prophets and is more distinctly manifested in the Gospel, as a Minister of grace, a Physician of the soul, a Deliverer from the most oppressive servitude, and an exceeding great Reward.

But while we contemplate him in his mercies, let us not forget to regard him also in his judgments. Reverting to the sequel of this prophetic text we find, that the same great era which is called, *The Year of Acceptance with the Lord*, is also called in the corresponding clause, *The Day of Vengeance of our God*. And such will be the state of things at that great and awful day, when he, that came before in the character of a Deliverer and a Lawgiver, will finally visit the world in the character of a Judge. In that tremendous hour, while he tempers judgment with mercy to those, who have gratefully received his proffered grace, and by repentance and faith have turned unto him with all their hearts, he will administer judgment without mercy to those, who have resisted or set at nought his grace, who in spite of warning have continued in impeni-

tence, who against conviction have remained in virtual unbelief.

In the economy of his government our Lord employs every means consistent with a state of discipline, to engage us to his law and to retain us in his service. He hath set before us life and death, and thus he appeals at once to our hopes and to our fears. Indeed he rather seeks to draw us by his grace, than to compel us by his power, to entreat us by his mercies, than to control us by his judgments. But if men are not moved to repentance by the goodness of God^k, it is expedient to persuade them by the terrors of the Lord^l.

By which of these two motives shall we be bound in our allegiance to our heavenly King? Shall we yield him our service out of a spirit of fear?—Far rather let us yield it out of a spirit of gratitude and love. Convincing as we are of the intolerable miseries, from which he has redeemed us, and of the inestimable benefits, which he has purchased for us by his precious blood, let us sacrifice for him every unlawful and irregular desire, and let us commit ourselves, both bodies and souls, to his government and guidance: con-

^k Rom. ii. 4.

^l 2 Cor. v. 11.

tinually waiting our appointed time of discipline on earth, in devout and humble hope of having an interest in that great Year of Acceptance with the Lord, when all, who are Israelites indeed, shall be called to their proper home, the Sion of the living God, and shall for evermore enjoy the full beatitude of the heavenly Kingdom.

S E R M O N IV.

JOHN i. 14.

*And the Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us ;
(and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten
of the Father;) full of Grace and Truth.*

IN preface to the history of our Saviour's life and conversation upon earth, the Apostle and Evangelist represents him in the fulness of his character, as the ΛΟΓΟΣ, or the Word of God ; a term of more extensive and important meaning in the original Greek, than we are accustomed to affix to it in the vulgar tongue ; since it implies both the reason and the speech of God, both the counsel determined in the divine mind, and the same expressed in the operations of his providence and grace. He declares, that in the beginning was the Word, that the Word was with God, and that the Word was God : that all things were made by him, and that without him existed no created thing : that in him was life ; and the life was the light of men. As he was the source of natural life

to

to the whole creation, so was he the source of spiritual life to the whole race of men; inasmuch as he imparted the light of heavenly truth to illuminate their minds and to animate their souls. To him the precious embassy belonged, to unfold the hopes and to display the means of salvation to mankind. For him was the great and glorious ministry reserved, to abolish the power of death, and to bring life and immortality to light^a.

But so much in general are the eyes of men obscured by sinful passions and diverted by worldly cares, that they do not appreciate or acknowledge the heavenly gift. The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not^b.

Before he was more openly manifested to the world, there was a Man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for a witness and harbinger of this divine Light, in order to prepare the people for the blessing that would shortly be revealed. He was not the promised Light himself, as he ingenuously confessed to the inquiries of the people. He was no other than a morning Star before that Sun of spiritual day, who soon should rise to shed his healing and benignant beams, with-

- ^a John i. 1—4.

^b Ver. 5.

out respect of clime or nation, on all the peopled earth^c.

This Fountain of light and life was indeed from earliest time, though not visibly and sensibly, yet spiritually present in the world. For as the world was by his ministration made, so by his ministration it has been continually sustained. But so deeply was it sunk in corruption and idolatry, as not to acknowledge and regard him. He came unto his own, to the people of Israel, who had long been distinguished above all other nations by the special countenance of Heaven. For as he had been partially signified to them in the Law and in the Prophets, so to them he personally came, when he visibly appeared on the earth. But so much had the veil of prejudice overspread their hearts, that his own in general received him not. But as many as received him in the character which he bore, as many as believed on him as the Word of God, the organ and minister of the divine will, to them gave he power to become the Sons of God; being admitted to the privileges of this divine relation, not in consequence of their carnal origin from the Father of the Faithful, or of their adoption into the legal

^c John i. 6—9.

covenant as proselytes of the Gentiles, but by the special grace of God ^d.

The Apostle, having thus established the dignity of that Person whom he styles the Word, proceeds to declare the manner of his appearance in the world. That he might more effectually accomplish the work of grace and peace to men, *The Word was made Flesh*. Notwithstanding the dignity of his nature, he did not confine himself to the seat of happiness in heaven ; nor was he satisfied to be present with us merely in spirit ; but he condescended to visit us in person ; and, that he might answer the great purposes of divine counsels, he was pleased to assume our nature, and to sojourn among us in a human form.

Of this Incarnation prophetic notices had been vouchsafed from earliest times. To cheer our first Parents in the midst of their despondence on finding sin and death through their transgression introduced into the world, it was graciously signified, that the Woman's Progeny should bruise the Serpent's head ^e. And in the long series of continued revelation the same great mystery of godliness was foretold, under the several circumstances of the Nativity, the Time, the Place, the Family, and the Parent.

^d John i. 10—13.

^e Gen. iii. 15.

His

His Nativity itself is thus declared by Isaiah the great Prophet of the Gospel, together with those titles which distinguished him above the most exalted of the earth ; “ Unto us a Child is born ; unto us a Son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder ; and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” The Time was marked in the dying prophecy of the Patriarch Jacob ; which declared, that “ the sceptre should not depart from Judah, nor a Lawgiver from between his feet, till Shiloh,” or the Person sent, “ should come ^f.” The Place had been expressly signified by the Prophet Micah ; “ And thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall come a Ruler, who shall rule my people Israel ^h.” His Lineage from the house of David was frequently implied, and occasionally expressed, in the Psalms and in the Prophets. Thus Isaiah signified ; “ And there shall come forth a Rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest

^f Isa. ix. 6.

^g Gen. xlix. 10.

^h Micah v. 2.

upon him^{i.}" The same Prophet also signified his supernatural Parentage; "Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son; and she shall call his name Immanuel^{k.}" Though coming into the world in a human character and person, yet his miraculous birth should be a testimony of his being superior to the sons of men.

To express this assumption of our nature the Apostle adds, *He dwelt among us, καὶ ἐστηνώποτεν ἐν ἡμῖν*: wherein is an allusion to the manner, in which the divine presence was manifested unto Israel at the first promulgation of the Law. As God sojourned of old in the Tabernacle of the congregation, and the people of Israel saw the glory of the Lord^{l.}; so under the New Covenant, the Word of God sojourned in the Tabernacle of a human body, and the Apostle testified in the name of all his Brethren, *And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.* While he dwelt among us in a human form, his divinity was not shaded from the observation of those, who looked upon him with the eye of faith. Though he did not appear in all those terrible splendours,

ⁱ Isa. xi. 1, 2.

^k Isa. vii. 14.

^l Exod. xl. 34.

which invested the Father when he delivered the Law, yet he had graces to invest him, which abundantly testified him to the world for the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person. This glory the Apostles beheld at his Baptism and at his Transfiguration, at both which times the Divine radiance broke upon him, and a Voice from heaven proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." They beheld it in his Miracles, when at his word the maladies of human nature fled; when the powers of death and hell surrendered to him their respective prisoners; when multitudes in the wilderness were fed by a few loaves and fishes; when the winds and the seas were subject to his control. They beheld it even in the temporary shade of his Passion, when all Nature in agony seemed to sympathize with him, when the sun was darkened, the earth trembled, the rocks were rent, and the graves were opened; which drew this confession even from a Heathen Witness, "Truly this Man was the Son of God." They beheld it at his Resurrection, when he was declared the Son of God with power, when the earth again trembled, and Angels again came to minister unto him. They beheld it at his Ascension, when he was taken up from them

them triumphantly to heaven, to be for ever seated with his Father on his throne. Even after his ascension they occasionally beheld his glory communicated to them by a special revelation. Thus St. Stephen saw it at his martyrdom : St. Paul saw it at his conversion : and St. John, who testified all this, was admitted to behold him reseated on his Father's throne, and reinvested in that glory, which he partook with him before the creation of the world.

But the great and prominent advantage of our Saviour's ministry, when he dwelt among us in our nature, was, that he was *Full of Grace and Truth*. In these two essential points the Gospel far excelled the Law. For that the Apostle intended to pursue the allusion taken up before, and to mark the superiority of the Christian over the Mosaic Dispensation, is evident from the text which shortly follows, *The Law was given by Moses; but Grace and Truth came by Jesus Christ*. To this clause of my text, as equally descriptive of the mission and of the character of Christ, our principal regard is due on this occasion. Whether considered by himself, or contrasted with the Minister of the Legal Covenant, the Word of God was full of Grace and Truth.

I. The

I. The Word of God was *full of Grace*,
1, In the whole system of his mediation
between God and Man ; 2, In his personal
ministry upon earth ; 3, In the nature of his
Laws ; And, 4, in the distribution of his
favours.

1. The Word of God was full of grace in
the whole system of his mediation between
God and Man. Ever since the transgression
of Adam the nature of man had become
exceedingly corrupt. He had fallen deeply
into sin and error ; and was neither compe-
tent to make satisfaction to divine justice, nor
to recover himself from the evil of his way.
All this was partially understood in the Legal
Economy ; and some method of restoration
and satisfaction was signified in its numerous
rites and offerings. But the demand of that
law for a continual recurrence of such insti-
tutions was a mark of their deficiency to take
away sin, and to restore the original integrity
of man. To effect this beneficial service the
Word of God was pleased to offer himself a
Mediator between God and Man. For this
purpose it was expedient that he should par-
take of the nature both of God and Man.
Of the nature of God he had intimately par-
taken from all eternity. Of the nature of
Man he equally partook by condescending to

be born into the world, and dwelling among us in the substance of a human body. In the body of our nature he undertook to execute the whole will of God, whether positive or moral ; for so, as he declared at his baptism, it became him to fulfil all righteousness^m. In the body of our nature he submitted to become a propitiation for our sins. In his great love to man he surrendered himself to be wounded for our transgressions, to be bruised for our iniquities. And that we might want no proof of the sufficiency of his righteousness in life and of his sacrifice in death to our pardon and justification with God, he resumed that body which had been sacrificed for us ; and having staid on earth a convenient time for the assurance of his disciples that he was actually risen, in the body of our nature he ascended into heaven, and resumed that glory which he possessed with his Father before the foundation of the world. By which two regal acts he has given us also full assurance, that if we avail ourselves of his merits by faith, and regulate our lives by his law, we also shall be raised, shall ascend into heaven, and shall dwell with him in glory.

^m Mat. iii. 15.

2. He was full of grace in his personal ministry upon earth. In delivering the Law, God manifested himself to Israel in all the terrors of his divinity. Though not personally seen, yet his presence was displayed upon Mount Sinai in thunders and lightnings and in smoke and fire; and so tremendous was his voice, that the people intreated they might hear it no more.

In a very different manner was the Gospel administered by the Word of God. For this divine Person having assumed our nature condescended to converse with men in a free and familiar manner. In every thing, but sin, which was totally repugnant to his character and purpose, he submitted to become like one of us, and was contented for our sakes to bear our sorrows and to sustain our infirmities. Thus having reduced himself to a capacity of conversing face to face with men, he went about the land of Palestine, seeking opportunities to exercise the work of mercy and benevolence. Through all his ministry upon earth he was incessantly employed in promoting both the temporal and the spiritual good of men. For this, as the Prophet had foretold, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him; for this he was anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power, to

publish glad tidings to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind. All these great works of charity and mercy he visibly performed on the bodies of men, whatever were the maladies under which they groaned ; by which he gave an earnest of his power and authority for a far more important and beneficial purpose, to heal the maladies and to work the deliverance of their souls. This appears in the tenour of all his conversation. For though to the Pharisees and Scribes, who were zealous for the form, while they wanted the power, of godliness, he was occasionally severe in his reproofs, yet to those, who had an humbler sense of their spiritual state, the mildness of his doctrine is well represented by Isaiah ; “A bruised reed he shall not break, and the dimly burning flax he shall not quench.” For the general complexion of his discourse was pardon to the penitent, and consolation to the sorrowful, and encouragement to the pious and well-disposed, and grace to all, who came to him in faith, and listened to his words in sincerity and truth.

Another great advantage resulted from his ministry in a human person, that he was competent to illustrate his doctrines by his own

own example. For in assuming the nature, he submitted to the duties, of man ; and as it became him to fulfil all righteousness, so he was a pattern of every branch of righteousness to men. In all his conduct whether personal or relative, in every duty whether positive or moral, he has left us an example, that we should follow his steps. As in his doctrine he was to us a Preceptor in godliness, so in his life and conversation he was a living and persuading Guide.

3. He was full of grace in the complexion of his precepts, being all of a moral and spiritual nature. The Law had indeed enjoined all those moral duties, which are comprehended in the love of God and the love of Man. For these are of eternal obligation ; and whatever be the fate of all positive injunctions, these must continually endure without variation or decay. But beside these essential duties, the Law required many cumbersome, expensive, and even painful rites. Not to speak of the seal of initiation into that Covenant by blood, it enjoined a tedious process of bodily washings and purifications, a costly series of daily sacrifices and offerings, and a frequent and punctual observance of solemn times and seasons. On the whole it was encumbered with so great a weight of

ceremonial duties, that the Apostle calls it a yoke, which neither they nor their Fathers were able to bear.

The Word of God requires an easier and a cheaper service. He demands the observance of all the moral precepts, as strictly as the Law of Moses; or rather he has given them greater weight, inasmuch as he claims obedience to them, not only in the letter, but also in the spirit, not only in the formal homage of the body, but also in the vital service of the soul. In this respect indeed he does not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets, that is, to disannul their authority, but to fulfil them. But from the ceremonial Law he has entirely set us free. He exacts neither painful services nor expensive sacrifices. Instead of a continual round of bodily washings and bleeding victims, he requires no other rites than Baptism, to be once undergone at our admission into his kingdom, the seal of that faith and the symbol of that purity, in which we engage ourselves to live; and the Supper of our Lord, to be frequently received as a standing memorial of a Saviour's love, in offering his body to be broken and his blood to be shed for the remission of our sins. To these we must add the observance of the Sabbath. For though more expressly enjoined

joined under the Law, it has been always understood to retain its obligation over Christians; not so much indeed as a positive institution; for in this respect the Christian Church has departed from the letter of the ancient ordinance, by transferring the observance from the Seventh day of the week to the First; but as a moral service, expedient for our growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; inasmuch as the consecrating a certain portion of our time to pious contemplations and divine exercises is the best and most acceptable offering, which we can render to a pure and holy God. Well therefore might our heavenly Teacher say, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is lightⁿ. ”

4. He is full of grace in the distribution of his favours. Even under the Law, which displays the justice more than the mercy of God, he is frequently represented as gracious and indulgent to his people. Yet in general he appears in the character of a Master, imposing a rigid service, and exacting the perform-

ⁿ Mat. xi. 28, &c.

ance of the whole on certain penalties for every transgression or deviation. Hence the people of Israel were said to be under the spirit of bondage, and to be compelled to obedience by a servile fear.

Under the Gospel economy God invariably appears in the milder characters of tenderness and love. On consideration of a Saviour's merits he is pleased to regard us with the affections of a Father. Through the powerful intercession of the Son of God, the eldest born in heaven, we have pardon of our past errors upon repentance and faith in him, we have assistance from above upon our fervent supplication and our earnest endeavours to do his holy will. Thus we are moved to obedience by a filial love; we are animated in our duty by a sense of God's paternal countenance. "For we have not received the spirit of bondage to fear," as was the case under the Law; "but we have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."^o

But the great benefit of this adoption is not merely the favour of God on earth, but

^o Rom. viii. 15, 16.

also his inheritance in heaven. For as the Apostle infers from this relation; “ If children, then heirs ; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.” The crown of all the blessings, which we derive from our gracious Mediator, is the tenure of that full, perfect, and eternal happiness, which he has purchased and assured for all his faithful followers in the life to come. This inestimable offer may be regarded as peculiar to the Gospel. To the Children of Israel the Law had conditionally given no greater promise than that of a temporal inheritance in a good and fruitful land : though certainly their Prophets and righteous men entertained more exalted hopes, and were desirous to look into that mystery of future grace, which was partially concealed from view. This glorious and assured hope “ is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.” Hence the Gospel is called, The grace of God, which bringeth salvation to all men. For the object of his coming into the world (to adopt the words of his declaration to Paul, when he called him in so miraculous man-

ner, to make him a minister and a witness of his faith) was “ to open the eyes of men, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God ; that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified, by faith in him ^{q.}”

II. I proceed to consider the Second character of this divine Word : He was *full of Truth*. In this point also we may observe an opposition to the Law of Moses. Not that we must imagine truth to be here opposed to error. For the Law was from the same source of truth as the Gospel. But the Revelation of Christ was a greater truth in opposition to a less. The Law was the shadow, but the Gospel was the substance. The Law was the reflected light of the Moon ; the Gospel was the noonday splendour of the Sun of righteousness. This may be observed in these several articles ; 1, in its Discoveries ; 2, in its Precepts ; and, 3, in its Motives.

1. The Discoveries of religion relate both to God and Man.—Under both Dispensations we are taught of God, that he is a Being of

^q Acts xxvi. 18.

infinite

infinite power, wisdom, and justice ; that he created the world by his word, and still up-holds it by his providence ; that he has a primary regard for Man, whom he placed at the head of his creation ; and that he makes all human actions subservient to his own wise designs.

But under the Law God is frequently represented in the semblance of a corporeal Being, as more adapted to the rude conceptions of a carnal people. In this point of view we behold him setting apart some particular spot for the seat of his immediate presence, and selecting a peculiar people for the special notice of his providence. Under the Gospel God is represented as an incorporeal and spiritual Nature, as casting the light of his countenance over all the world, and diffusing his spiritual as well as natural bounties indifferently on all men. In this dispensation he hath no respect of persons, he maketh no distinction of nations or communities of men ; but in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him^r. Being every where present, he is every where attentive to the homage of his faithful servants, who pay him a reverence correspon-

^r *Acts x. 35.*

dent to his nature, and worship him in spirit and in truth.

Under both Dispensations Man is considered as degenerate from that image of God, in which he was originally made. The perception of this degeneracy and the expedience of a restoration to his original character are equally acknowledged in the prevailing rite of sacrifice, which was common to all Heathen States, even before it was prescribed in the ritual of the Hebrews, and which declared in symbolic language this principle of divine justice, that “without shedding of blood there is no remission^s. ” It is difficult to discover by the light of reason, how taking the life of a brute animal could contribute to the expiation of human guilt. Indeed it was not possible, as the Apostle argues, that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins^t. But the whole mystery is solved, when we understand this religious rite to be a type or symbol of the great propitiation, which would afterwards be made by the death of Christ. This doctrine was copiously represented in the whole system of sacrifice under the Mosaic Law. It is more especially displayed in the sacrifice of the Paschal

^s Heb. ix. 22.

^t Heb. x. 4.

Lamb without spot or blemish, an unquestionable emblem of that Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world. It is still more circumstantially shadowed forth in the whole process of the Feast of Expiation, when the High Priest sacrificed a spotless Victim at the door of the Tabernacle, and then entered with the blood into the Holy of Holies, and sprinkling it on the Mercy-seat made a virtual intercession for the people. This delineates the whole doctrine of atonement by the blood of Christ, as is largely demonstrated in the Epistle to the Hebrews. He is the great High Priest, who offered himself for the sins of men a sacrifice on the cross; and on the merit of that sacrifice is entered into the most holy place, the residence of God himself, and is our prevailing Intercessor at the Mercy-seat of Heaven, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

2. The same comparison will hold between these two Dispensations, when we consider their respective Precepts. The Law required a long and tedious round of rites and ceremonies, of washings and sacrifices and solemn observances; which, whatever might have been their relative advantage to the people of Israel, do not seem to have much intrinsic worth; for it does not appear to the eye of reason

reason how they could render men more acceptable to God. The Prophets in some measure opened the design of these institutions, and shewed them to be emblems of a moral and spiritual service. But it was left for Jesus Christ to undraw the veil entirely from them, and to shew them in the fulness of truth. Illumined by this light of men we learn, that the ablutions of the body according to the Hebrew ritual, implied the purification of the soul according to the Christian service, “ by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost;” that the sacrifices of animals prescribed to the Hebrews, beside that mystery, which they symbolized, of atonement by the blood of Christ, implied what was necessary on our part, the surrender of ourselves and all our faculties to God’s honour and service.

At the same time it is to be observed, that in accommodation to our understandings, which require external and visible signs for the conveyance and impression of spiritual truth, our Lord has appointed two plain and easy Rites, bearing some analogy to the washings and sacrifices of the Mosaic Law; namely, Baptism, and the Supper of our Lord.

But he has taken care, that both these
Rites,

Rites, plain and easy as they are, should have a moral and internal use. For while they are emblems of a spiritual grace imparted to those, who piously and faithfully receive them, they are also inducements and encouragements to grow in grace and to improve in godliness. Thus Baptism, while it stands for an emblem to us of purification from the stains of sin, continues to us, when so initiated, a persuasive exhortation, that we perform the conditions, on which this grace is administered, by repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the Supper of the Lord, while it induces the divine grace on us who devoutly and worthily receive it, contributes to strengthen our faith, to reanimate our love to Christ, to open our hearts and hands in charity to all, who are partakers of the same spiritual graces. And surely this act of commemorating our Saviour's love in presenting himself a mortal sacrifice for us, must be a powerful inducement to us to fulfil the law of Christian love to our brethren, and to present our bodies a living sacrifice to God.

We may extend the comparison even to those moral precepts, which are common to the Law and to the Gospel. Under both Dispensations these two duties were enjoined,
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the love of God, and the love of our neighbour. This commandment was holy, just, and good ; but, as accepted by the Jews, it produced a formal, rather than a vital service : They honoured God in the letter ; but they did not honour him in the spirit. They loved their Neighbour in profession; but they did not love him in sincerity of heart and application of practice : Beside that they restricted the term of Neighbour, according to the literal sense, to those who were near them, or were partakers with them in the same country and religion. The Gospel gives an energy to the moral law, which was rarely and but faintly apprehended among the Jews. Instead of an outward and ceremonial service, we are required so to love the Lord, as to worship him in spirit and in truth; to mould our dispositions and characters to his, so as to chuse whatever he commands, and to refuse whatever he forbids, without hesitation or reluctance. By this standard of our love to God is regulated also our love to our Neighbour. We account ourselves obliged, not only to abstain from sinful acts, such as murder, adultery, theft, false witness ; but even to suppress intemperate anger, to restrain all lascivious and licentious thoughts, to control all inordinate inclinations after worldly wealth,

'wealth, to forbear all uncharitable judging of others ; on the whole to do to others, not as others use to do, but as we would have others do to us ; and instead of confining our love to those, who are our neighbours in the literal sense, to extend it indifferently to all, who are partakers in the bounties of the same providence, in the blessings of the same grace.

3. The same comparison will apply to the motives, which those two Dispensations hold forth for the observance of their respective precepts. The essential motives of all religion consist in rewards and punishments ; which have the strongest hold on the human mind, as they operate on the hopes and fears of men, the two chief springs and principles of action. The Law was sanctioned to the children of Israel by the promise of a certain good to obedience and by the threatening of a certain evil to disobedience. If they obeyed the Lord with all their faculties, they were to acquire and to retain possession of the land of promise, to enjoy long life and health, to have peace and plenty in their borders, and a numerous and flourishing posterity. If they disobeyed him, they were to be oppressed with famine, pestilence, and plague, to be annoyed by the sword of the enemy, to be

led into bondage and exile, to be deprived of posterity, to be cut off themselves in the strength of their days. And these promises and threatenings, according as they incurred them, by a special providence were remarkably fulfilled.

Thus the recompence proposed in the Law was confined in the letter to the present life. Yet in the spirit it was designed, and so it was understood and occasionally signified by the Prophets, for a type and earnest of a far more weighty recompence in the life to come. But though the Jews were disposed in general to entertain this expectation, they could not receive it with full assurance of faith, as it had not been expressly declared. And they looked to a future life, as through clouds and shades, that did not admit of a distinct and certain vision.

In this important article our Lord was eminently full of truth. He has placed this doctrine in the clearest light, that an hour will come, when he will call the world to judgment; “when all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.”

In all these respects the Incarnate Word was full of Grace and Truth.—This declaration of John the Apostle and Evangelist had been previously intimated by John the Baptist, when he bore witness of him saying, *He that cometh after me is preferred before me.* In every essential of a Minister of Heaven our Lord had the preeminence, not only over him, but over all the Prophets of the Hebrew Dispensation. Of this the Apostles had a still more sensible experience than the Baptist. As they were blest above the Prophets and righteous men of old, in seeing the works and in hearing the words of their divine Master, so they also were blest above them by a liberal participation of his grace and truth : *Of his fulness we have all received, and grace for grace.* For the Law was given by Moses ; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. In his dispensation God is made manifest to men in all his fairest; all his brightest attributes. It must indeed be allowed, that literally *No man hath seen God at any time.* For being a spiritual essence he is not visible to carnal eyes. But the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, who partakes of his substance, and intimately knows his most secret counsels,

the same hath openly declared him to the world.

Thus the Preface of the Evangelist affords a summary view of the Mission and Character of that divine Person, whose life and conversation, while he dwelt among us, he is about to write.

If we profess to know and to receive him in the character, in which he displays his glory to us in the Gospel, as the Incarnate Word of God, let us humbly adore the counsels of divine wisdom, justice, and benevolence, in adopting so wonderful a scheme of grace to accomplish our salvation. And while we contemplate him in those features of grace and truth, in which he is manifested to us in the Gospel, let us gratefully accept and assiduously improve all those advantages imparted to us before the wisest and the best of Heathens, before the Prophets and righteous men of the Legal Economy; continually striving to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Thus may we hope, that as we are now empowered to become the Sons of God, so we shall finally partake of the inheritance of Sons; that as we are privileged in this life to receive
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of his fulness in grace and truth, so we may be admitted in the life to come to partake of his fulness in happiness and glory ^u.

^u In this discourse the Author must acknowledge that he has fallen, not intentionally, but of necessity, into some similarity of argument with that of Dr. John Scott on the same text, at the close of his "Christian Life." He thinks it a point of justice to mention this: otherwise it would have been a point of prudence to suppress a remark, which may engage a comparison with so respectable a Divine.

S E R M O N V.

LUKE ii. 13, 14.

And suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly Host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.

THE Birth of a Redeemer is an event of the first importance in the spiritual history of Man. Agreeably to which importance it had often been presignified in the long series of ancient revelation: so that at the time, when it actually came to pass, a general expectation of this welcome Visitant was entertained among the Jews; and had even extended to the nations of the Gentiles. In regard to the Jews, to whom these prophetic notices were more immediately given, they had some general intimation of the time when he was to come, they were more directly instructed in the lineage from which he was to spring, and they were distinctly guided to

the very place that was to be honoured with his birth. But the manner of his coming did not correspond with the sentiments of those who expected him the most. Accustomed to regard him as the Heir and Representative of David, they looked for his first appearance in some stately palace, meet as they fancied for his kingly character, and with ensigns of dignity, correspondent with his future greatness. How little were they prepared for the tidings to be given, when this mighty Prince was born, that they might find him wrapt in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger !

Yet humbled as he was in the sight of men, he still was glorified among the inhabitants of heaven. Although no courtiers of an earthly kingdom were prepared to receive the Son of David at his coming, yet the courtiers of the heavenly kingdom were ever ready to attend him and to minister unto him. If Men were silent, when this Desire of all eyes appeared among them, Angels were at hand to open their lips, to proclaim his arrival on an embassy of grace, and to celebrate the blessing sent with a song of joyful praise.

The theme, that now required their song, was well adapted to those blessed Beings, who continually stand before the throne of God,

God, and tune their voices and their harps in adorations to that Almighty King, who dwells in light ineffable, and whose most engaging attribute is goodness.

The first time, that we read of their being so employed, was at that eventful hour, when this fabric of the World was called into existence at the word of the Creator. When the foundations of the globe were fastened, and the corner-stones were laid, then indeed, as the holy Scriptures intimate, the morning Stars sang together, and all the Sons of God shouted for joy^a. Are we solicitous to hear their song on this occasion? In the vision of the Evangelist we find one appropriate for this mighty theme; “*Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come! Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for thou hast created all things; and for thy pleasure they are, and were created^b.*”

If there was any thing in this goodly work to demand a superior strain of gratitude and joy, it must have been the formation of man, the last and noblest work of God, who, though the shell of his body was fashioned of the dust of the earth, yet in his spiritual part

^a Job xxxviii. 7.

^b Rev. iv. 8, 10.

was made in the image and likeness of God. The place, which he then held in the scale of the creation, is beautifully described by the Psalmist, in a strain not unsuitable for the harp of heavenly Beings : “ Thou hast made him a little lower than the Angels ; and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou hast made him to have dominion over the works of thy hands ; and hast put all things in subjection under his feet ; all flocks and herds, the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea. O Lord our Governor, how excellent is thy name in all the world ! ”

There was one happiness above the rest, which in this state of innocence he liberally enjoyed, that he had continued intercourse with heavenly Beings. God himself occasionally talked with him ; and all the Sons of light visited his dwellings, and formed a chain of harmony between heaven and earth. This chain conditionally was to be closer drawn. If he obeyed one prohibitory law, which was given him for the test of his integrity, he should be removed in convenient season, without tasting death, to the more immediate presence of God, and should be

¶ Psal. viii. 5—9.

associated with celestial Natures in the blissful exercise of praising and magnifying God for ever.

But this communion did not long subsist, nor was this prospect long maintained. Too soon for human peace our first Parents yielded to the seductions of an enemy ; and misery followed their too fatal disobedience. God averted the light of his countenance from them, and the Sons of God no longer visited the abodes of Men. One most unhappy consequence ensued. The guilt of their transgressions entailed a moral corruption on all the human race.

Nevertheless, God would not abandon his creatures to all the fatal effects of their apostasy. In the midst of judgement he remembered mercy ; which in the fulness of time he resolved to exercise, in a way that man could never have presumed to hope. Meanwhile some partial communications were indulged to mortals by the ministry of Angels. But it was only on rare occasions, and to peculiar favourites of heaven, that an open and audible conference was allowed. They repeatedly visited the Patriarchs ; they cheered them in their wanderings with the assurance of God's favour and the promise of better things to come. They were present in the ministry

ministry of the Law, for that, Saint Stephen testifies, was given by the disposition of Angels^d; Saint Paul affirms, that the word of the Law was spoken by Angels^e; and it has been conjectured, that a multitude of these heavenly Beings composed the glory of the Divine Presence, whenever it was manifested under that dispensation. They also visibly appeared to some of the Prophets. Thus Isaiah testifies, that he saw the Lord sitting on a high and lofty throne, and his train filled the temple: And before his presence the Seraphim cried one to another in alternate song, “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts! The whole earth is full of his glory f.*”

But an event of much greater importance was now drawing nigh. That scheme of divine grace, which the Father of mercies had determined in his counsels, for restoring man to his own image, and for reconciling the world unto himself, was now to be put in execution. For this high purpose the Son of God undertook for us what we could never do for ourselves. In order to effect the ministry of reconciliation, he consented to leave the bosom of his Father, and to

^d A&ts vii. 53.

^e Heb. ii. 2.

^f Isa. vi. 1, 2, 3.

come among us in the body of our nature. For so it was expedient, that he might be qualified to become a Mediator between God and Man. When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, to be born indeed of a woman ^g, but to be born out of the ordinary course of nature, according to the declaration of the Prophet, “Behold a Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son ^h.” It had lately been the office of one of these Children of light to announce the Virgin Mary for the Mother of our Lord. And when the promised hour was come, the whole band of Angels welcomed the event with gratulations. When they saw the means of grace and the hopes of glory again expanded to the race of men, they considered this as the dawn of a new Creation. For as far as related to the spiritual condition of man, God herein had created all things new ⁱ. And as they had originally sung to the glory of God at his creation, so also at his renovation they sung to the same effect. “Thus when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the Angels of God worship him ^k.”

^g Gal. iv. 4.

^h Isa. vii. 14.

ⁱ Rev. xxi. 5.

^k Heb. i. 6. Ps. xcvi. 7.

It was suitable to the benignant nature of the Sons of God to impart such welcome tidings to the Sons of men. But to whom among the Sons of men should they impart them first? To the wise, the noble and the great of this world? To the Sages among the Heathens, to the Scribes among the Jews, to Kings, to Captains, and to Counsellors? All this in the sentiment of men would have been most agreeable to the dignity and honour of the Personage proclaimed. But the thoughts of God are not our thoughts, neither are our ways his ways¹. It was agreeable to his counsels in this economy of grace, that the great Mediator between God and Man should come into the world in the humblest character and station, yet at the same time should retain sufficient evidence of the divinity within him. As being the Son of God, the brightness of his Father's glory and the image of his person, the brightest Sons of light were employed to minister in his service, and to usher him into the world. As humbling himself to be made in the likeness of man, and even to take upon him the form of a servant, the persons chosen before all others to receive this truth were in

¹ Isa. lv. 8.

the lowest orders of men and in the humblest conditions of life. They were shepherds attendant on their flocks. Yet were they not so distinguished, it may be reasonably presumed, but for some congeniality of disposition and character to the tidings now delivered. Employed in a peaceable and lowly occupation, they were free from those passions and prejudices, which obscured the understandings and corrupted the hearts of men in superior stations and more public walks of life. They probably came under the description, so much approved by the Author of our faith, of being poor in spirit and meek and lowly in heart. And therefore they were best disposed and best qualified for the reception of those glad tidings, which the band of Angels had now to communicate.

But let us attend to the relation of the Evangelist, making such observations as the story may suggest.

And there were in the same country Shepherds, abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the Angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. Under the Law, whenever God gave any sensible notice of his more immediate presence, he was invested with such awful glories as were

were the ground of apprehension and alarm. Under the Gospel he is presented to human regard in the milder characters of grace. The communication now to be made was a matter not of terror, but of gladness. *And the Angel said unto them, Fear not. For behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people.* The dispensation to be now imparted had been invariably foretold by the name of good tidings. Thus Isaiah says in address to that person, who should proclaim the coming of the Messiah ; “ O thou, that bringest good tidings to Sion, get thee up into the high mountain : O thou, that bringest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid ; say to the cities of Judah, Behold your God^m ! ” And thus he also says in the person of that Anointed, whom he repeatedly foretold ; “ The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ; because he hath anointed me. He hath sent me to publish good tidings to the poorⁿ. ” And surely those must be tidings of great joy, which offered healing to the broken-hearted, and deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind. The value of these tidings was incomparably the greater, that

^m Isa. xl. 9.ⁿ Isa. lxii. 1.

they

they were not to be limited to one nation like the Jews, but were to be extended without reserve or exception to all people. The grace of God was now publicly divulged, which brought salvation indifferently to all men.

For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. He is called a Saviour, agreeably to the language of preceding communications. For thus he is signified in those several passages of the Prophets, which foretel him in the character of a Redeemer and Deliverer. And thus was he announced by the Angel before his birth, in the name, which was given him, of Jesus, or a Saviour, for he should save his people from their sins^o; that is, he should redeem them from the guilt and punishment of sin, as well by his own sacrifice for sin, as by preaching repentance for the remission of sin. For both by his doctrine and by his suffering he should redeem them from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. He is also styled by the name of Christ the Lord, being the same person who had been foretold by the title of the Messiah or Anointed; which cha-

^o Mat. i. 21.

racter he was to fulfil in the several capacities, to which anointing was the rite of consecration among the Jews ; of a Prophet, in declaring the whole counsel of God to man ; of a Priest, in offering sacrifice, and making intercession to God for man ; of a King, in establishing a spiritual dominion on the earth, and ruling in the power of God over man.

In the last of these characters he had been represented by the Angel at the annunciation of his Virgin Mother ; the same not improbably, who now addressed the shepherds, when this promised Heir was born : “ He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest. And the Lord God will give unto him the throne of his Father David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever ; and of his kingdom there shall be no end ^p. ” With a reference to the same royal character and lineage, the Angel declares him to be born in the City of David, according to the prophecy of Micah ; “ And thou, Bethlehem in the land of Judah, art not the least among the cities of Judah ; for out of thee shall come a Governor, who shall rule my people Israel ^q. ” As being of the house and lineage of David according to the

^p Luke i. 32, 33.

^q Mic. v. 2. Mat. ii. 6.

flesh,

flesh, he was born in the City of David. So far indeed he condescended to comply with the carnal expectations of the Jews ; though in all other circumstances of his birth he had no external signs of a royal parentage. Notwithstanding the real dignity of his person and character as he was acknowledged in heaven, yet in the eyes of men he appeared in every garb and circumstance of humility. As the Prophet had foretold, “ he had no form nor comeliness, when men should see him ; nor was his countenance such, that they should desire him.” Accordingly the Angel adds, “ *And this shall be a sign unto you ; Ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*”

This lowly circumstance would have been an ungrateful hearing to the Pharisees and Scribes, to the wise and great of this world. Predisposed to receive him in a palace, they would have turned with disappointment and aversion from a scene so unworthy, as they might conceive, of the promised Heir. But humble Shepherds had no such prejudices of worldly ambition to impair the value of the tidings given. Conscious of the blessing now imparted to the world, they were gratefully

^r Isa. liii. 2.

disposed to receive this divine Personage in whatever form he came. And perhaps they might estimate the blessing more, as it was brought the nearer on a level to their stations and capacities.

This declaration of the Angel was immediately followed by a song of praise from the full chorus of celestial Beings: “*And suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly Host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*”

To glorify God is the constant, as it is the most delightful task of those high orders of Beings, who have the supreme beatitude of standing in the presence and beholding the face of God. They glorify him, as we have the countenance of revelation for believing, by celebrating all those attributes, in which consists the excellence of his nature, that is to say, his power, by which he created, his wisdom, by which he guides, and his justice, by which he controls the world: above all other characters his goodness, by which he dispenses far and wide his benefits. They glorify him for the happiness, which they so copiously enjoy themselves, and which he diffuses freely, according to the nature of things and the established order of his government, on the vast multi-

multitude of created Beings. This, as far as we can collect from the book of Revelations, is the general subject of their song in heaven. But when they sing on earth, and gladden human ears with song, they chuse a theme, in which the sons of men have a closer and more immediate interest. The glory of God, as it fills their hearts, still animates their song: but they sing his glory, as it operates to the good of this inferior world: and accordingly the subject of their song on this extraordinary occasion was, peace on earth, and good will to men; that is, They ascribe glory to God for peace restored between Heaven and Earth, for good will re-established between God and Man, by the Mediation of that Person, who is called in prophetic language, The Prince of Peace. Full of gratitude for the happiness they enjoy themselves, they feel an interest in seeing this happiness diffused among their fellow-servants upon earth; and they gladly undertake to impart the tidings of this divine grace to men.

And still animated by a zeal for their welfare and happiness, they continue to forward that great scheme of redemption, which this Prince of Peace has so effectually accom-

plished. Even while they behold their heavenly Father's face, they continually watch over those who are babes in spiritual things: they keep the righteous in all their ways: they minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation. And as they strenuously labour to subdue that evil Spirit, who has usurped so much power in the heart of man, so they have satisfaction in their conquest; they rejoice even in the presence of God over one sinner that repenteth. Thus by assisting in the military conflict against their spiritual enemies they promote the interests of the Kingdom of God among the Sons of men. And by instilling into their hearts good dispositions and desires they apply their endeavour, that his will be done on earth, as it is in heaven ; being animated with the welcome hope, that they, whom they have once assisted in the severer task of discipline, will be for ever associated with them in the blissful exercise of gratitude and praise.

It remains for me now to make some practical inferences from this engaging theme.

If Angels take delight in singing to the glory of God for those great things which he has done for men, it certainly behoves us to follow

follow their example in a matter, in which we have a much more immediate interest than they, to take their song of praise, and to sing it for ourselves.

In this offering of gratitude it is a pleasing contemplation to us, that through the mediation of his beloved Son the ears of God are again open to our devotions. The all-prevailing intercession of our great high Priest has procured acceptance to all our offerings, to the sacrifice of our prayers and to the incense of our praises: and now we are privileged to address him every where and at every time, in glad assurance that he is disposed to yield a favourable ear.

Yet let us not forget, that though we have a powerful Advocate at the throne of heavenly grace, our prayers and praises will ascend in vain, unless they proceed from hearts conformed to the will and character of God. In vain shall we attempt to glorify God in our songs, if we do not also glorify him in the temper of our minds and in the tenour of our lives.

That we may sing with advantage to the glory of God, for the blessings that ensue to us from the nativity of his Son, it is expedient, first, that we make our peace with God by a sincere repentance of all our sins, and a

lively faith in all his revelations ; and secondly, that we strive to maintain his favour by a steady cultivation of all those Christian graces, which are the fruits of a sincere repentance and a lively faith : for instance, in our personal deportment, of purity of heart and holiness of life ; in our duty towards men, of justice, charity, and peace ; in our duty towards God, of humility, patience, content, and gratitude. On the whole, that we may be qualified to sing with Angels to the glory of God, it is incumbent on us to apply our endeavours according to the purport of our daily prayers, that his will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

But by no other means can we more effectually glorify God, than by copying his example in the most glorious of his attributes, in doing and diffusing good to men. This we may do in several ways ; more especially, as we may gather from the text, by labouring according to our stations and capacities to promote and establish peace on earth, and to maintain or to restore among mankind a spirit of good will and benevolence one towards another. For so, as our Lord affirms, “ shall we be the children of our heavenly Father, who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and

and on the unjust." Or to extend our benevolence from temporal to spiritual concerns, we may imitate God in his goodness more essentially, by labouring to promote their peace with heaven, and to place them in a condition for acceptance and good will with God. This also we may do by several means; by intercession to God in their behalf; by admonition, exhortation, and reproof; and above all by the silent yet most persuasive argument of a good example. This our Lord himself advises, as an effectual means of rendering glory to God; "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

While thus we glorify God in the temper of our hearts and in the tenour of our lives, we shall bring our dispositions in unison with those, who continually stand before the throne of God; we shall harmonize our affections to the melodies of the heavenly Sion, and shall prepare ourselves in some degree to bear our part in the chorus of celestial song; when having made our peace with heaven, and obtained acceptance and good will with God, we shall find it not merely our delightful office, but our most honourable privilege, our supreme beatitude, to sing glory to God in the highest.

Of

Of this blessed exercise some brief examples are given us by the beloved Disciple and Evangelist Saint John, who was admitted even in the body to look into the heaven of heavens, to see the glories, and to hear the melodies of that blissful realm. All these no doubt are recorded for our edification in a state of discipline. May we therefore so meditate upon the subjects they present, as to be qualified through the mercies and the grace of God to partake hereafter in these heavenly strains !

“ Hallelujah ! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth—The Kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever ;—King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.—Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty : Just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints.—Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

^s Rev. xix. 6. xi. 15. xix. 16. xv. 3. v. 13.

S E R M O N VI.

MATTHEW iv. 23.

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

THE Apostle in these words relates the transactions of Jesus Christ at the beginning of his ministry; all which displayed an active and unwearied zeal both for the spiritual and the temporal welfare of men. And as he persevered, while he abode on earth, in the practice of the same benevolent operations, they form a compendious history of his human life, and they present a general view of his mission and character. At the same time they delineate, what I propose for the subject of our present meditation, the method and economy employed by the Author of our faith, in preaching the Gospel of his kingdom through the world.

The wisdom of God has adopted various modes

modes of representing his nature and of imparting his will to men. To the Heathens he was manifested in the operations of his providence. In the beauty and order of the works of nature, in the grateful vicissitudes of the seasons, in the general and impartial distribution of genial suns and showers, they might readily contemplate the great Founder and Upholder of the universe in all his attributes of power and wisdom and benevolence. From this conception of his nature they might reasonably infer, by what kind of service they might please him best, and render him their Friend. But this train of inference was very rarely drawn among the nations of the Heathens, except by a very few of superior penetration and reflexion: And even among these it seldom produced any solid influence on their moral practice; since they continued to do what was right in their own eyes, and to consult their own pleasure rather than the will of God.

To the Children of Israel he was shewn in a fuller and more conspicuous manner. Beside an immediate communication under Moses the Minister of the Legal Economy, he revealed himself to all the people by signs and by wonders beyond the ordinary course of nature. Having inflicted an exemplary vengeance

vengeance on their Egyptian tyrants, he wrought their deliverance by a mighty hand. He divided the red sea before them, and directed their march through the bottom of the deep. He went before them in the pillar of a cloud by day and of fire by night. Thus having prepared them by unquestionable tokens of his immediate presence, and having ratified them by special testimonies for a chosen generation, a peculiar people, he gave them a Law in thunders and lightnings from Mount Sinai. This method of communicating his counsels was no doubt very powerful and impressive. But then it was calculated not so much to conciliate as to alarm. It compelled by fear rather than engaged by love. And highly as they were distinguished above all other people by this divine visitation, they shrank with trembling from this awful scene, as appears from their supplication to Moses, “ Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die ^a. ”

In the last Revelation of himself by the Gospel he has taken a method which is equally conciliating and impressive. In this dispensation of united grace and truth he appears in a

^a Exod. xx. 19.

clearer and more expressive way, than through the operations of nature ; yet he does not break upon us, as he did under the ministry of the Law, in the overwhelming splendours of his divinity ; but he comes before us in a more endearing and familiar form. The Word of God, the organ of divine counsels, the effusion of his glory, the image of his person, condescends to dwell among us. Shrouding the severities of the Godhead from human eye, he presents himself to our contemplation in the form and character of man : and this not by a temporary semblance, but by an entire assumption of our nature, not in occasional appearance, but through all the stages of human life. In this combination of the divine and human nature, though the divine glory was veiled, yet the divine energy remained. In him dwelt bodily all the fulness of the Godhead. But to engage the affection, as well as the veneration of men, to draw them by the bonds of gratitude and love, as well as to control them by the power of his authority, he submitted to pass through life like one of us ; and he took the most interesting and affecting means to induce our allegiance to his government and our obedience to his law.

What

What engages our attention first in the history of his human life is his active and unwearyed application to promote the good and welfare of mankind. Though sameness of character might dispose him to perpetual converse with his heavenly Father, yet while he dwelt on earth, he promoted the counsel, he performed the will of God by a free and constant intercourse with men. He went about doing good: he spared no labour, he omitted no opportunity, to teach them the way of truth, and to guide them in the path to everlasting life.

I. The leading purpose of our Saviour's mission, whether we regard him in his prophetic or his kingly character, was to publish the good tidings, or *to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom*; that is, to proclaim and to communicate a new Dispensation of divine grace and truth, which had been foretold from earliest times, and had been the final theme of all preceding revelation. Of this great order Jesus Christ himself was both the Prophet and the King. He came to be the light and the life of men. He unfolded all the mysteries of divine knowledge; he imparted all the treasures of divine grace. While he exposed the corruption, the error, the insufficiency

cience of men, he offered himself to them a Physician, a Guide, and an Assistant. He gave them the consolation of spiritual health upon repentance toward God and faith in him. He directed them in that way of holiness, which terminates in happiness. He assured them on their prayers of the free grace of heaven, to strengthen and support them in all their labours after righteousness. And on condition of their allegiance to his government, he set before them the adoption of sons into the household of God, and the inheritance of sons in the kingdom of heaven. Thus all his acts and offices on earth have been directed to this beneficial end, to turn men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.

The same wisdom and benevolence, so conspicuous in all his doctrines, may be traced in the method or economy employed in communicating his Gospel to the world. To enlarge the sphere of his beneficence he frequented the places of public worship. He taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. But the exercise of his ministry was not limited to time or place. As he went about doing good, he made use of all times and places and opportunities. In the city, or in the wilderness, on a mountain, or on the sea-

sea-shore, in the public temple, or in the private house, with his chosen disciples, or with a promiscuous multitude, among the rich and great, and among the poor and humble, with Pharisees and Scribes, and with Publicans and sinners, he was equally employed in executing that work, for which he came into the world.

On some occasions he delivered his doctrines in a more professed and continued form of discourse; especially in the Sermon on the Mount; wherein he astonished the people with his doctrine, for he taught them in a manner very different from the Scribes, and in a tone of authority as an immediate Minister of God. In the opening of his sermon he shews himself a Teacher of a far superior kind, since he pronounces the beatitudes of his kingdom on tempers or dispositions very different from those, which usually engage the cultivation and attract the applause of men, on dispositions productive of vital holiness, and conducive to genuine and substantial happiness. But while he inculcates more godlike dispositions and proposes a more heavenly recompence than the customary teachers of the Jews, he disclaims all intention of abrogating or even impairing the spirit of the Mosaic Law. He had no design

to establish a religion altogether new, but to give life and energy to the old, to fulfil the typical, to illustrate and improve the moral. In particular what the Law forbade in act, he forbade in meditation and in thought; what the Law enjoined in the letter, he enjoined in the spirit; and what was cultivated in the form, he established in the heart. He taught the people, what they could not learn from those who were Masters in Israel, to lay up treasures not on earth, but in heaven; to give their service not to Mammon, but to God; and instead of a fretful solicitude for the necessaries of this life, to seek before all other things the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and to confide in his providence for the supply of every need. He taught them not to trust to a mere profession of their faith, but to shew their profession in their practice: for not the callers on his name, but the doers of his will should have admission into his heavenly kingdom.

But his common way of teaching was by easy and familiar conversation; in which he was always ready to avail himself of every incidental circumstance, which might be made subservient to the purpose of instruction. Whatever scene appeared in view, whatever topic of discourse arose, he rendered it an argument

gument or vehicle of moral and spiritual truth. Thus on meeting the woman of Samaria at the well, he took occasion from the circumstance before him to recommend those living waters, which he alone was able to bestow. And when a reference ensued to that violent schism then subsisting between the Jews and the Samaritans respecting the proper seat of public worship, he assured her that the time was come, when there should neither be local seat, nor peculiar people set apart for the service of God; for that all divine worship, in whatever place it was paid, and by whatever people it was offered, would be impartially accepted, provided it was offered in a way most agreeable to his character, in spirit and in truth.

In all his instructions, whether given in a continued form of discourse, or in colloquial conversation, he frequently resorted to the language of Parable; in which by sensible and material images he delineated moral and spiritual truths. Thus in the opening of his Sermon on the Mount he calls his Disciples the Salt of the earth; by which he signified, that they were to purify and preserve mankind from all moral corruption: he calls them the Light of the world; by which he also signified, that they were to illuminate

the world by their doctrine, their conversation, and their example.

Thus also in the close of the same discourse he represents the indispensable agreement of the heart and the life by a good tree bearing good fruit, and a corrupt tree bearing evil fruit. In sequel to which he likens the man, who hears his words, and does them, to a wise man, who built his house upon a rock ; so that it was able to withstand the violence of every storm. On the other hand he compares the man, who hears his words and does them not, to a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand, so that it was unable to resist the contention of the elements.

In the progress of his ministry, a change is perceptible in the style of his parable. From the brief similitude or metaphor it is expanded into the fuller form of continued narrative ; as is most observable in that series of parables, which he spoke from a ship on the coast of the sea of Galilee to the multitude extended on the shore. For this change of style a reason is assigned, in answer to the inquiry of his disciples, why he spoke to the multitude in parables. They were so much under the influence of prejudice and passion, that they were not competent at the time to receive the mysteries of the kingdom

of

of heaven. And therefore, as in ancient times the counsels of divine providence and grace had been represented to their Fathers under the types and shadows of the Legal economy, so when these counsels were at length fulfilled in the Gospel dispensation, they were still for a time represented under the veil of parable, which might gradually be removed, as the shades of passion and prejudice were dispersed from their understandings, and their hearts.

Yet may it be observed, that this answer of our Lord applies more directly to that class of parables, which he spoke on that occasion; such as the Sower, the Tares among the Wheat, the Mustard seed in the field, the Leven in the mass of meal. All these being prophetic pictures of the rise and progress, the condition and constitution of the Messiah's kingdom, may be classed under those mysteries, which it was not expedient for the common people to apprehend, till the whole scheme of this revelation was fulfilled. He told these things before they came to pass, that when they were come to pass, they might believe.

But though the parables, more expressive of the mysteries of the Gospel, were not open at the time to the apprehensions of the

people in general, nor even of the Disciples, before they were expounded to them by their Lord ; yet whatever were of practical design and use, seem not to have been concealed from the understandings of those who had ears to hear ; that is, who had faculties, or rather dispositions to receive the truth. Thus whatever might be the partial and temporary design of speaking to the multitude of our Saviour's time and age in parables, they will be found, in their general application to the Christian world, to embrace these great advantages, that they illustrate and exemplify moral truth, that they give an agreeable exercise to the understanding, and that they leave a durable impression on the memory.

The parables comprehend a very spacious field of instruction. In some are prophetically represented the rise and progress, the nature and constitution of the Gospel Economy. Of this complexion are those in general, in which the Kingdom of heaven is likened to any image, whether on the face of nature, or in civil or domestic life. Thus our Lord compares himself, as a Preacher of the Gospel, to a Sower going forth to sow his grain, which failed in various ways, or thrrove in various degrees, according to the qualities

qualities of the soil on which it fell. In some is manifested the economy of divine providence and grace to men. Thus the disposition of God toward repenting sinners is represented by a father receiving a recovered prodigal with every token of compassion and tenderness, of pardon and of peace. In some are delineated the several duties of the Christian life. Thus the duty of neighbourly love, the peculiar character of the Christian profession, is pourtrayed in the case of the benevolent Samaritan, who finding a traveller half expiring on the road, has an active compassion on him, and treats him with every kind of hospitable care. In some are displayed the great motives of obedience in the retributive justice of God, as is instanced in a Lord or a Prince delivering to his Servants talents, which they were required to use, and for which afterwards he called them to account, and rewarded or punished them according as they had improved or neglected their several trusts.

Another manner of teaching, still more impressive than these, was by Example. And this, it may be presumed, was one of the reasons in the divine counsels, why the Son of God should come among us in our nature, that of all those virtues, which he taught in

his doctrine, he might be a pattern to us in his life. The advantage of example to recommend instruction is universally allowed. The example of a teacher is not only the surest argument of his sincerity, it is also the best illustration of his doctrine. Thereby he represents the virtues that he teaches, not in semblance or in picture, but in substance and in actual life. And while he points out the path of duty, he gives us encouragement to walk therein. But the best examples among the sons of men are imperfect. Among all human teachers of moral truth the life is not uniformly correct and faultless as the precept. The light, which they exhibit so clear in the doctrine, has some portion of shade in the practice. Even the Prophets and righteous men, whom our Lord himself commends, were not so exempt from the common frailty of our nature, as to be entirely pure from errors and infirmities in their lives. And therefore, when we take them for models of conduct, it behoves us to copy them with some degree of caution and reserve.—It is the peculiar character of our holy Teacher, that his life on earth was entirely free from every moral shade, that he was a perfect model of every moral excellence. Though subject to our infirmities, and in all points tempted

tempted like as we are, yet he was continually pure from all taint of sin. And in every active and in every passive virtue he has left us an example, that we should follow his steps, who did no sin, and who fulfilled all righteousness.

Indeed, there are many parts of his life on earth, which as they belong to his divine and mediatorial character, are not for men to imitate; for instance, when he performed miracles, and when he forgave sins. Yet the moral, which is displayed in these several acts of authority, is not beyond the reach of human cultivation. If we are not able to follow him in performing miracles, yet we may take for our pattern in the ordinary course of nature that example of benevolence to the body, which he performed by the immediate hand of God. According as we have received of the gifts of providence, we may communicate to others by feeding the hungry, by comforting the sick, by solacing the maladies, and by softening the afflictions of human life. If we must not presume to follow him in remitting sins, yet we may take for our pattern in the ordinary course of grace that example of benevolence to the soul, which he performed by an immediate authority

rity from heaven. According to our station or influence in society, we may take opportunities to admonish, to exhort, and to reprove, so as to conyince the sinner of his errors, to move him to repentance, and to reconcile him to God.

The same eminence of character precludes him from being an immediate object of human imitation in some points of discipline, which form an essential exercise in the spiritual life of his followers. As being an object of faith himself, he could not be a pattern of faith to others. As being without sin, he could not be a pattern of repentance. Yet in these several points his preeminence of character contains an energy of instruction, superior in some manner to direct example. If we do not actually see him a pattern of faith, yet while we contemplate him in every relation that he bears to man, as a Prophet, as a Priest, and as a King, we see him a living and persuading Guide in every point, which is necessary to our pardon and justification with God. If we do not see him a pattern of repentance, yet while we contemplate him as bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows, as wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, we see him a living

a living and persuading Precept to mourn for our own transgressions and to sorrow for our own iniquities.

But in every branch of holiness, whether in disposition or practice, we may without exception immediately look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who has exemplified in his life, whatever he has inculcated in his doctrine. While he taught us by his precept, he equally taught us in his own personal deportment, to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. In humility of spirit, in meekness of temper, and in purity of heart, in compassion and forbearance, in mercy and charity to men, in piety and resignation, in trust and patience towards God, we may take him for a sure and unquestionable Guide. When therefore we receive him as a Teacher come from God, it concerns us, not only to attend his precepts and observe his laws, but to study his life, and to contemplate his character, that on so complete a model we may regulate our own.

Indeed after all we do, we shall fall infinitely short of that unblemished, of that perfect character, whom we profess to imitate. For in this imperfect state of our nature

ture we shall be neither free from sin, nor shall we be able to make any great advance in righteousness. But provided we sincerely obey him, and faithfully follow him with all our heart and might, in the word that he has left, and in the example that he has given, we have every encouragement to hope, notwithstanding all our errors and deficiencies, through his merits and by his aid to have an interest in the glad tidings that he came to impart, and finally to have an entrance into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

II. In concurrence with this act of mercy to the spiritual state of men was the attention, that he paid to their temporal benefit and welfare. While he was thus beneficially employed *in preaching the Gospel of the kingdom*, he omitted no opportunities of *healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people*. Though the latter of these gracious works was in subservience to the former, yet was it of important use in these two respects, as it gave an evidence of his mission, and was an illustration of his character.

Whenever God is pleased to manifest himself to men, he is pleased at the same time to give some token or evidence that the mani-

manifestation is of God. In the common order of providence he reveals himself no otherwise, than in the common operations of nature. Even in the darkest ages of the Heathen world he did not leave mankind without some witness or memorial of himself; inasmuch as the whole system and order of created things bore abundant evidence of the divine Artificer. Well therefore does the Apostle reason in his address to the Lycaonians, when he sought to turn them from the vanities they worshipped, to serve the living God who made heaven and earth and all things that are therein; “ Although in times past he suffered all nations to walk in their own ways; nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness ^b. ”

But when he would reveal himself in a more peculiar manner by a special embassy from heaven, he testified this embassy by miraculous deviations from the ordinary laws of nature. Thus when Moses was appointed an Ambassador of God, his legation was established by signs and by wonders and by a

^b Acts xiv. 17.

mighty

mighty hand and by an outstretched arm, as exerted in the plagues of Egypt, the exod of Israel, and the delivery of the Law. All which being out of the ordinary sphere of nature were unquestionable testimonies, that his mission was derived from him, who has the control of nature and of nature's laws.

And when another Minister of Heaven, a greater than Moses, even the Son of God, the Anointed of the Lord, appeared, he was equally invested with preternatural testimonies of his mission and character. He was ushered into the world by the song of Angels, and by the guidance of an extraordinary Star. And when he entered upon his ministry, the spirit of God descended upon him in a visible form, and a voice from heaven proclaimed him the beloved Son of God. In various manners through the course of his ministry did he exercise a strong command over the laws of nature, as when he walked upon the sea, or when he bade the storm to cease, and the winds and the waves were still. But the common evidence of his mission and the common exercise of his authority were most in harmony with those good tidings of the kingdom, which it was the purpose of his coming to impart. His miracles in general were acts of mercy and

com-

compassion. His preternatural power was very rarely exerted, but for the most beneficial, the most salutary purposes. To give evidence of his authority to preach the gospel of the kingdom, “ he healed all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.” In sequel to which it is further said, that “ his fame went through all Syria ; and they brought unto him all sick people, that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed of devils, and those which were lunatic, and those which had the palsey ; and he healed them.”

In almost every chapter of the Gospel, which is not entirely occupied by his doctrine, we meet with some act or miracle of compassion. There was no malady, however severe or inveterate, which he did not instantaneously subdue. With a touch or at a word, not only in the presence of the suffering object, but also at a distance, the various forms of human misery fled. The eyes of the blind were opened, the ears of the deaf were unstopped, the tongue of the dumb was tuned, to the fevered was given the cheering glow of health, to the palsied the recovered use of limbs, and soundness of understanding to the demoniacs. To the multitude,

tude, who were pining with hunger in the wilderness, he repeatedly administered a miraculous supply. But to give a fuller testimony of his mission and character, he repeatedly called the departed spirit into the infestate corse. Thus he severally raised to life the daughter of Jairus on her bed, the young man of Nain on his bier, and the man of Bethany from the tomb. And therefore well might he appeal to those extraordinary powers as an evidence not to be disproved, that he was the Person, whom the company of Prophets had foretold, who was to come from God to confer some great and unexampled good on men. “ Go, and shew John again the things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up ^c. ”

All these miraculous acts were not only infallible signs of his being a Teacher come from God: but they also illustrate that peculiar purpose for which he came to men. In their most important and comprehensive aim they gave a moral evidence of his authority to impart a much more valuable and enduring good. In all these energies of mer-

^c Mat. xi. 5.

cy he may be understood to preach the good tidings of the kingdom, as every miracle, that he performed on the body, might be construed into a pledge and symbol of that grace and compassion, which he administered to the soul. Did he open the eyes of the blind ? He equally restored the moral sight of men, he removed the film of spiritual darkness, and opened to them the light of heavenly truth. Did he restore to the palsied the use of their limbs ? He also renovated the intellectual faculties of men with the strengthening and supporting grace of God. Did he cleanse the lepers ? He was no less competent to cleanse the soul from every moral taint, and to say to the conscious of their guilt, Your sins be forgiven you. Did he cast evil spirits out of the bodies of men ? He had also authority to dispossess their souls of the same malignant enemies, and to discard from their hearts every sinful passion and propensity. Did he supply the multitude, when they hungered in the wilderness, with food ? He also administered to all mankind in their spiritual indigence the true bread that cometh down from heaven, the bread that nourisheth to eternal life. Did he raise the dead to life ? In that very chief of miracles he shewed his power to reani-

mate mankind who were spiritually dead, to raise them from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. To this purpose therefore we may presume it was, that to the testimonies, which he gave of his mission in his miracles of healing, he added this, as most illustrative of his own character and also that of his doctrine ; “ And the poor have the Gospel preached unto them.”

III. One circumstance remains to be considered in the Economy of our Saviour’s ministry on earth, to which we are directed by the words of the Text ; namely, the Scene, on which it was exercised ; which induces and involves a consideration of greater weight, the People, to whom it was addressed.

Though the benefits of his mission were intended for the whole race of men through all the peopled earth, yet his personal ministry was necessarily limited to a certain range of country and a certain community of men. Now what region was more suitable for the scene of his ministry, than the same land of Palestine, which from the time of Abraham had been distinguished by the more peculiar presence of God ? And to what people could he manifest himself to more advantage and effect, than to the chosen Race of Israel, to whom

whom from ancient time God had revealed his will and had imparted the promise of this spiritual kingdom ?

Of this tract of country the principal scene of his ministry was the land of Galilee ; a region, proverbially disparaged by the Jews in the precincts of Jerusalem, yet preordained of heaven for the first promulgation of the Gospel. For so it had been foretold by the Prophet Isaiah ; “ Though in the former time he debased, yet in the latter time he shall render glorious, the land of Zebulon and the land of Naphthali, even the way of the sea beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people, that walked in darkness, have seen a great light : They that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined ^a. ” In this land of Galilee did our Lord begin to preach the Gospel of the kingdom ; from this he principally chose his twelve Apostles ; through this he made repeated circuits, distinguishing his progress with the grace and energy of his words and works ; yet occasionally travelling through Samaria, Judea, and the region beyond Jordan, and paying frequent

^a Isa. ix. 1, 2. Mat. iv. 15, 16.

visits to Jerusalem, especially at the public Feasts.

Though he came to be the light of the World, yet he came more immediately to the house of Israel. To them before other nations the Kingdom of heaven was announced and the terms of acceptance were proposed. But here again it merits observation, that while for the scene of his ministry he preferred the disparaged land of Galilee to the land of Judea, distinguished as it was for the city and temple of Jerusalem, so also he chose to address his conversation to the common people and the poor, rather than to the rich and great. Thus the persons, whom he chose at the commencement of his ministry for the companions of his travels, the witnesses of his words and works, and the future Apostles of his Gospel, were taken out of the humblest orders of life, the most memorable of them being fishermen on the sea of Galilee. To this distinction they were raised, not on account of any extraordinary talent or endowment, but for their humility of disposition and their readiness of faith on the earliest testimony to receive him for a Teacher come from God ; though indeed it is evident from the sequel of their life

life and conversation, that they were slow in apprehending the true nature of his mission and the final purpose of his coming into the world.

Thus also he did not seek the society of those, who professed a superior knowledge of the Law, and claimed to themselves extraordinary merit from a strict observance of its institutions. He did not address himself to the wise in their own conceits, or the righteous in their own esteem, as was the general character of the Pharisees and Scribes, the Chief Priests and Elders of the Jews. He was not disposed to waste the precious overtures of Gospel grace on those, who were totally averse to receive it; though he did not omit opportunities, when they fell in his way, of friendly, though unwelcome admonition and reproof. But his attentions were paid more directly to those, who were favourably disposed toward his person and ministry; especially to such as felt their deficiency in spiritual attainments, and were anxious to receive instruction and assistance; to such as were sensible of their deviations from righteousness, and were anxious to obtain the pardon and the peace of God; to Publicans and sinners, to those, whom the Pharisees and Scribes considered as strangers to the co-

tenant of promise and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. Wherever he came, by the power of his words and works he was distinguished for a Minister of divine grace and truth; his fame went through all the land; and from every part of Palestine there followed him great multitudes of people, who were anxious to hear his voice, and to be healed of their infirmities.

Nor did he confine his regard to those, who were pure in their descent from Abraham, and correct in their observance of the Law of Moses. In his travels through Samaria he did not hesitate to extend the benefits of his Gospel to the people of that country, whose descent from Abraham was alloyed with Gentile blood, and whose Law of Moses was corrupted with many heathen superstitions and idolatries. Thus he entered into an instructive conversation at the well of Sychar with a woman of that nation, to whom he signified his character, and offered the benefits of his Gospel. And when the Samaritans in consequence of her report came out to meet him, he congratulated his Disciples on the prospect of that spiritual harvest now ripening in their view. And for the few days that he tarried among them, he made so great a progress in their conversion,
that

that many believed on him because of his word ; and having heard him themselves, they acknowledged that he was indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world ^c.

The Samaritans might have some pretensions to a common notice with the Jews, inasmuch as they acknowledged the same Law of Moses, and boasted of the same Descent from Abraham. But as opportunities arose, he did not scruple to extend the benefits of his mission to those, who had no shadow of title, either by profession of faith, or by distinction of lineage, to the privileges of God's peculiar people. Indeed as the scene of his personal ministry was confined to the land of Palestine, so the immediate benefits of his mission were in a good measure limited to the House of Israel. But instances occur in the Gospel history, of his admitting the Gentiles, when they came in his way, to the same common benefits both temporal and spiritual. Thus immediately after his Sermon on the Mount, when he was entered into Capernaum, he received a supplication from a Roman Centurion, in behalf of his servant, who lay at his house severely afflicted with the palsey. Jesus did not hesitate to answer, that he would

^c John iv. 5—42.

come and heal him: But while he was on the way, he received a second message from the Centurion confessing his unworthiness to receive so great a Prophet under his roof, and requesting only that he would speak the word, in full assurance that his servant would be healed. Jesus hearing this professed to the multitude who followed him, that he had not found so great a faith in Israel: and he declared unto them, that many should come from the various quarters of the world, and should sit down with the Patriarchs in the Kingdom of Heaven, as children of the kingdom through the righteousness of faith, and heirs of the promises that were made to the faithful; while many, who were children by natural descent, should be rejected from the Kingdom, for want of that faith to which these promises were given. Hereupon he immediately declared, that the mercy he implored was granted: and his servant was healed in the self same hour^f.

Thus also when he came into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, a Woman of Canaan, who was a Heathen, addressed him as the Son of David, and implored him to have mercy on her daughter, who was grievously

^f Mat. viii. 5—13. Luke vii. 1—10.

vexed with an impure spirit. For a while he seemed to pay no attention to her suit. But when she continued her importunities, he declared, with a view (as appears from the sequel) to elucidate her faith, that his mission was to the house of Israel, and he urged the impropriety of taking that bread which belonged to the children, and giving it to aliens. The woman, not discouraged from perseverance in her suit, expressed her hope, that though the first portion in this divine household was due to the children, yet in the riches of divine grace there was an overflowing abundance for all other suppliants. Hereupon Jesus commended her faith; and for her faith assured her, that it should be done as she desired^s. Thus admitting the Heathens to partake in his temporal mercies, he gave them an assurance, that he admitted them also to partake in his spiritual blessings ; that though the first overtures were to the house of Israel, yet now, on the promulgation of peace on earth and of goodwill to men, this house had no longer an exclusive title to the favour and regard of Heaven ; that the bounties of divine grace, now laid open in the Gospel, were impartially ex-

^s Mat. xv. 21—28. Mark vii. 24—30.

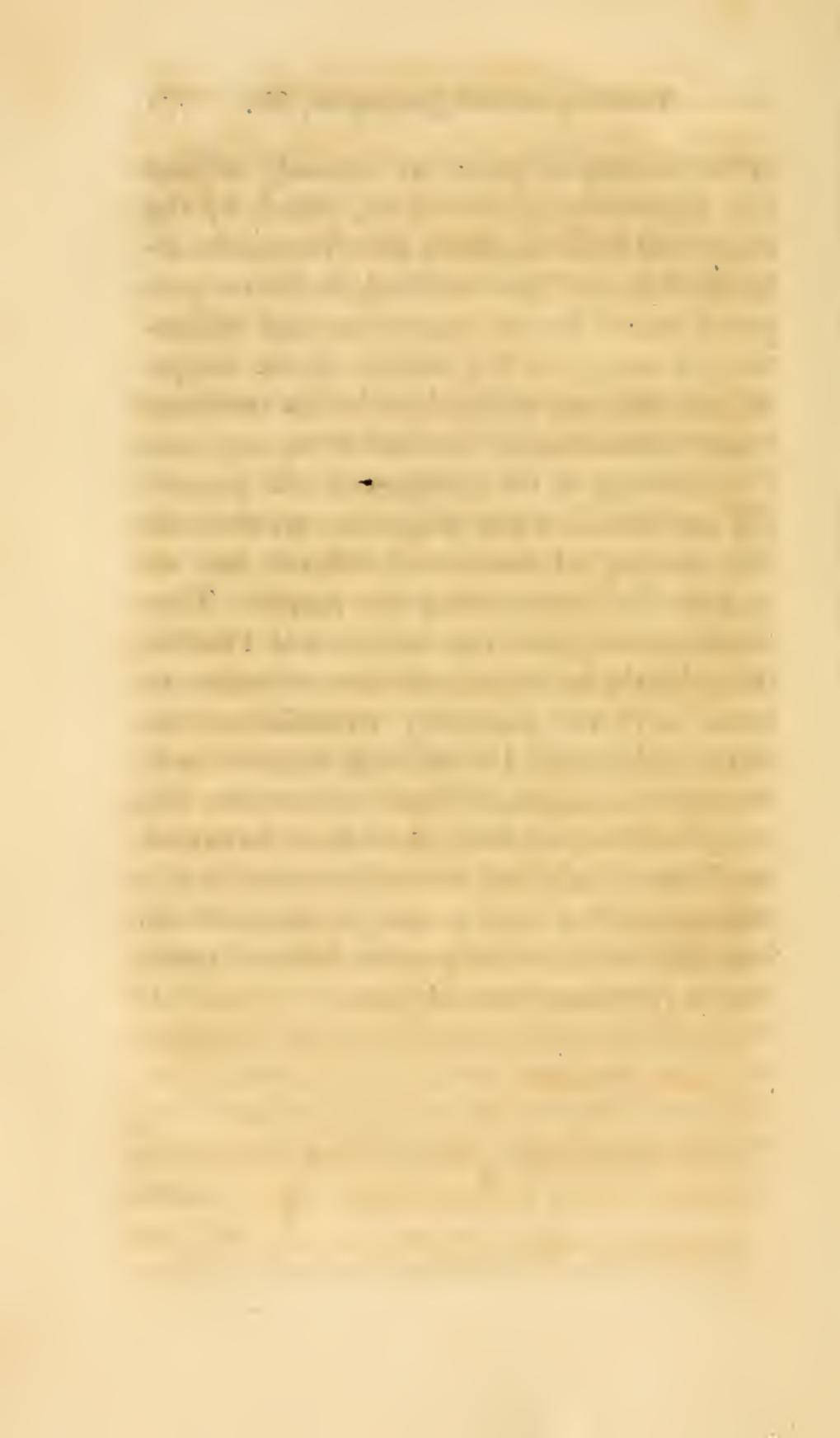
tended

tended to all persons and orders and communities of men ; and whoever accepted this faith and complied with these terms, should be received into the privileges of the heavenly kingdom.

Thus we see the wisdom and benevolence displayed, not only in the Gospel Covenant itself, but in the method or economy employed of imparting this Covenant to men. The Founder of our faith assumed our nature, and dwelt among us, and through the course of an active and laborious life made use of all means and occasions, by every mode of doctrine, and in every form of example, to unfold the counsels of divine grace, and to impress upon us the conditions of his Covenant. He gave evidence of his mission and illustration of his character by healing all manner of sickness and disease. And though his personal ministry was necessarily limited to a certain region and to a certain people, yet has he given us full assurance, that his Kingdom comprehends every clime and age, and that the benefits of his gospel are laid open indifferently to all nations and communities of men.

If we do not personally see and hear him
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in his ministry of grace, we virtually see and hear him in that sacred word, which by the active zeal of his Apostles and Evangelists, illumined by the Spirit of God, is left on perpetual record for the instruction and edification of men. In the history of the Gospel we in spirit may attend him in his travels of benevolence through the land; we may hear him teaching in the synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom; we may see him healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. Thus looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith, let us pay the same attention to him, as if we personally witnessed all his words and works. Let us walk by faith, as if we walked by sight. So shall we have the full benefit of his preaching: so shall we be healed of all the diseases and infirmities of our souls: and so may we hope to be partakers of his kingdom both in the present state of grace and in the future state of glory.



S E R M O N VII.

M A R K i. 15.

—*The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.*

THESE words have a peculiar claim to the regard of Christians; not only as they are the first on record, which the Founder of our faith employed, when he entered upon his ministry; but, what is of more essential concern, as they comprise the substance of what he came to teach. They announce the arrival of that spiritual State, which had long been foretold in all preceding Revelations; *The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand:* And they propose to mankind the conditions of acceptance into that spiritual State; *Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.*—To each of these two clauses I mean to assign a separate discourse.

The Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven, as it is indifferently styled by the Evangelists, is a constitution very different from

from the kingdoms of this world, being founded immediately by the power of God, and being modelled on the polity of Heaven. A kingdom of this kind originally subsisted on the face of the earth. When Almighty God had finished his creation of the world, “ he saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good.” The last of all his works, as the crown of the whole, was Man ; for he was made in the image of God, that is, in the fashion of his own moral goodness. And while he resembled him in holiness, he also partook of his happiness. Thus the Kingdom of Heaven was indeed on earth, and Man was immediately under the government of God.

But though a scene of happiness, it was yet a scene of discipline to man. In that free conversation, which he held with heavenly Natures, it was signified to him, that if in a temporary state of trial he conformed himself entirely to the will of God, he should be translated to a place of superior happiness in heaven itself, the more immediate seat of the divine presence, and the fulness of beatitude. For the exercise of his faith and the test of his obedience one plain prohibition was enjoined. Among all the fruits of paradise, which were freely given him to enjoy,

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he was restricted from the taste of one. By the seductions of an Enemy he was prevailed upon to violate the express command of God. By which fatal act he broke his allegiance to his heavenly King, and incurred the penalty denounced on his disobedience ; he was degraded from that image in which he was lately made ; he was expelled from paradise ; he was deprived of a communion with Heaven. The Kingdom of God was now withdrawn from the earth. The earth itself on his account lost its primitive beauty and order. The Foe of God and Man usurped a tyrannic sway therein : and sin and misery entered into the world. For the consequence of his guilt did not fall upon our first Progenitor alone ; but the taint of his corruption extended to all his posterity.

Yet fallen as he was from his first integrity, God would not abandon him to the fatal consequence of his transgression. In the midst of judgment he remembered mercy. Even when he pronounced the threatened sentence on the guilty Pair, he would not overwhelm them with the severities of his wrath. In the depth of their sorrow for their lapse from innocence, he gave them the promise of consolation in one of their offspring, who, not without some sacrifice on his

his part, should bruise the head of their malignant Foe, should reconcile to God the fallen race of men, should restore them to the image in which they were created, and should reestablish for them the Kingdom of Heaven.

This however was not to take place till a long term of time had intervened; during which mankind might be convinced by long experience, of the weakness of their reason, the deficiency of their powers, their strong propensity to evil, and their deplorable condition without God in the world.

In a distant age God selected Abraham from a degenerate and corrupted race, to maintain among mankind some memorial of their Creator, and to keep alive in his household some image of the heavenly Kingdom.

In the energy of his faith he shewed himself worthy of that celestial choice. For the firmness of his allegiance to his divine King he was distinguished as the Father of the Faithful, and the Friend of God. To him were given those several promises, which were afterwards repeated to Isaac and to Jacob, that he would make him a Father of many nations, and would multiply him as the stars of heaven; that with them he would establish a perpetual Covenant, and would give them

an everlasting inheritance ; that he would be their God for ever ; that he would be to them an exceeding great reward ; and that in him, or in his seed, should all the nations of the earth be blessed^a.

These promises undoubtedly belong, not merely to those who should be Children of Abraham by natural descent ; nor were they limited to the inheritance of the land, on which the Patriarchs then sojourned. Accepted in their full and final signification, they extend to all those, who should be his Children by spiritual birth, who should be heirs of the Covenant by the adoption of grace ; and they would be completed in the inheritance of that heavenly Kingdom prepared for the righteous from the foundation of the world. Of this the Patriarchs entertained a general hope. Though the promises received by them conveyed no express assurance, yet were they persuaded, that God had provided some better things for them : and while they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth, they desired a better country, that is, a heavenly : they looked for a city, which hath foundations

^a Gen. xii. 2, 3. xvii. 2, &c. xxii. 17, 18.

more durable than the works of men, whose Maker and Builder is God^b.

The intercourse, thus opened with the Patriarchs in their respective households, was extended to their progeny the race of Israel. The whole Economy of Moses was designed for a shadow or emblem of a spiritual Kingdom, which was afterwards to rise. Thus the moral Law was the outline of that law of righteousness, to be completed and confirmed in the Gospel precepts. The Civil Law was a figure of the Christian Discipline. The Ceremonial Law in its sacrifices and intercessions, its purifications, and atonements delineated the mysteries of the Christian Redemption. Even the History of the Children of Israel, from their exod out of Egypt to their posseffion of the land of promise, was molded into a prophetic parable of the same design. Their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, as commemorated in the Paschal sacrifice, pourtrays the deliverance of all mankind from the bondage of sin and Satan, as accomplished in that great ransom offered by the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world. Their pilgrimage through the wilderness of Sinai represents the pilgrimage

^b Heb. xi. 9, &c.

of

of the spiritual Israel through the wilderness of mortal life. And their establishment in the promised land of Canaan delineates the final establishment of every true Israelite in the promised Inheritance of the heavenly Kingdom.

This communication of divine truth was continued by the Prophets, who rose at different times to admonish, to reprove, and to comfort Israel : Of these more especially by Isaiah, the peculiar Prophet of the Christian Dispensation. In the general structure of his prophecies, though the subject in the literal acceptation relates more immediately to the people and the land of Israel, yet the principal and final aim is the spiritual Kingdom or Church of God, as afterwards to be established under the banners of the Messiah. Thus in the commencement of his inspired volume, after lamenting the degeneracy of Jerusalem, and the calamities which on that account were brought upon her inhabitants, he looks for consolation to that distant age, when the Lord would turn his hand upon her, and would entirely purge away her dross, and would restore her judges and counsellors, and she should be called, The City of righteousness, The faithful City^c. Then breaking

^c Isa. i.

forth into a clearer strain, he anticipates the time, when this divine Kingdom should be established and exalted in the earth, and all nations should flow unto it ; when out of Sion should go forth the law, and the word of the Lord out of Jerusalem : when he should judge many nations, and convince many people ; when they should beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning hooks ; when nation should not lift up sword against nation, neither should they learn war any more^d. Thus also in the progress of his divine revelations, whenever he speaks of the deliverance of his people from the invasion or oppression of the several Heathen powers of Syria, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, he is led insensibly to mix therewith the spiritual deliverance of the true Israel of God from the yoke of their enemies by a Prince of the house of David, who should establish a Kingdom of unbroken peace and happiness and glory.

But this design is still more conspicuous in the latter portion of his writings ; in which the Prophet may be observed, more expressly by civil benefits to foreshadow spiritual blessings, and more distinctly through things tem-

^d Isa. ii. 1—4.

poral to look to things eternal. In the letter indeed he delineates the signal acts of mercy, to be wrought for Israel by Cyrus, the Anointed and the Shepherd of the Lord; namely, their redemption from the severa countries in which they were dispersed in servitude and sorrow, their restoration to the land of Sion, and their resettlement on their paternal inheritance: But in the spirit he delineates far superior things, to be accomplished by Christ, the true Anointed of the Lord, the true Shepherd of his people, namely, the redemption of mankind from spiritual bondage, that worst of evils, their restoration to the prospect of the Jerusalem which is above, and their final establishment in the inheritance of heaven, the proper home of all the faithful^f. Hence at the close of his prophetic book, under the same image of Jerusalem restored he describes the divine City, the Kingdom of the Church of God, breaking forth into transcendent light and life, admitting into its courts the multitudes of the Gentiles, flourishing in eternal peace, prosperity, and plenty, invested with the brightest beams of heavenly glory, animated with the divine presence, filled with a righteous peo-

^f Isa. xl—xliv, xlv, &c.

ple, and speedily multiplying into an immense and mighty nation^g.

Among other prophetic intimations of this heavenly Kingdom, was that fulness of time when it was to be established. Now this was signified by Jacob in his dying address to his Sons ; wherein he declared, that “ the sceptre should not depart from Judah, nor a Lawgiver from between his feet, till Shiloh, or the person sent, should come^h. ” Now the sceptre must be understood to be departed from Judah, when the land of Judah was deprived of its native Kings, and became a province of the Roman Empire. This was accomplished in the degradation of Archelaus the Son of Herod, on whose removal from the throne a Roman Governor was appointed. Which event took place, as nearly as can be collected, in the very year, when Jesus then a Child gave the first public tokens of his mission, when he sat among the Doctors, both hearing them and asking them questionsⁱ.

The time was also signified by Daniel in the memorable vision and prophecy of the Seventy Weeks; which, though variously interpreted in minuter circumstances, is gene-

^g Isa. ix.

^h Gen. xlvi. 10.

ⁱ Luke ii. 46.

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rally understood to designate the time of our Lord's appearance, while it equally foretels the important purpose for which he was to appear, namely, "to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up the vision and prophecy, to anoint the most holy^k."

Hence at the time, when Jesus began to preach, a general expectation of the Messiah was entertained among the Jews, as appears from the enquiries that were made relative to the Baptist, as well as to himself. It was also entertained among the Samaritans, notwithstanding their schismatic creed, as appears from the conversation that Jesus held at the well of Sychar with the woman of Samaria. It had even extended among the Heathens; for a tradition had obtained, which most probably was derived from the Prophets of the Hebrews, that one should come out of Judea, who should have dominion over all the world.

The circumstance of this Kingdom's rise had also been repeatedly foretold, by Isaiah the first of the Prophets, and by Malachi the

^k Dan ix. 24.

last, that a Harbinger should go before the expected King, to announce his coming, and to prepare the way before him¹. These prophetic notices were fulfilled in John the Baptist, who was ordained even before his birth for this special purpose, that he should come in the power and spirit of Elias, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord^m. And when the appointed hour was come, the Spirit of God was upon him in the wilderness, and he came into the more inhabited parts of the country, proclaiming the Kingdom of Heaven, and disposing the people for the reception of their King.

In pursuance of the same design it was his office to assist at the inauguration of his Superior. The part which he had to execute was to administer to him the rite of Baptism. The same rite, which was to others an emblem of preparation to receive their King, was to Christ himself an emblem of investiture into his kingly function; as appears from what immediately ensues. For as soon as he ascended out of the water, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and

¹ Isa. xl. 3. Mal. iii. 1.

^m Luke i. 17.

lighting

lighting upon him, and lo a voice from heaven saying, “ This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

In this solemn act was Jesus anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power, and ordained to be a Sovereign over all the race of men. And therefore, after passing through some preparatory trials in the wilderness, he assumed the character in which he had been proclaimed ; and the first earnest which he gave of that exalted office was to affirm the arrival of this divine Kingdom, and to publish to mankind the terms of admission into its blessed immunities.

He had indeed no external shew of royalty about his person ; for instead of pomp and state of office and deportment, he was meek and lowly both in manner and in heart ; instead of worldly goods, he was scantily supplied even with the necessaries of life ; instead of territorial domains, he had not even a place whereon to lay his head ; instead of armies to attend his motions, he had only a company of poor and unlettered fishermen. This humble appearance was so very different from the prevailing expectations of the Pharisees and Scribes and all the superior orders of the Jews, who had entertained the most ambitious hopes of the Messiah’s reign, that

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they totally rejected his government, and disallowed him for their King. And they continued to look for some glorious Prince in human estimation, of a character and temper more congenial to their own, who should assert a dominion over other Kingdoms, and make Judea the Mistress, and Jerusalem the Metropolis of the world.

And yet if they had looked upon him with unprejudiced regard, they might have discovered under this shade of humiliation abundant evidence of his title to the kingly name, and such as would eclipse the most ambitious views of worldly potentates. If he had no state of office, he had the divine glory to visit and to greet him, not in spirit only, but in visible manifestations from above. If he had no worldly riches to enjoy himself or to communicate to others, he could instantly convert water into wine, or multiply a few loaves and fishes into an ample sustenance for thousands. If he had no territorial domains, he had the entire control of nature and of nature's laws. If he had no armies to attend his steps, he had angels to minister unto him, he had legions of angels at his immediate call to guard him. If he had not the means, which are oft so flagrantly abused by the Potentates of the earth,

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of dealing incurable calamities on the human race, he had the power, which he omitted no occasion to exert, of healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

Great however as these testimonies were, the superior orders of the Jews either obstinately shut their eyes against them, or impiously ascribed them to the agency of evil Spirits. On the common people they operated to more advantage. When they saw such exertions of supernatural power, as were never seen before in Israel, they were disposed to regard him as the Messiah, whom they had desired so long. Yet so much had worldly prejudice overpowered their understandings, that they were greatly disappointed to behold him in so humble and obscure a garb, and could no otherwise be reconciled to the lowness of his appearance, than by the hope to which they clung, that he would shortly break forth from his temporary shade of obscurity and indigence, and manifest himself to Israel in the style and authority of a temporal Prince. This common prejudice was also entertained by his personal Disciples, who had been the companions of his travels in his circuits of benevolence, and had been the constant witnesses of all his words and works. Notwithstanding they had received many testimonies in

in his conversation, of the spiritual nature of his kingdom, they continually expected his advancement to the throne of David in a literal sense, and in their fond imaginations they ambitiously assumed the highest offices of trust, authority, and honour in his kingdom. Nor could they be convinced till he expired upon the cross, that all their expectations of an earthly monarchy were vain.

That scene was undoubtedly sufficient to extinguish every hope of temporal aggrandizement: for death is the certain termination of all worldly projects, and there is no work or device of ambition in the grave.— Yet here the energies of his sovereign power most effectually prevailed. In that very scene of depression and of suffering even to death he became the Prince of life to men. In his arduous encounter on the cross he wrought a decisive conquest over the powers of darkness, which he soon triumphantly displayed in his resurrection from the dead. The time was now come, when he fully manifested himself to his Disciples in the real purport of his kingly character. He plainly told them that “all power was given unto him in heaven and in earth.” And having appointed them his Ambassadors to all the nations of the world he publicly ascended to his throne of glory in

in the heaven of heavens, and was for ever seated at the right hand of God.

Sustained by his grace, and armed with his authority of working miracles themselves, they proclaimed his Kingdom to all peoples, nations, and languages. Weak and ignorant as they were before, and fearfully shrinking from the very shadow of danger, they now courageously displayed the wisdom and the power of God. The same Disciples, who timorously forsook their Lord, when he was arraigned as a criminal, were now forward to publish his gospel at the hazard of life and every thing which could be dear in life. And he in particular, who had recently denied him, when he was capitally accused before the High Priest and the council of the Jews, now boldly testified before the same authorities, that the same Jesus, whom they had ignominiously slain, was now exalted by the immediate operation of the Godhead, to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and remission of sinsⁿ. Unsupported by an arm of flesh, or by the weapons of carnal warfare, and no otherwise accoutred than with the shield of faith and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of

ⁿ Acts v. 31.

God, they went forth every where to reduce mankind to the obedience of the Gospel. And though incessant labours were their portion, and persecution in every form impended over their heads, yet they still persevered in their heroic enterprise to death. In consequence of their labours the banner of the Cross is established over all mankind, and the Kingdoms of the world are become the Kingdom of our God and of his Christ.

Thus Jesus of Nazareth, the obscure and lowly Peasant of Galilee, is advanced to be “the Prince of the Kings of the earth.” When contemplated with the eye of faith, he is indeed the “Lord of Lords and King of Kings.” And though his Kingdom cometh not with observation, or is not ostensibly displayed in external acts of royalty, yet he has completely executed, or is continuing still to execute, in its best and noblest purpose, every branch of the kingly function. Whatever has been done in their several kingdoms, that merits the praise and gratitude of men, by Princes famous in their generation, and deservedly styled the great and excellent of the earth, has been more amply and effectually done by Jesus Christ in his spiritual Kingdom, whether in support of his own authority, or in

in advancement of the general good and happiness of his people. He came in his kingly character, to effect the deliverance of the human race from a bondage far more grievous and more fatal than that of Egypt, from the bondage of sin and Satan, the tyrants and oppressors of the soul. He came to restore them not to civil life, as had been done to Israel on their exod out of Egypt by giving them a name among independent states, but to moral and spiritual life by renewing them in the inner man, by giving them a new heart and a new spirit, and by re-creating them in the image and likeness of God. He came to establish for them a covenant of peace, not with the Kings of other nations, but with the sovereign Lord of all the earth. He came to confer his kingly bounties on them, not in remission of temporal debts, not in largesses of worldly goods, not in splendid vestments, and in rich repasts, but in forgiveness of sins, in all manner of spiritual gifts, in the white robe of righteousness, in the true bread of life, and in every help essential to their justification and acceptance with God. He came to give them, not a ceremonial law for the government of the body, not a civil law for the guidance of the state, but a spiritual law for the direction of

of the soul. He came to guide them, not through such a wilderness as that of Sinai to an earthly Canaan, but through the wilderness of this mortal life to that blessed land of promise, the Canaan of another world. And to crown his acts of kingly government, he came to recompense his faithful subjects, not by assigning them portions of a temporal inheritance on earth, or by appointing them to offices of trust and authority in a transitory kingdom, but by insuring to them an incorruptible inheritance in the realms of heavenly bliss, by reserving for them a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

It remains for me now to offer a few words on the nature and constitution of that Kingdom, which our Lord himself at the opening of his ministry proclaimed.—His Kingdom was opposite in all its characters to every idea of temporal opulence and honour; as was abundantly testified in the manner of his appearance, as well as in the substance of his doctrine. His Kingdom was not of this world, though for a time to be maintained and exercised therein. It was of a divine and spiritual kind. And whether we consider its origin, its nature, its influence, or its end, it was called with great propriety the
Kingdom

Kingdom of Heaven. In its origin it is founded by the Son of God, who came down from heaven to establish it on earth, and who still governs it from his throne in heaven. In its nature it is modelled on the laws and government of heaven. In its influence it aims to have the will of God so done on earth as it is in heaven. In its end it offers to mankind, after a temporary discipline upon earth, an everlasting home and inheritance in heaven.

But a more particular view of this Kingdom in its more striking characters may be taken at once from a most interesting portion of the Prophet Jeremiah, as applied by Saint Paul to the dispensation of the Gospel. In the sorrows that he had in his heart for the afflictions of his country, the Prophet looked for consolation to the time, when God would make a new Covenant with his people, holding forth superior privileges, and to be established upon better promises^o.

The first circumstance, that engages our regard in this important embassy of grace, is the People to whom this Covenant belongs. This indeed, if we were to understand it literally, would be confined altogether to the

^o Jer. xxxi. 31—34. Heb. viii. 8—12.

house of Israel. But this mode of speech we are constantly taught by the Apostle to accept in a figurative sense. According to his interpretation they constitute the realm of Israel, they are the children of Abraham, not who are so by civil relation, or by natural descent, but who conform in the spirit to the whole law of God, who are followers of Abraham in the righteousness of faith. To all, who receive the Gospel as the light and the life of men, and comply with the terms which it proposes to mankind, is given the peculiar privilege of acceptance into the fellowship, of adoption into the household of the faithful, of being partakers of the Covenant of promise, of being members of the Commonwealth of Israel.

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the Covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.” As God in ancient times had established a civil Covenant with the house of Israel by nature, when he redeemed them from Egyptian bondage, and formed them into a civil community; so he would make a Covenant of another kind with the house of Israel

Israel by adoption and grace, when he should redeem them from the bondage of their most oppressive Tyrant the Prince of the darkness of this world, and should establish them into a spiritual community, the Kingdom or the Church of God. As he had a greater deliverance to accomplish, so he had a dispensation of superior good to bestow upon them.

“ But this is the Covenant, that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts.” Under the ancient Covenant he had enjoined a multitude of political and ceremonial services. In particular he had commanded in continual round the sacrifice of beasts, the washings of the body, and the observance of solemn times and seasons. In this new Dispensation he would enjoin, not a carnal, but a spiritual, not a formal, but a vital service; he would impose his law upon the inner man; would require his subjects to purify their souls from all moral defilement by the baptism of repentance, and to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. It was the purpose of our heavenly King, to teach us to deny un-

godliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, having given himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works ^{p.}

This indeed is expressly signified in the ensuing clause of the prophecy; “And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” In the constitution of Moses he had proclaimed himself the God of Israel, and Israel he had styled his peculiar people. But this high relation was qualified by those features of awful dignity, in which he displayed himself to the understandings of that generation. Hence they were led to consider him in the character of a Master; and were swayed in their obedience by a spirit of servile fear. In this new Dispensation he would present himself to them in the character of a Father, tenderly solicitous for their peace and welfare, and anxious to bring them to his happiness and glory. Hence being led to consider themselves as children, they would be moved to obedience by a spirit of filial love, they would be animated to every duty by a desire of

^p Titus ii. 12, 14.

pleasing him, and would esteem it their greatest happiness to obtain his approbation and to live in his favour.

“ And they shall no more teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord ; for they all shall know me from the least unto the greatest.” They shall not depend on merely human instruction and institution for knowledge and edification in religious truth. For God himself will impart to all his faithful subjects, without respect of station, order, or profession, the animating graces of his holy Spirit. To all, whose hearts and affections are disposed to receive our heavenly King in his mediatorial character, he is ever ready to present himself. He will guide them into all truth essential for them to know ; he will shew the Father to them in all his attributes of grace and goodness ; and he will teach them all things that are necessary for the attainment of salvation and happiness.

“ For I will forgive their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.” Under the Law God appeared as a God of strict and inflexible justice. Having prescribed a sentence, he exacted a punishment for every transgression. The soul, that sinned in any capital offence, was doomed

to die without mitigation or reprieve. Under the new Dispensation he appears as a God of mercy. The Covenant which he now proposes is a Covenant of grace. On the merit of that atonement, which our great High Priest has made, he is pleased on our repentance to blot out our transgressions, and to receive us again into favour as if we never had offended.

In all these respects we cannot but look upon it as a far superior Covenant to that of Moses, we cannot but regard it as a far more valuable Kingdom than that of Israel or any temporal state.—But its great and principal excellence must be referred to the fulness of its blessings in another life. And therefore the Apostle says, in comment on this prophecy when applied to Christ; “ But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the Mediator of a better Covenant, established upon better promises ^a. ” These better promises, though they certainly comprehend the benefits of the present life, as vouchsafed to the Jews under the dispensation of Moses, have a principal regard to the blessings, which our heavenly King has by unquestionable signs assured to

^a Heb. viii. 6.

all his faithful subjects in the realms of heavenly bliss. To all who comply with the terms of this Covenant, to all who are faithful in their allegiance to his person and government, he is disposed to give, not only of the fulness of his grace and truth in this life, but also of his glory and happiness in the life to come. He admits them to that kingdom which cannot be moved, a kingdom of transcendent light and everlasting rest; where being purified from all the frailties and corruptions of this mortal nature, they shall be associated with the companies of Angels and the spirits of just men made perfect, and shall be blest above all other blessings in seeing God the source of every good, in receiving with Christ, the peculiar Son and Heir of God, the inheritance of Children, and in partaking with him a crown of glory that fadeth not away^r.

^r The subject of this discourse has been previously discussed, upon a larger scale, and with some shades of difference both in matter and in method, under the title of *The King of Israel*, by the same Author in his two concluding Sermons on the Parables.

S E R M O N VIII.

MARK i. 15.

—*The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.*

OUR Saviour's Mission comprehended these two purposes; to propose a new Covenant on the part of God, and to state the conditions on the part of man for acceptance and continuance therein. The former of these purposes is expressed in the former clause, *The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand:* That was the subject of my last discourse. The latter of these purposes is expressed in the latter clause, *Repent ye, and believe the Gospel:* This remains for our present consideration.

To repent of their sins, and to believe in the word of God, were duties which he frequently proposed to his people, as terms of acceptance under the Covenant of the Law. They are continually asserted under the Covenant of the Gospel, as indispensable conditions

tions for having an entrance into the Kingdom of God. And therefore on these did the Baptist principally insist, when he came in the character in which he had been foretold, as the Herald and Harbinger of the promised King. The strain of his preaching was agreeable to the language, which the Prophet of the Gospel had put in his mouth : “ In the wilderness prepare ye the way of the Lord : make straight in the desart a highway for our God ^a. ” And how were they to prepare the way ? This the Prophet had represented in very figurative, but at the same time most expressive images : “ Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low ; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain : And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed ; and all flesh shall see it together : for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” It was the usage of Eastern nations to receive Kings and Conquerors with great solemnities of preparation. The roads were opened and the ways were levelled with the united labour of the people, that they might enter into the country without obstruction and with greater dignity. Agreea-

^a Isa. xl. 3, &c.

ble to this usage is the language here employed. But the preparation thus announced must be taken, not in a literal, but in a spiritual sense. The humble were to be exalted, and the proud were to be abased ; the stony heart was to be softened, and the perverse and crooked spirit rendered straight. This indeed was the manner in which the Baptist undertook to prepare the way of the Lord. Persuaded that a habit of sin and a bias to evil would necessarily preclude both a disposition to receive, and a qualification to obtain, the privileges of the Gospel covenant ; he was anxious first to purify mankind from the stains of sin by repentance, and then to open their eyes in faith to the reception and acknowledgment of their heavenly King.

To prepare them for his appearance, it was the object of all his exhortations to the people, that they should be ready to meet him, not in splendid garments and in proud array, but in purified and humbled hearts. The spirit of this exhortation was implied in the rite which he administered. By the baptism of the body he signified the purification of the soul, as the most acceptable garb in which they could meet their King. Hence he is said to have come “ preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.”

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To give effect to this general exhortation, he addressed the several orders and characters of his hearers with a special caution against those vices, to which from their habits of life they were most exposed. The Publicans he cautioned against extortion and dishonest dealing ; “ Exact no more than what is appointed you.” The Soldiers he cautioned against sedition, discontent, and oppression ; “ Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages.” The People in general he exhorted to a liberal communication of benefits ; “ He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none ; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.” To the Pharisees and Sadducees, who presumed on their descent from Abraham without an endeavour to imitate his virtues, he addressed himself in a severer tone of indignant reproof ; “ O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come ? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance ; and say not within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father : For I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.” To give weight to his reproofs he declared the imminent danger of continuing in their sins ; “ And now

now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees. Therefore every tree, that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire." The energy of his doctrine was displayed in its fruits: For the people resorted to him from every part of Palestine, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins^b.

During all this ministry of repentance, he took equal care to predispose them to believe on him who was now to come. Disclaiming all those honours which they were ready to ascribe to him, he professed that he was no better than the Herald of a Person far superior to himself, for whom he was unworthy to do the humblest offices of a menial servant; "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather the wheat into his garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." In like manner he declared afterwards; "He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life; but he that

^b Mat. iii. 1—10. Mark i. 1—5. Luke iii. 1—14.

believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." According to the office of a herald and harbinger he repeatedly testified, saying ; " I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I saw, and bore record, that this is the Son of God." He continually gave his testimony to the characters in which Jesus came ; more especially did he point him out to his followers, as the propitiatory sacrifice for the whole race of men ; " Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world !" In consequence of what he taught we observe in the first Disciples various testimonies of their faith. Thus Andrew said to his brother Simon ; " We have found the Messiah," or the Anointed. Thus Philip said to Nathanael ; " We have found him, of whom Moses and the Prophets wrote." Thus Nathanael testified to Jesus ; " Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel ^{c.}"

The same conditions, which the Baptist had prescribed when he announced the promised King, were urged by our Lord himself, as soon as he entered upon his kingly ministry ; *Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.*

^c Mat. iii. 11, 12. Luke iii. 15, 16, 17. John i. 26, &c. iii. 36.

In regard to the former of these two duties, it was the object of his daily care to work a change in the dispositions, in the habits, and the hearts of men. But before he applied any effectual remedy to their corrupted nature, he sought to convince them of their unhappy state. When this was once attained, he pointed out to them the necessity of renouncing all their sins, in order to obtain remission and forgiveness. At the same time he offered every aid conducive to this happy change; and he held forth every encouragement in returning to the way of godliness. This change of heart and life he in common with the Baptist inculcated as a duty incumbent, not only on Publicans and Sinners, who were brought to a sense of their unhappy state, but also on the Pharisees and Scribes, who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and arrogantly thought that they needed no repentance. And though in the general aim of his instructions he always insisted on purity of heart and holiness of life, yet to the doctrine of repentance he continually reverted, as the ground of all his precepts, and as the necessary discipline of all who partake of the descent from Adam. And in all his exhortations and reproofs this is continually implied as a primary and essential duty.

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To encourage this religious exercise he was full of consolation to the truly penitent. To those, that mourned a godly sorrow to repentance, his language usually was, "Your sins be forgiven you." And the indulgence of Heaven toward a repenting sinner he represents under the image of a Father tenderly receiving an unhappy prodigal, when reclaimed from the error of his ways, and addressing him in the language of pardon and of peace. He likewise teaches the quality of that repentance in order to be accepted in the sight of God. It must be severe and radical, such as operates to a change of heart, of habit, and of life. For of this complexion, as he shews in parable, was the repentance of the Publican, when he came into the temple to pray. Conscious of his unworthiness, he presumed not so much as to lift up his eyes to heaven, he stood at a distance from the more holy place, and he smote upon his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" This he places in a still more impressive light in his discourse to Nicodemus, when he represents it as consisting of an entire change of nature and a total renovation of the spiritual man. So great is the transformation from sin to righteousness, that he describes it by the expressive metaphor of
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a second birth ; “ Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” To effect this extraordinary change in the soul of man, he taught the necessity of resorting in fervent prayer to God for the assistance of his holy Spirit, without which all human efforts would be of no avail.

The other essential article of acceptance was, That they believed the Gospel, in other words, that they believed in Jesus, as the Messiah, preordained of Heaven to deliver men from spiritual darkness and bondage, to instruct them in the way and will of God, to diffuse upon them the divine grace, and to guide them in the way to final happiness. For the foundation of this belief he came with the united evidence of prophecy and miracle. In the tenour of his life he shewed himself to be the Person foretold by the whole company of Prophets, as the Minister of divine grace and truth to men ; and in the conduct of his ministry he shewed himself a Prophet mighty both in word and deed ; in particular, he healed all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. By which he not only testified his prophetic mission, but also displayed that character of grace and benevolence peculiar

to a Minister of peace on earth and of good will to men. Hence in answer to the inquiry, which the Baptist made by two of his Disciples, (for the conviction of others, not his own,) whether he was the person to come for the welfare of the world, he made this appeal to the united evidence of prophecy and miracle, as the most decisive assurance that he came from God ; “ Go, and shew John again the things, which ye do hear and see : The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them.” Well therefore might he add ; “ And blessed are they, who shall not be offended in me.”

The Pharisees and Scribes were indeed offended in him. Having fanned their ambition with the delusive hope of a temporal Kingdom under the banners of the Messiah, they could not reconcile their minds to the idea of beholding him in a poor and lowly form. In the humbler walks of life he found more notice of his works and more attention to his words. It was from the shades of obscurity and indigence, that he selected those, who should be witnesses of his miracles and apostles of his doctrines to the nations of the world.

world. These were the first fruits of his Church or Kingdom upon earth. And in the progress of his ministry the spiritual harvest was plenteous, especially among the poor, who had an humbler sense of their moral and their intellectual attainments. Having ocular evidence of his authority to heal all manner of sickness and infirmities, they were convinced that he derived his authority from God, and were therefore ready to receive every doctrine that he imparted as an oracle of divine truth. To them thus favourably disposed to hear him he expounded the leading articles of Christian faith and hope. He did not indeed unfold to them the whole design of his mission, and the full survey of his character. According to the general plan of providence in the whole series of preceding revelation from the beginning of time, he judged it expedient to make a gradual communication of heavenly light according to the dispositions and capacities of men to receive it. As the people in general with whom he conversed were full of many national prejudices, and slow to apprehend the truth, he thought it prudent in his more open or public discourse to confine himself in points of faith to the general assertion of the character which he bore, as the Son of God,

and on the basis of that belief to insist on the dispositions and duties of godliness. And whenever he had occasion to touch upon those peculiar truths of his religion, which he styles the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven, he delivered them under the veil of parable, reserving his interpretation for the private ear of his Disciples, who by long attendance on his life and conversation were better qualified to comprehend their purport.

Nor yet to his Disciples, who also had their prejudices, and such as were not easily to be removed by the argument of words, did he openly unfold all the doctrines of his religion. He sometimes indeed alluded to the Cross, on which he was to yield his life a ransom for the world. He sometimes also spoke of his rising again the third day, and of his departure to his Father. But these were sayings, which the Disciples did not yet understand. They were imparted in the way of prophecy, which might be dark and obscure at the time of their delivery, but when once accomplished would not only be clear and luminous themselves, but would also throw a light on the whole of his economy. He told these things before they came to pass, that when they came to pass
they

they might believe. But as soon as the whole plan of divine grace to men was fulfilled in his passion and death, his resurrection and ascension, it was time to unfold to them all the mystery of godliness. According to the promise which he made them before his departure, the Holy Ghost fell on them, and their eyes were opened. By the aid of this divine Visitant they were guided into all truth. They not only understood these mysteries themselves, but they were authorized and enjoined to impart them to the world.

The same terms of acceptance, which he taught through all his ministry, he repeated at his departure. The final charge, which he gave to his Disciples immediately before his ascension, was that they should "go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost ^d." Wherein is implied, not only that they should instruct them in the principles of the Christian Faith, but also that they should cleanse and purify them from every stain of moral pollution, that so they might be prepared for admission into a state of grace.

These therefore were the primary doc-

^d Mat. xxviii. 19.

trines of all the Apostles. Thus the sum of Saint Peter's preaching to the Jews on the first diffusion of the divine Spirit was, " Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.—Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities ^e." In like manner Saint Paul comprised the purport of his sacred embassy in " testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ ^f." Thus the tenour of his epistles to the Churches among the Gentiles is to expose the shame, the misery, and the fatal consequence of their former course of life, and to shew them the means of recovery from their unhappy ways by repentance from dead works and renovation to spiritual life in Christ. On so great a change they might hope to obtain remission of their sins, to have a portion in the covenant of the Gospel, to become by adoption the children of grace, and heirs of the promises given to the faithful, and to be rendered in the spiritual, what Israel was in the temporal sense, " a chosen

^e Acts ii. 38. iii. 26.

^f Acts xx. 21.

genera-

generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people."

After this general statement of the terms of acceptance into that divine Kingdom, as originally proposed both to Jews and Gentiles, I design in the sequel of this discourse to give this argument a practical application to ourselves, who are differently circumstanced both from Jews and Gentiles, inasmuch as we were admitted in our infancy into the Church of Christ by baptism: which is equally a symbol of both those duties, which our Lord enjoined in the front of his religion, that we repent of our sins, and that we believe the Gospel.

In regard to Repentance, our Baptism is not only a pledge of our conditional release from the taint of original sin, but is also a token and memorial to us, as soon as we come of age to understand its purport, that we will fulfil those engagements, which were then made in our name, by repenting of our sins, and leading a new life correspondent with the faith we hold. For though admitted at our baptism to the privileges of the Christian covenant, yet the corruption of our nature, though in some degree controlled, is

not overcome, but will predominate, unless we renew and ratify our baptismal vows by repentance ; or as it is therein expressed to nearly the same effect, by renouncing the devil, the world, and the flesh. In this religious exercise it is incumbent on all, who bear the Christian name, very seriously to engage. The expedience of this is evident in the case of those, who either through want of instruction from others, or want of consideration in themselves, have overlooked or neglected their Christian vows, and have followed altogether the devices and desires of their own hearts ; who like the younger Son in the parable have seceded from their heavenly Father's government, and surrendered themselves to a life of spiritual prodigality. It is certain that they can have no title to a reinstatement in their Father's household, or to a portion in his inheritance, till they have renounced and abandoned all their evil ways, have repaired in contrition and humility to the throne of heavenly grace, and with a full confession of their unworthiness have supplicated pardon for their past offences, and have sincerely submitted themselves to his authority and guidance. In which case indeed the doors of mercy are freely

freely open to them, and they are again received with compassion and tenderness to pardon and to peace.

But the duty of repentance, though not so difficult and so severe, is no less expedient, in the case of those, who have been brought up, and who continue still to live, under a general sense of their religious calling, who have studied with some diligence and application to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For we must not imagine, that we ever shall have made so great a progress in the Christian life, as not to stand in need of a frequent recurrence of this salutary discipline. Encumbered as we are with the infirmities of our corrupt nature, we are continually deviating from that line of rectitude, which the Law of Christ requires us to pursue. After all our endeavours to put on the Christian dispositions and habits, we are transgressing every day, whether by doing what we are forbidden, or by leaving undone what we are commanded to do. Now though it is not expedient for us to repeat the rite of baptism, yet it is highly necessary, that we frequently resort to the laver of regeneration for the sprinkling of our hearts from an evil conscience, that we frequently undergo in the spiritual

ritual import the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

Now this exercise of repentance is not an easy discipline, even to those, who in their general deportment have lived in allegiance to their heavenly King; since it implies a sorrow for having deviated in any case from that royal law, to which they had vowed obedience. But then this sorrow is productive of the most blessed fruits, as it worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of, and closes in joy and peace and consolation. But to those who have walked according to their own ways, without any sense of God and religion, and consequently in the ways of sin, this exercise is indeed severe, if duly and efficiently performed; since it implies such contrition and remorse, as is expressed in holy Scripture by a wounded spirit and a broken heart; since it produces a total change and renovation of nature, in disposition of soul and in habit of life. On which account it is therein also described under very strong and expressive images, by being born again, and by becoming a new creature, by being dead unto sin, and alive unto God, by being buried with Christ, and being risen again with Christ from the dead, by putting off the old man, which is corrupt in the former

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conversation, and by putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness^g.

The repentance, which the law of Christ requires, must have these essential qualities to give it acceptance in the sight of heaven. It must be immediate; as soon as the sinner is convinced of the guilt under which he labours, he must without delay apply himself to obtain a release from his sins by those means which the Gospel has pointed out. It must be sincere; not consisting in form, but proceeding from the heart. It must be universal; not reserving the indulgence of any darling habit of transgression, but abandoning every sinful passion and propensity without exception. It must be productive; having so much influence on our practice, as to bring forth in us fruits meet for repentance, namely the fruits of a good and holy life: And when through infirmity of nature or any strong temptation we are surprised and overcome by sin, we must make no delay to renew our repentance.

For this important exercise we must prepare ourselves by all the religious means in our power; by serious examination, how far

^g 2 Cor. v. 17. Rom. vi. 11, 4. Eph. iv. 22, &c.

we are conformed in our dispositions and habits to the law and will of God; by unfeigned sorrow for our sins, considering that they are of so malignant a nature, as to alienate us from our heavenly King; by confession of them in all contrition and humility to God; by supplication of pardon for the sake of Christ our great Mediator and Advocate in Heaven; by invocation of the divine grace for assistance and support, convinced that wanting this we have no power to do any good, or to offer any acceptable service; by resolutions in concurrence with this assisting and supporting grace to live under a sense of our religious obligations for the time to come. Having thus engaged the countenance and protection of the holy Spirit, who is never far from those who sincerely and diligently seek him, we may hope to surmount all the difficulties of our Christian warfare; and when once we are passed the severer trials of our profession, we shall find, as our Lord himself assures us, that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. Thus shall we verify our allegiance to our heavenly King, which we vowed at our baptism, when enrolled under his banner; and notwithstanding repeated failures, which may require the repeated exercise of repentance, we may hope

hope through his grace and mercy to find acceptance at the last.

Again, in regard to Belief in the Gospel, our Baptism is a memorial to us of the faith, to which we then virtually gave assent, and an engagement to us, that we will persevere in that belief. For this purpose it may be convenient to examine and review the faith we have received, under those two leading articles which the Apostle has advanced, that "there is one God and one Mediator between God and Man, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all ^h."

That there is one God, is the primary doctrine of all religion. That he has a providential eye over the world, and takes cognizance of the dispositions and actions of reasonable creatures, is a doctrine that necessarily follows next. Without this essential faith it is impossible to please him. For he that cometh to God must believe, that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him ⁱ. This was the first principle of faith under the Law. The children of Israel were required to believe in him alone, to contemplate and adore him in his attributes of infinite power, wisdom, justice,

^h 1 Tim. ii. 5.

ⁱ Heb. xi. 6.

and goodness, to look up to him as the Creator and Preserver of the world, the Rewarder of moral good and the Avenger of moral evil ; and in consequence they were taught to worship him alone, to reverence his name, to hallow his sabbath, and to love him with all their hearts and all their faculties.

And in this light also we are taught to contemplate him under the Gospel dispensation ; though with additional motives of gratitude and love ; as therein he is manifested more distinctly to us under the character of a Parent, who regards us as his children, and is solicitous for our welfare and happiness. For though Man is degenerate from that image of God in which he was originally made, and by reason of his fall from his primitive uprightness is rendered unworthy of divine favour and regard, yet the Father of all in his consummate wisdom has formed an expedient to reconcile his inflexible justice with his unbounded benevolence. This wonderful scheme of grace he has manifested to the world in the last dispensation of his counsel : “ God so loved the world, that he sent his only begotten Son into the world ; that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

This

This brings me to the consideration of that other article of our faith, that there is one Mediator between God and Man, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all. This doctrine is peculiar to the Gospel. It is that mystery of godliness, which had been concealed for ages from the world in general, had been signified only through the shade of types and parables to the Jews, but was openly revealed to all men in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In this mediatorial character he presents himself to the eye of faith in these three capacities, for which he was anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power, of a Prophet, of a Priest, and of a King.

As a Prophet, he came to declare the whole counsel of God to men, to teach them what they had to do in this life, and what they had to look for in the life to come; to direct them in the way of holiness on earth, as the necessary road to happiness in heaven; of duty, what he taught in precept, to illustrate in example, and of recompence, what he declared in doctrine, to assure to all men by his own resurrection from the dead.

As a Priest, he has undertaken the ministry of reconciliation between God and Man.

Being

Being holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, he was prepared and qualified to yield an acceptable sacrifice for the sins of men. And this he effected, not by such offerings as the Mosaic Law required, but by the inestimable offering of himself. By surrendering his precious life upon the cross he gave himself a ransom for all. And on the merit of that ransom he is now entered into the most holy place, even into heaven itself, where he continually makes a most prevailing intercession for us. Thus being redeemed, not with corruptible things, but by the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot^k, we are encouraged to hope not only for the pardon and remission of our sins, but also for acceptance and adoption into the grace and inheritance of heaven.

As a King, he has undertaken to deliver us from the bondage of sin and Satan, having entered himself into warfare with our Spiritual Foe, and by his arduous conflict on the cross having rescued us from his dominion. He has given us laws for our government and guidance : He has conducted us on the way in which he would have us go. And

^k 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

now that he is returned in triumph to his throne of glory, he still continues by his providence and grace to defend us from all the assaults and seductions of our enemies. From that high and holy place he diffuses every spiritual gift upon his Church, to the truly penitent the forgiveness of sins, and to the truly faithful every divine support and assistance, to cheer them in a state of warfare, and finally to bring them to a state of triumph. And when this scene of discipline is closed, he will return in the style and authority of a King, to take vengeance on those, who know not God and obey not his Gospel, and to receive all his faithful Soldiers and Servants into his heavenly Kingdom.

Such are the doctrines of that Gospel, which we are required to believe, as one of the two principal conditions of acceptance into the Kingdom of God.

But how are we to believe?—Not merely by assenting to them with our lips, nor yet by acknowledging them with our understandings, for so superficial a faith would not avail us in the fight of God, but by receiving the impression into our hearts. The belief, which we are called upon to yield, is such as is animated by love and gratitude to Christ, as produces in us good dispositions and desires,

and manifests itself in the habit of a holy life.

Our Belief in one God, when duly established in the heart, induces and implies a serious disposition and sincere endeavour to serve him with reverence and with godly fear ; to love him in his mercies, to adore him in his judgments ; to be thankful for his favours, to be patient under his corrections ; to trust to his providence, to be resigned to his disposal ; to imitate his character, to conform to his will ; to regard him as a Father, who is tenderly solicitous for our true and final welfare, and, provided we avail ourselves of his spiritual gifts, is promoting the design of our redemption and adoption, is working in us a release from sin, is disposing us to holiness, and preparing us for happiness.

In like manner our Belief in one Mediator between God and Man, when equally grounded in the heart, both induces and implies an earnest resolution to pay him the homage of our hearts and of our lives.

While we believe in him as a Prophet, we accept his word as an embassy of pardon and of peace, we adore him in the mysteries that he hath opened to us, we attend to all his doctrines with gratitude and reverence, we are animated by his exhortations, we are corrected

corrected by his reproofs, we obey him in his precept, and we follow him in his example.

While we believe in him as a Priest, who gave himself a ransom for all, we are moved by this stupendous act of grace to entertain the greatest horror for sin, and the highest gratitude to our Redeemer; and we thence determine to renounce our sins, to take up our cross with him, to present our bodies a living sacrifice to God; in full assurance of faith, that through his intercession they will not be offered up in vain.

While we believe in him as a King, we shall be touched with gratitude for the great deliverance he has accomplished for us; we shall be persuaded to reverence his Laws, and to submit ourselves to his government; we shall be encouraged to resort to him for pardon of the sins of which we repent, for assistance and support in all our religious labours, for protection and defence against all our enemies; we shall be resolved to arrange ourselves under his banner against the several adversaries of the Christian cause, and to continue his faithful Soldiers for the remainder of our days.

If thus we comply with the terms of acceptance, as proposed by our Lord himself,

by repenting of our sins and believing the Gospel, it is humbly to be hoped on the promise he has given, that we have an interest in the Kingdom of God both in the present and the future life. Even while we continue in this field of discipline, we are partakers in the Kingdom of Grace ; and when the scene of discipline is closed, we shall have our portion in the Kingdom of Glory.

SERMONS ON THE BEATITUDES.

MATTHEW V. 3—10.

Blessed are the Poor in spirit : for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven: &c, &c.

THE great purpose of our Saviour's mission was to procure and advance the happiness of men. It was therefore the leading object of his ministry to inculcate all those dispositions and habits of holiness, which in the dispensation of divine providence and grace are essential to this important end. For which intent he commands our reverence and regard in the character of a Lawgiver, who has a certain course of duty to propose, supported and sanctioned by a certain train of recompence. The laws which he delivered are spread through all his discourses: But they seem to be collected and comprized in his Sermon on the Mount. This valuable discourse was delivered it is probable in the early part of his ministry, soon after he had

begun to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom; and seems intended for a summary to his Disciples both of Christian duty and of Christian hope. It does not indeed unfold those mysteries of godliness, which are now proposed for the objects of our faith, such as our redemption and justification by the merits, the atonement, and intercession of our Redeemer: For these it was expedient to represent, not so much in words, as in facts; and these accordingly our Lord expressed, not so much in his doctrine, as in his passion and crucifixion, his resurrection and ascension. But it instructs us very fully in those virtuous dispositions, which all who name the name of Christ must cultivate; and it assures us very clearly of that divine recompence, which awaits our fidelity and obedience.

This is placed in a conspicuous light in the front of his discourse. With a spirit of benevolence, congenial to the character of a Minister of grace and peace from God to Man, he opens his discourse with a series of Beatitudes: he pronounces a blessing on all those virtuous qualities, which are essential to his true Disciples; and to each of those qualities he assigns a corresponding recompence.

It

It was unquestionably the design of our holy Teacher through all this series of Beatitudes to rectify the dispositions and pursuits of men, which are generally too intent on worldly things, and to fix them on objects, wherein alone true happiness is to be attained. According to their several propensities of mind the Children of this world are proud and ambitious after worldly consequence, are turbulent and grasping after worldly possessions, are inordinate lovers of pleasures, are intemperate followers after the luxuries of this life. But in all these pursuits, even if they attain the summit of their wishes, they never find that sovereign good they seek, as it does not centre in any temporal acquisition. It continually evades their grasp, and disappoints their hope. Thus by the ordinary course of providence, even in this life, the denunciations of our Lord are severally fulfilled upon them : “ Woe unto you that are rich ! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full ! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now ! for ye shall mourn and weep^a. ” In opposition to these vain pursuits our blessed Lord instructs his Disciples to seek

^a Luke vi 24, 25.

for happiness by very different means, and to place their happiness in very different ends.

In concurrence with this general design of Christ, as it relates to the world at large, it has also been supposed with some plausibility, that he had it in contemplation to rectify those erroneous opinions entertained among the Jews, of the Kingdom of the Messiah, and of the qualities expedient for a place therein. Led away by worldly prejudice they took the prophecies relative to this expected Prince in a literal sense, and they molded this Kingdom in their fond imaginations on the model of the Kingdom of Israel in its most flourishing state. They supposed, that he would literally sit upon the throne of David, and would gratify his followers in the several vain desires of their carnal hearts, that to the proud and ambitious he would give dominion and authority, to the turbulent and grasping territorial possessions, to the lovers of pleasure festive revelries and pageants, to the followers after luxuries all manner of luxurious gratifications. It might therefore be suitable to our Lord's design, to correct those errors, that severally prevailed among the Gentiles and among the Jews, by publishing to the world, that the Beatitudes of his Kingdom were proposed

proposed to different characters, and were in themselves of a different kind, from what they might severally imagine or desire. Thus the instruction contained in these sentences will bear an application both to the Gentiles, who had little or no conception of this heavenly reign, and to the Jews, who had entertained erroneous notions of its character and government. Instead of animating the ambitious with the hope of temporal dominion and authority, he said, “Blessed are the Poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” Instead of encouraging the turbulent and grasping with the hope of worldly possessions, he said, “Blessed are the Meek: for they shall inherit the Earth.” Instead of gratifying the lovers of pleasure with festive pageants and triumphal shews, he said, “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.” Instead of indulging the followers after luxuries with every dainty that the ransacked world supplies, he said, “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be satisfied.”

On these Beatitudes I have now to treat, as they form a constituent part of the subject on which I am employed. On a close investigation

vestigation they will be found, with equal advantage to display the mission and to illustrate the character of him who spoke them.

But before I proceed to discourse upon them separately, it may be convenient to premise a few remarks on their structure and arrangement, for that may be of use in unfolding their design. Now it deserves our notice, that as they are formed on the model of certain introductory sentences in the Psalms, which pronounce a blessing on virtuous dispositions^b, so they are delivered in the same sententious and proverbial style. Hence they bear the complexion of the Poetry of the Hebrews, which in its prevailing character is combined of parallel sentences and clauses, wherein proposition corresponds with proposition, and term is answerable to term. Thus every sentence in this series is composed of two clauses, of which the former pronounces a certain disposition blessed, and the latter states wherein this blessedness consists. But beside the general parallel that pervades the whole, the sentences appear to be disposed in couplets, bearing a still closer analogy to one

^b Psalms i. xxxii. xli. cxix.

another both in construction and in spirit : as will be more distinctly seen, if we read them in the order, which they hold in some very ancient and well approved Manuscripts of the Gospel, and in which they are quoted by some distinguished Fathers of the Christian Church :

“ Blessed are the Poor in spirit : for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

“ Blessed are the Meek : for they shall inherit the Earth.

“ Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted.

“ Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be satisfied .”

According to this arrangement the second sentence is parallel to the first. The Meek are of a kindred character with the Poor in spirit : And the inheritance of the Earth bears an evident antithesis to the possession

“ It may suffice to state, that this is the Order of the Cambridge Manuscript both in the Greek and the Latin Text : which is further sanctioned by the following list of authorities from Wetstein’s Edition :—Versio Latina, Clemens, Origenes, Eusebius, Gregor. Nyss. Juvencus, Ambrosius, Chromatus, Hieronymus.

of the Kingdom of Heaven. A similar correspondence holds both in disposition and in recompence between the third and the fourth: They that mourn are comforted : They that hunger and thirst are satisfied.

This arrangement I am the more disposed to note, as it contributes in some degree to the perspicuity of the sentences, and fixes in some cases a precision of meaning, which in the common order of reading is not so observable. We shall more distinctly understand who are meant by the Poor in spirit, on which there is some difference of opinion, when we find them collated with the Meek. We shall more clearly apprehend who are meant by them that mourn, on which there is also some degree of doubt, when we find them collated with them that hunger and thirst after righteousness.

In treating on this important and comprehensive theme, I propose to assign a separate Discourse to each Beatitude. And here also it may be convenient to state in general terms the plan to be pursued. As the Sentences themselves are parallel, I would endeavour to render these Discourses parallel, as far as the subject will conveniently admit. Now as every sentence is composed of two clauses, the argument thereupon is accordingly disposed

posed into two heads of discourse, the Character commended, and the Blessedness assigned. After stating, and occasionally explaining, the Character proposed, I have to consider it first, as it was severally regarded, both in speculation, and in practice, among the Heathens, and among the Jews, and then, as it was more fully illustrated, and more forcibly enjoined, as well in example, as in doctrine, by the Author of our faith: whence I collect a general outline of the Character proposed to the cultivation of Christians. In a similar method I have also to treat of the latter clause. After stating in general terms the nature of the Blessedness assigned, I have to consider it first, as it was severally regarded, both in speculation, and in practice, among the Heathens, and among the Jews, and then, as it was more clearly and decisively proposed by our Lord himself in the fulness of divine revelation: whence I proceed to explain it in its different views, of the present, and of the future life: And conclude the discourse by shewing the correspondence, in the nature of things, and in the dispensations of grace, between the Virtue thus commended, and its appropriate Reward.

S E R M O N IX.

MATTHEW v. 3.

Blessed are the Poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

THE first Beatitude of our heavenly Teacher is assigned to persons, who do not attract the notice or engage the applause of men. Instead of approving the ambitious, and encouraging the hopes of those who aspire after worldly consequence and honours, as is a prevailing sentiment with the children of this world, he pronounces a blessing on an opposite disposition and character: *Blessed are the Poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

By poverty of spirit, as thus commended and encouraged by our Lord, may be understood humility in general in contradistinction to pride and ambition of every kind: But especially and principally I would understand humility of heart in relation to God and in reference to spiritual things; a sense of our low

low condition in the more essential qualities of man, in the attainment of divine knowledge, and in the growth of divine grace.

A disposition of this nature was so little cultivated by the Heathens, that it was discouraged and despised. For their Sages entertained a proud conceit of the dignity of human nature; and confidently boasted of their moral and intellectual powers. The consequence of which was darkness of understanding and depravity of heart. Professing themselves wise they became fools; and being extravagantly vain in their imaginations they were alienated from the life of God. Being hardened in their hearts against all moral feeling, they did what was right in their own eyes; and having lost the true knowledge of a holy God, they surrendered themselves to their own lawless and unprofitable devices^a.

A spirit of pride, though dissimilar to theirs, prevailed among the Jews, more especially among those, who from their station and character ought to have set a better example, among those, who professed themselves to be teachers of the ignorant and guides of the blind. According to the most unquestiona-

^a Rom. i. 22, &c.

ble evidence they were elated with extravagant ideas of their own merit, they trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and they arrogated to themselves, as children of Abraham, and heirs of the promises, a peculiar title to the care and recompence of Heaven. And yet it had been the constant language of the Law which they professed to teach, that one of the principal duties required and insisted on by their heavenly King was to walk humbly with their God. In like manner it was the tenor of instruction by the whole band of Prophets, that pride was odious in the sight of Heaven. And God himself declares by his chosen Minister Isaiah, that though he is supreme over all, yet hath he a peculiar respect unto the lowly; though his immediate seat is in the high and holy place, yet he also dwells with the contrite and humble spirit^b.

But a more powerful and persuasive Teacher than Moses and the Prophets was requisite to overcome this prevailing and original sin in the nature and heart of man. To cherish the disposition of humility, to encourage the character of the poor in spirit, was the first aim of Christ on proclaiming his kingdom to

^b Isa. lvii. 15.

the world. This engages our regard in the primary circumstance of his appearance upon earth. Though being in the form of God, he condescended to assume the form of man, and from the highest eminence of divine glory he submitted to the lowest condition of human life. Born and brought up in obscurity and indigence, he came forth upon his ministry in circumstances most unpromising to ambitious minds : he was destitute of the comforts of humble poverty; he wanted even the common refuge of the indigent, a place whereon to lay his head. Thus according to the Prophet he had no form nor comeliness, when men should see him ; nor was his countenance such, that they should desire him^c.

The character of humility he continually exemplified in all his conversation and deportment. He avoided all those honours, which the people in their starts of admiration were eager to bestow upon him. He chose for his companions poor and artless and unlettered men, with whom he travelled on foot through the land of Palestine. To these he was rather a servant than a master, being come, as he declared, not to be ministered

^c Isa. liii. 2.

unto,

unto, but to minister; as was instanced in that signal act of humiliation, when he girt himself with a towel, and washed the feet of his Disciples: By which expressive emblem he not only dissipated their false expectations of a temporal kingdom, but also taught them humility of disposition and demeanour both to God and Man. Well therefore might he propose himself as a pattern of imitation in this preliminary grace of his religion: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart^d. ”

Correspondent with his appearance upon earth was the tone and direction of his teaching. The first of those gracious characters, which the Prophet ascribes to this Minister of grace, was that he should “preach the Gospel to the Poor.” And accordingly he declares in evidence of his divine mission, what was continually seen and heard under his ministration, that “the Poor have the Gospel preached unto them.” To the Poor before others he imparted the benefits of his ministry, whether temporal or spiritual. He healed their infirmities, he dispelled their sorrows, he supplied their wants. Their bodily necessities might engage his compas-

^d Mat. xi. 29.

sion, which was never slow to administer relief. But it was not their external condition in itself, which could recommend them to his favour above other classes of men, but the temper of mind and heart, which this condition cherished and improved. He looked with complacence on the poor in fortune, because in them he usually found the poor in spirit. In this respect only could they engage his more peculiar notice, as the humility of their station disposed them to humility of heart. The scantiness of their lot in temporal riches prepared them for the search after spiritual treasures ; and the lowliness of their state in this life pre-engaged their cares for the glories of the life to come. To such he imparted liberally of the abundance of his grace ; he dispelled their doubts and fears ; he assured them of the divine compassion and indulgence ; and he encouraged them to look up to the high and mighty God for approbation and acceptance.

And while he was thus full of solace and encouragement to the poor in spirit, he was also full of reprehension to persons of an opposite temper, which he generally found in the superior walks of life ; to such as were elated with a vain conceit of their moral and intellectual attainments, as was the prevailing character

character of the Pharisees and Scribes. In his intercourse with persons of this description he omitted no occasion to reprove their spiritual pride, and to inculcate a temper of a contrary nature: which he commonly did under the covert form of parable, being the mildest vehicle of severe reproof. This was the spirit of his admonition at the table of one of the chief Pharisees, when he marked the distinction of precedence, which the guests were sedulous to maintain in sitting down to meat. He advised them, when invited to a feast, not to take the highest place, from which they might with shame be degraded to a lower, but to take the lowest place, from which they might with honour be advanced to a higher. Thus under the semblance of instruction in regard to their civil and social intercourse he conveyed a lesson of much more important admonition, peculiarly necessary to that class of men who sat at table with him. He reproved their spiritual pride, as tending to abase them in the sight of God; and he recommended spiritual humility, as most conducive to advance them in his favour^e. Thus also to certain of the same description, who trusted in themselves

^e Luke xiv. 7—11.

that they were righteous, he proposed as a lesson of admonition and reproof the opposite deportment of a Pharisee and a Publican, when they went into the temple to pray. The Pharisee presumptuously thanks God, that he is better than other men in his observance both of the positive and the moral law. While the Publican at a distance from the more holy place presumes not so much as to lift his eyes to heaven, but smites upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a Sinner. "I tell you," says our Lord, "this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." To both which parables he attaches this maxim of divine justice ; "He that exalteth himself shall be abased ; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted ^f."

From this general view we may collect who the persons are, who come under the privilege of this Beatitude. By the poor in spirit we may understand without exception all, whether rich or poor in worldly substance, whether high or low in worldly rank, who are lowly in heart and soul, who have an humble sense of their own qualities and attainments ; more especially in the knowledge and the grace of God. Casting down all

^f Luke xviii. 9—14.

proud imaginations of temporal consequence, renouncing every vain desire after temporal dignities and honours, which are commonly at variance with the knowledge of God as laid open in the Gospel, they freely surrender every thought to the obedience of Christ^s. Under the impression of that knowledge, which he has imparted to the world, they entertain a feeling sense of their own weakness, ignorance, and want in spiritual things; they pay an awful deference to the power, the wisdom, the justice, and the benevolence of God, and a profound submission to all his dispensations. And while they disclaim all merit and sufficiency of their own, they commit themselves entirely in devout and persevering prayer to God, being solicitous to receive the benefit of his assistance and support, the light of his truth, and the riches of his grace, in whatever manner and by whatever means it may please the great Fountain of blessedness to bestow them. Thus conforming to the primary instruction, as also to the leading disposition and character of the lowly Jesuſ, they have the first distinction in the series of his beatitudes: *For theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

^s 2 Cor. x. 5.

The promise of a Kingdom, as accepted in the worldly sense, might be welcome to multitudes, as it coincides with a ruling passion in the mind of man. Among the different objects of human desire and pursuit there is none that has a more general and more commanding sway than that of eminence above their fellow-creatures. It is the lot of very few to reign : But most men are ambitious of obtaining consideration, authority, and power. Accordingly a spirit of ambition from the highest to the lowest ranks of men has universally prevailed. This operates in common life by the pains that are taken through the several gradations of society to advance themselves in the scale of social order, and to obtain a preeminence in rank and station over those around them. In public life it operates with more baneful effects. It has prompted men by all manner of lawless and sanguinary means to usurp a dominion over their fellow mortals. The love of empire has been the great spur of human enterprise in all ages and nations of the world. Hence the military achievements of the Greeks and of the Romans. Hence the ardour of Alexander to conquer other nations, of Cæsar to enslave his own.

In this pursuit after fancied happiness how little

little do they really attain what they so anxiously and assiduously seek ! for they seek it where it is not to be found. In common life, if they succeed in their designs, they find the elevation they have attained to be at best but an ideal good, but in general no better than vanity and vexation of spirit. In public life the object that they seek is still more chimerical and full of fearful and continual hazard. Among the several candidates for empire and dominion how few can possibly attain that gilded prize, that glitters in the eyes of the multitude ! If they fall, destruction is almost the certain consequence ; and to those very few, who by a singular combination of fortunate events attain the most lofty station which ambition could propose for the summit of their desires, what real happiness is in store to recompence the dangers long encountered and anxieties long endured ? More dangers and anxieties in long succession must attend their steps. In the midst of a palace they are ill at ease. In the height of their dominion and in the fulness of their authority they are continually encompassed by jealousies and terrors. In the revelries of the festive board, in the secrecies of their chambers, the pointed sword
perpetually

perpetually hangs over their guilty heads. They have no real enjoyment of the present hour; and they have no hopes to gild the prospect of futurity.

In opposition to this common aim, our holy Teacher proposes to the desires and pursuits of his Disciples a blessing of another kind. He has also a kingdom to offer: but his Kingdom is different in all respects from those, which animate the desires and enterprize of the ambitious of this world. It must be sought by other dispositions, and cultivated by other means. The Kingdom of Heaven is the scriptural expression for the reign of the Messiah, the general theme of ancient prophecy, the final hope of the Children of Israel. This Kingdom the Hebrew Prophets, for want of terms and images appropriate to spiritual themes, most usually represent under types or symbols of temporal dominion and authority. In this form of imagery it very powerfully engaged the expectation of the Jews. Actuated by ambition and a love of worldly greatness, they equally mistook the nature of this Kingdom and the temper essential for a place and interest therein. Accordingly they looked for a temporal dominion supported by the sword,

fword, in which they should triumph far and wide, and hold a preeminence of power over all the nations of the earth.

Far different was the Kingdom which the Messiah came to establish ; for it was not of a temporal, but of a spiritual kind, after the model, not of men, but of God. This indeed was expressively signified in the form of his appearance upon earth, which bore no external semblance of dignity and power ; since he came in every circumstance of poverty and humility. He had no lure to offer to worldly ambition : He had no posts of honour, no functions of authority, to bestow upon his followers ; for his Kingdom was not of this world. And this he himself explained in answer to the enquiries of the Pharisees : “ The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation ; neither shall they say, Lo here, or lo there ; for the Kingdom of God is within you ^b. ” It is not attended by external images of worldly grandeur : It is not circumscribed within local or temporary bounds. It is an invisible dominion, which, without any shew or form of jurisdiction over the body, is exercised with power in the spirit and on the soul. It is a Kingdom of

^b Luke xvii. 20, 21.

grace in this life, of glory in the life to come.

This also our Lord had repeated occasion to explain to his Disciples ; who, before they had received of the fulness of his truth, entertained very worldly sentiments both of the nature of his Kingdom, and of the disposition requisite for a place therein. Thus on one occasion, when there had been a dispute among them, who should be the greatest in this promised Kingdom, he took a little child, and set him in the midst of them, and said, “ Verily, I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of Heavenⁱ. ”

On another occasion, when the same contention was renewed among them, as they were partaking of the Paschal Supper, he took another mode of correcting their ambitious aims and hopes. After he had prepared them for a very different lesson by the expressive emblem of washing their feet, he taught them in a plainer strain, that it was for the Kings of this world to exercise autho-

ⁱ Mat. xviii. 1—4.

rity and to display munificence among the children of men. But a contrary lot awaited the Disciples of the lowly Jesus. It was theirs in this life to submit with their Master to every kind of humiliation, self-denial, and suffering for his sake. Yet would not their labours and sacrifices in so good a cause be vain. As during his ministry they had continued with him in all his trials, and had yet further trials to undergo in preaching his Gospel through the world, he had appointed unto them a Kingdom, as his Father had appointed unto him, that they might partake of his heavenly feast, and might sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel ^k.

Thus the Kingdom of Heaven is proposed as the appropriate recompence of the Poor in spirit; because in the temper and habit of their souls they are best prepared and qualified to receive it. The benefit of the Gospel is indeed laid open to the whole race of men, to high and low, rich and poor, learned and ignorant. But in order to partake of this inestimable gift, a corresponding disposition is indispensably required. And therefore, though our Lord precluded none from admittance into his covenant, yet he made

^k Luke xxii. 24—30.

the first overtures of his grace, not to the ambitious after worldly dignities, neither to the wise in their own conceits, nor to the righteous in their own esteem, but to the poor in spirit and the lowly in heart: to such as did not give their souls to a vain desire after worldly preeminence, as had an humble sense of their moral and intellectual worth, and a feeling conviction of their want and ignorance in spiritual things. Having this preliminary qualification for allegiance to their heavenly King, they are predisposed for the reception of all his doctrines and the cultivation of all his laws. To such as these he preached in person, when he appeared in our nature: To such he still preaches in his written word through all ages and nations of men: To such he more freely opens the unsearchable riches of his grace: And of such he has given assurance is the Kingdom of God.

In the present state of discipline they have the favour and acceptance of their heavenly King; from which they derive whatever is essential to their growth in grace and their advancement in godliness, a deliverance from the bondage and assaults of their spiritual enemies, a conquest over all their sinful passions and propensities, assistance and support in

in maintaining their allegiance to the law and government of Heaven, and a peace of soul more valuable than all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them.

But this kingdom of our God in the present state of grace is no more than preparatory to a future state of glory: when they who have humbled themselves on earth shall be exalted in heaven. Then they who have cultivated this lowly disposition of their once despised, but now glorified Lord, shall be advanced above the greatest Potentates of this lower world. For all the self-abasement, to which they have submitted here, they shall be transcendently glorified hereafter; for all the contempt and shame, which they have incurred among the children of this world, they shall be remunerated with unspeakable applause among the children of light. Being received into the immediate presence of their heavenly King, they shall partake in his triumph who has overcome the world: they shall obtain the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him; and shall reign with him for ever and ever.



S E R M O N X.

MATTHEW v. 5.

Blessed are the Meek : for they shall inherit the Earth.

HAVING treated on the Beatitude of the Poor in spirit, I proceed in the order which I proposed to take, to discourse on that of the Meek. These two dispositions are so closely related, that they are oft associated in holy Scripture ; and indeed in some instances they are put indifferently the one for the other. Thus the prophetic clause of Isaiah, “ To publish good tidings to the Meek,” is rendered by the Evangelist, “ To preach the Gospel to the Poor ^a. ” But as some distinction of character seems designed in this place, it may be proper to regard it through the present discourse. Now as I have understood the Poor in spirit in relation to God and with a reference to the things of heaven, so I would understand the Meek in relation to

^a Isa. lxi. 1. Luke iv. 18.

men and with a reference to the things of earth ; an acceptation, which derives some countenance from their respective Beatitudes : To the Poor in spirit is assigned the Kingdom of Heaven, and to the Meek the Inheritance of the Earth.

It cannot escape our observation, that the recompence here proposed of a temporal inheritance has a singular aspect in the series of Beatitudes, since to every other character the blessedness assigned is, not indeed entirely, but in the principal and final aim, of a spiritual nature and in the life to come. Perhaps the singularity of this exception may be removed, if we attend to that peculiar structure of language in which this series is given. It is agreeable to the sententious style of Hebrew Poetry, which our Lord appears to have adopted on this occasion, to distribute into separate, yet parallel clauses two parts of a proposition, which are to be understood in union. On this principle we may accept the two first of these Sentences, as if they were thus disposed : “ Blessed are the Poor in spirit, and the Meek : for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven, and they shall inherit the Earth : ” They, who cultivate these two kindred dispositions, shall be blest both in temporal and in spiritual things ; they have

have the promise both of this life and of that which is to come.

I propose this remark for the consideration of those who are studious of the holy Scriptures. But as this acceptation is probably new, and may therefore be liable to the imputation of being more fanciful than solid, I do not presume to ground the argument of this discourse upon it. Nor indeed is it necessary to have recourse to any novel and unapproved interpretation; since the sentence before us will admit of a plain and clear construction as a distinct and independent text. In this point of view I shall now discourse upon it; though it may not be without its use to keep in our remembrance the near relation which it bears to the preceding Beatitude of the Poor in spirit. And I trust, that on a close examination of the blessedness assigned it will be found to harmonize sufficiently with the rest.

Understanding therefore the Meek with a relation to men and a reference to the things of earth, I conceive them to be such as are uniformly mild and placid, forbearing and forgiving in their communion with their fellow-creatures, such as cultivate an equal mind in the extremes and vicissitudes of life, being content and satisfied in every station,

being moderate in prosperity and patient in adversity.

This quality was not overlooked by the Heathen Philosophers; but it was very feebly cultivated in the general practice of the Heathen world. It was too much the manner of men, uncorrected by divine instruction and unenlightened with celestial truth, to be turbulent and violent in asserting their own cause and infringing the rights and properties of others, to give way to pride and arrogance in the heights of prosperity, to impatience and discontent under troubles and afflictions. Even the wisest and the best of Heathen Sages, who has written a code of moral law making some approach to the Christian institutes, was singularly deficient in that equanimity, which he commended in theory, being too much elated with a prosperous tide of fame and fortune, and still more extravagantly dejected, when he came to experience an unforeseen reverse.

The quality of Meekness was much better taught under the dispensation of the Law. It was also frequently commended and proposed for cultivation in the Psalms and in the Prophets. But like its sister virtue Humility it obtained but a feeble hold upon the practice of the Jews. And though exemplified

fied in some of their superior men, especially their Lawgiver himself, who “ was very meek above all men upon the face of the earth ^b,” yet in later times it seems to have been dismissed, if not from the doctrine, however from the practical cultivation of those, who professed to be their Teachers and their Guides.

It remained for our Lord, a superior Teacher of righteousness, to give this quality its proper influence on the heart and practice of mankind. He has made it a primary disposition of all who would be truly his disciples, and he has attached a blessing to those that are invested with this moral grace: *Blessed are the Meek: for they shall inherit the Earth.*

The virtue thus proposed to the cultivation of his followers is first exemplified in the tenor of his own character and conversation. The mildness of his manner in executing his divine mission is thus represented by the Prophet of the Gospel; “ He shall not cry aloud nor lift up his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he shall not break, and the dimly burning flax he shall not quench ^c. ” All which was remarkably ful-

^b Numb. xii. 3.

^c Isa. xlii. 2, 3. Mat. xii. 19, 20.

filled in his public ministry. He did not come among mankind with a rod of discipline or with the sword of the civil power, but in peace and love and in the spirit of meekness. He made no public parade of the exalted office which he bore, but he communicated his doctrines in the mildest, freest, easiest manner. And though he spoke with the energy of a Teacher come from God, yet in the tone of his preaching, as well as in the substance of his doctrine, he was gentle, apt to teach, patient; shewing all meekness to all men^d. Those, who were bruised with a sense of their irreligious and sinful state, he did not overwhelm with the severity of judgment, but he raised them with the language of compassion and consolation. And whenever he found a feeble and half extinguished spark of religion in the soul of man, he gently fanned it into a living flame. Even to the Pharisees and Scribes, who vilified his person and ministry, he was mild and temperate in the tenor of his conversation, seeking rather to correct them than to irritate. And when he had urgent occasion to reprehend them, he usually conveyed his sentiments by the circuitous, yet more conciliating mode

^d 2 Tim. ii. 24. Tit. iii. 2.

of parable, rather than by open and direct reproof.

Such also was his character in his ordinary dealings and conversation. In all his intercourse with men, and during all his sojourn upon earth, he was forbearing and forgiving, patient and content. Thus when some of his Disciples suggested to him the infliction of an exemplary vengeance on the inhospitable Samaritans, he rebuked their sanguinary zeal, and told them, that he was not come to destroy, but to save^e. And when the extremes of calamity were coming upon him in his agony in the garden, though indeed he prayed that the cup of anguish, if it were possible, might pass away from him, yet he submitted with resignation to his Father's pleasure ; “ Nevertheless not my will, but thine be done^f.” So also in the severest of his trials, when he was arraigned before an iniquitous tribunal, “ as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth : when he was reviled, he reviled not again ; when he suffered, he threatened not ; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously^g.” And when they wreaked their ut-

^e Luke ix. 54, &c.

^f Luke xxii. 42.

^g Isa. liii. 7. 1 Pet. ii. 23.

most cruelty upon him, and he was enduring the most dreadful agonies of human nature, as he hung upon the cross, he prayed for their pardon ; “ Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do ^h.” Accordingly he is said by the Apostle in this very instance to have “ left us an example, that we should follow his steps.” And in like manner he recommends his own disposition as a pattern to his followers ; “ Learn of me : for I am meek and lowly in heart ⁱ.”

Of the same complexion also was his doctrine. Thus in his Sermon on the Mount, it was his instruction to his Disciples, that they be not angry with their Brother, without a reasonable cause ; that they agree with their adversary without delay ; that they resist not, nor retaliate evil ; that they forbear all impatient and fretful solicitude for the necessaries of life ; and that they commit themselves contentedly to his wise providence, who supplies to all his creatures their respective wants.

To the same purpose are the frequent exhortations of the Apostles, who had imbibed from the doctrine and example of their Lord this essential spirit of his religion. Thus

^h Luke xxiii. 34.

ⁱ Mat. xi. 29.

Saint Paul teaches, that the fruit of the spirit is meekness ; and exhorts his Christian Converts, to walk worthy of their vocation, with all lowliness and meekness and long suffering, forbearing one another in love¹. Saint James admonishes the Brethren, to receive with meekness the engrafted word ; and recommends it as the character of a man truly wise and endued with knowledge, that he shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom^m. And Saint Peter, after commanding in Christian Matrons above all other ornaments the jewel, highly precious in the sight of God, of a meek and quiet spirit, makes it a general exhortation to Christians, that they be all of one mind, having compassion one of another, that they love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteousⁿ.

And hence we may collect a general view of the character thus proposed for the cultivation of Christians. As far as relates to other men, the Meek may be described with the same features of character, which the Apostle has assigned to charity or Christian love. They suffer long the injuries and insults of others, before they express a spirit of

¹ Gal. v. 23. Eph. iv. 1, 2.

^m Ja. i. 21. iii. 13.

ⁿ 1 Pet. iii. 4, 8.

resentment or resistance : they are kind and gentle in the several relations, which they bear in social and domestic life, as well as in their common treatment of all men : they do not envy the more fortunate condition of others : they do not vaunt themselves on their possessions or endowments : they are not puffed up with any peculiar advantage above others : they do not behave themselves with unseemly assumption in their conversation or deportment : they are not forward or importunate in seeking or insisting on their own : they are not easily provoked to express, or even to conceive any harsh or uncharitable sentiments of others : they think no evil of those around them : they rejoice not in any thing to the prejudice of others ; but they rejoice in what is just and right^o.

Thus also in their personal deportment, they are contented with their station and condition in life, whatever be the place which providence assigns them. They are moderate and equal minded in both extremes and in all vicissitudes of fortune. If their lot is prosperous, they endeavour to apply it to the glory of God and the benefit of men, as also to their own advancement in godliness : they

^o 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5, 6.

enjoy it with moderation, and diffuse it with cheerfulness : If their lot is adverse, they bow with resignation to the divine disposal ; they are patient under correction ; and they improve it also to their final good.

Such are the characters which our Lord pronounces blessed ; and to which he assigns this Beatitude, that *they shall inherit the Earth.*

The words of this Beatitude are adopted from the Psalmist, who expressly says, that “ The Meek shall inherit the Earth ”^{P:} alluding most probably to that inheritance of the Land of Canaan, which was promised to the Israelites, on condition of their conformity to the will and character of God. In reference to this promise under the Law, our Lord has given to persons of the same description a corresponding promise under the Gospel, that they shall inherit the Earth : not that they shall have an appropriate allotment like the Children of Israel in the division of the land ; but they shall have a full sufficiency of worldly goods.

In the literal sense of this promise our Lord coincides with the general wishes and

^P Psalm xxxvii. 11.

desires of men. To enjoy an abundance of worldly goods has engaged the very serious pursuits of mankind under every system of religious faith. Whatever they may believe or hope of a future recompence, to this they look as a certain, immediate, and essential good. For this they compass land and sea : for this they encounter every danger and submit to every toil : for this they rise up early, and go late to rest, and eat the bread of care. The great object of human labour and enterprize is a portion or possession of the earth, as what they commonly suppose will yield the happiness they seek. And some degree of comfort it no doubt implies ; otherwise it would not be propos'd as one, though indeed a subordinate, recompence of godliness.

It is true, the Religion of Christ does not dwell in general, like that of Moses, on a temporal recompence ; because it has in store an exceeding great reward, which totally eclipses all the transitory goods of this life. As the light under which we live has given us a far clearer view of better things to come, we cannot repine that the providence of God is not so exact in apportioning to us the benefits of this life, as it was to the Jews, who had received no explicit assurance

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of a full remuneration in the life hereafter. But though the chief beatitude of Christians is placed in another world, our Lord has not omitted to set before us a partial recompence in the present world, as a more immediate incitement to the cultivation of holiness.

For though he discommends and dissuades all inordinate anxiety for the necessaries of this life, as of small concern when put in competition with our eternal weal, yet he assures us of the divine care to provide for all our temporal wants, if we give our principal attention to the interests of futurity. “ Be not full of care, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed? For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you ^a.”

But how, it may be asked, is this promise of our Lord fulfilled upon the Meek? In the common course of things do they really inherit or enjoy the earth? Does it not rather appear from the history of mankind and from our own experience, that the men of an op-

^a Mat. vi. 31, 32, 33.

posite temper and character have usually contrived to secure to themselves the fairest portion of this inheritance ?

It must be acknowledged, that the grasping and the turbulent by their art or by their enterprize have usually acquired a more ostensible inheritance of earthly goods. Placing all their happiness in worldly possessions, they employ all means to attain them ; without scrupulously considering whether the means be right or wrong. But it is their fate continually to strive, yet never to attain the happiness they seek. The object is pursued with unremitting care and disquietude of soul. And when they have secured to themselves an ample competence of worldly wealth, they are no nearer happiness than when they began the search. They are stimulated with a vain and insatiable desire of adding to their possessions, they are harassed with apprehensions of losing by disingenuous means what they have by disingenuous means acquired. And a serious reflexion, as life advances, must frequently intrude upon their troubled hearts, that while they have been so intent on amassing worldly riches, they have neglected to lay up treasures in heaven which alone are incorruptible and enduring, and that an hour is drawing nigh, when this inheritance

inheritance which they have sought on earth must entirely fail them, and having no better inheritance in reserve, they must be poor indeed.

The Meek on the contrary may be truly said to inherit the Earth, because they really enjoy the comforts which the Earth supplies. In some rare circumstances indeed the cause of righteousness may demand extraordinary sacrifices. But in the common course of things this truly Christian disposition administers to temporal enjoyment, and constitutes their portion of worldly goods a valuable inheritance.

By contracting their desires and by regulating their pursuits they inherit the earth more effectually than those, whose portion is abundance. A small provision by content and economy is rendered equal to great opulence. “A little that the righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith.” By sobriety and temperance in all lawful indulgences they retain a relish for the bounties of providence, and health to enjoy them to a good old age. By industry and diligence in their stations and capacities in life they pro-

² Psalm xxxvii. 16. Prov. xv. 16.

vide a store of comfort to themselves and their families, and obtain respect in the society, to which they contribute their stock of useful and beneficial service. By the mildness of their manners they conciliate the love of men, so as to prevent every disposition to do them harm or wrong, and to encourage every disposition to do them good. Thus they pass through the vale of life with little or no molestation ; and so quiet a possession of a moderate portion is better than a contested title to the inheritance of kingdoms. By their patience under trials and resignation to the will of God they acquire his favour, who by secret means of providence makes all their affairs to prosper; or if he occasionally visits them with affliction, who yet supports them with his grace, and makes even affliction subservient to their genuine and their final good. Beyond other blessings they have, what the world can neither give nor take away, the peace of conscience shed abroad into their hearts by the Spirit of God, which puts a value upon all they have. Without it the possession of the whole world would be no better than vanity and vexation of spirit ; and with it the whole world is to every genuine use their own.

But the most valuable recompence of
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the Meek is not in temporal things, but in spiritual, is not in this, but in the future world. And this we may conclude is implied in the promise that they shall inherit the Earth, when we consider the usage of the holy Scripture, by the shadows of the natural to delineate the truths of the spiritual world, and by the images of the present life to describe the realities of the life to come. This interpretation in the present instance is countenanced by the Apostle in the general strain of his Epistle to the Hebrews. The inheritance of an earthly Canaan, as promised to the Israelites by natural descent, is a type or earnest of the inheritance of a heavenly Canaan, as promised to all who are Israelites indeed by adoption and grace. This is in a peculiar sense the recompence of the Meek, inasmuch as they are conformed in disposition and character to the instruction and image of their blessed Lord. Having learnt of him to be meek and lowly in heart, they shall find a temporary rest unto their souls in the favour and approbation both of God and Man: And when this earth, and all the present scene of things is dissolved, they shall find an eternal rest in that new heaven and that new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness¹.

¹ Matt. xi. 29. 2 Pet. iii. 13.

S E R M O N XI.

MATTHEW v. 4.

Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted.

IT is a prevailing sentiment among the Children of this world to place their happiness in revelries and pageants and licentious mirth. And according as they have the means of dissipation, they intemperately enjoy them. Whatever their eyes desire, they keep not from them ; they withhold not their hearts from every joy ^a. But short is the gratification and unsatisfactory the end of turbulent and immoderate mirth. In the midst of laughter they are often ill at ease ; and by too free an indulgence their pleasures are converted into pain. A cheerless, if not a miserable void ensues. They have no comfort now to gild their adversity ; and as they lived without any thought of futurity, they

^a Eccles. ii. 10.

have no hope to cheer them from another life.

Our Lord has taught a different disposition, and has given the promise of an opposite consequence : *Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*

As the final purpose of our Saviour's mission was to promote the happiness of men, it may seem extraordinary to a slight observation, that he should enjoin and encourage mourning as the means of attaining so very different an end. But when we explore the nature and aim of this Beatitude, we shall equally see the wisdom and the benevolence of our holy Teacher, in proposing this as a necessary branch of the Christian discipline.

By the mourning thus proposed for the object of beatitude we are by no means to understand a gloomy fretfulness of temper for trivial or imaginary evils, or even an indulgence of immoderate and unavailing sorrow for the real afflictions and calamities of life: For these are totally repugnant to that spirit of patience and content and resignation so much commended and approved by the doctrines of our religion. The persons, whom our Lord pronounces blessed, are they that mourn in a religious sense and to a religious use. They mourn for the miseries of humanity,

humanity, whether natural or moral. They mourn for calamities, whether public, domestic, or personal, as the trials, the corrections, the judgments of a just, a wise, a gracious God. They mourn for sin, with which the world continually groans, and of which they feelingly know the power themselves.

A mourning of this description was neither cultivated in practice, nor even cherished in contemplation by the Heathens. They might mourn for the afflictions and calamities of life, no doubt the more feelingly, as they wanted hope, which religion alone can supply, to assuage and moderate their grief. But they never thought of turning them to any moral good. When therefore sorrow and adversity came upon them, they considered it as the truest wisdom to drown reflexion in every species of careless dissipation. It was a maxim of a considerable sect among the Heathen, “ Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die :” Since we have so short a time to live, let us crowd all enjoyments into the present hour. Thus the shortness of life and the certainty of death, which our religion proposes as the great argument for serious meditations on another state, they perverted into a plea for all voluptuous indulgence.

A mourning of this description was che-

rished among the people of Israel in the doctrines and examples of their Prophets and righteous men. They were taught to consider afflictions and adversities as the chastenings and corrections of the Lord ; and therefore they received them as salutary disciplines to turn them to religious thoughts and to move them to repentance. This we learn from the example of David. When he was in the sunshine of prosperity, he was tempted to forget his God, to violate his neighbour's honour, and being entangled in a chain of guilt, to conspire against his life. But when the corrections of God were upon him, he was brought to reflect on the heinousness of his transgression. Then indeed he humbled himself, and repented of his sin ; and after a severe and painful discipline he was reconciled to God. Hence he is led to say for our instruction and admonition ; “ In the day of my trouble I have sought the Lord. Before I was afflicted, I went astray : but now have I kept thy word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes ^b. ”

This also we learn from the example of Solomon his Son. Having abundant means

^b Psa. lxxvii. 2. cxix. 67, 71.

of indulgence in all that wealth and empire could supply, he possessed himself of every thing which his heart could desire; he denied himself no pleasure which could be found under the sun. The consequence of which was, that he became depraved in his moral sense, and his heart was turned away from God. But when adversity came upon him, he saw the vanity of his former life, and in trouble he confessed his vexation of spirit. He then could testify from his own experience, that “it is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting. For by the sadness of the countenance,” or in other words, by sobriety and seriousness of demeanour, “the heart is made better: For the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning.”^c And the result of his contemplations in the season of affliction was this caution to others, to guard against that rock on which he suffered shipwreck of his conscience: “Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, wherein thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.”^d

And what is thus exemplified in their su-

^c Eccles. vii. 2, 3, 4.

^d Eccles. xii. 1.

erior men whether for civil consequence or intellectual endowment, is also to be observed in the whole house of Israel. In the course of prosperous fortune they were too apt to forget their God, who had done such great things for them, and while they were at ease in Sion, they did not think of the moral miseries of Jacob. But when the judgments of the Lord were in the land, the people learned righteousness^e. Whenever any public or national affliction came upon them, whether the pestilence or the famine inflicted immediately by the hand of God, or invasion or destruction from the hands of men the instruments of his avenging justice, then they turned unto the Lord with all their hearts, they sanctified a fast, they assembled in the house of God to offer up one general service of confession and penitence, they wept for their sins, which had brought these heavy judgments upon them, and they devoutly called on God to stay his hand, to have compassion, to pardon, and to spare.

Our blessed Lord has inculcated a lesson upon this head more impressive than what had been taught under any former dispensation. He came indeed, as he himself pro-

^e Isa. xxvi. 9.

fessed,

felled, in contradistinction to the austeries of the Baptist, indulging his Disciples, not only in the common gifts of providence, but also in the innocent festivities of social life; by which he sufficiently displayed the complexion of his religion, that it did not demand severe and continual mortification either of the body or of the spirit, but only what was necessary to detach men from the things of this world, and to fix them on the more important concerns of eternity. For this purpose it was that he taught the expedience of mourning for their genuine and their final peace.

And what he taught to others he practised first himself. Of this mourning he himself is a prototype and a pattern. Of his character as a Mourner a very affecting description is given us by the Prophet of the Gospel; “ He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; as one that hideth his face from us, he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely our infirmities hath he borne, and our sorrows hath he carried: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted^f. ” And this prophetic description was fulfilled in his life on earth,

^f Isa. liii. 3, 4.

wherein

wherein he was indeed a Mourner. He did not however mourn for the evils which he endured himself, for severe as they were, they were freely undergone for our sakes. Much less did he mourn for any sin committed in his own person; for though he condescended to become a sin for us in the phrase of the Apostle, that is, a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins, yet he had no sins of his own to mourn, being entirely pure and innocent and spotless. When he offered himself to redeem us from the miseries that are derived from sin, he submitted to be like us in every thing but sin. In this indeed he would have no part with us. But he mourned for all that sin under which the world was groaning, and for all that misery in which it was by consequence involved. Thus we see the tenderness of his heart for others, when he contemplated the City of Jerusalem in its present state of ease and security. He wept over those calamities, which the accumulated guilt of her inhabitants was drawing down upon her^s. Thus also we see what a weight of misery he submitted to undergo in that terrible agony, through which he passed on the eve of his passion and crucifixion, when

his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. In the dreadful contemplation of what he had to undergo, and for what purpose he had to undergo it, he broke out into these impassioned words, “ My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death^h. ” Surely on considering this we may take up the lamentation of the mournful Jeremiah : “ Behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto his sorrowⁱ. ” Yet even in the extremities of his passion, when the women followed him in tears, he turned from his own sorrows to sympathize with them ; “ Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children^k. ” When we thus consider how he mourned for us, we may learn from him to mourn for ourselves.

The example of our Lord will guide us to understand the instruction conveyed in this Beatitude. Whether we consider the natural or the moral evil that is in the world, whether we contemplate the condition of others, or more closely examine our own, we have abundant cause to mourn. But in order to mourn in the sense in which it is recommended here, it is expedient that we

^h Mat. xxvi. 38.ⁱ Lam. i. 12.^k Luke xxiii. 28.

mourn a godly sorrow, that we mourn with a reference to our spiritual state and to a religious end.

If we look abroad into the world, or even if we confine our view to home, we find many sources of severe affliction. The loss of friends united to us by all the tender charities of life, the loss of fortune by the instability of all sublunary things, the loss of health by various kinds of maladies, and the approach of death in all the various forms of wretchedness. All these are evils grievous to be borne, and which by religion only can be made supportable. But all these are designed, as our religion teaches, by a wise and gracious providence for the true and final benefit of man; and in the Gospel we may learn how to turn them to our genuine and substantial good. Therein we are taught that God has withholden natural good and inflicted natural evil, as the means of correcting moral evil and of improving moral good. In prosperity we are all too apt to turn our attention from the Giver to the gift, to worship the creature more than the Creator, and to fix our minds on earthly rather than on heavenly things. It is the great use and benefit of adversity to rectify our thoughts, desires, and pursuits, to detach our minds from

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too intense a love of the world, and to turn them to a state more worthy of our choice, to correct what is evil in us, to improve and fortify what is good, and to engage us in such exercises as are conducive to our general and eternal welfare. In this sense in part we may understand the instruction here conveyed to mourn.

But that religious quality, which is more especially commended in this sentence, is a sorrow for the moral unhappiness of the world. It is the instruction of our religion, that Man is fallen from that state of innocence in which he was originally placed. Thus being born in sin he is born to sorrow, and by the accumulation of actual transgression he aggravates his unhappiness; for by the righteous judgment of God in the whole plan of his providence the necessary consequence of guilt is misery. Now when we contemplate the wretchedness of man in a moral point of view, we have abundant cause to mourn. And as far as this mourning is conducive to apply our hearts to wisdom, and to move our conscience to repentance, it constitutes a part of the Christian character recommended by our Lord and proposed for the cultivation of all his true Disciples. It was to instigate this religious mourning, that
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our Lord conversed so much with Publicans and Sinners. He sought to instil into their souls a feeling sense of their unhappy state, to make them conscious of their degeneracy from God and goodness, that so he might lead them to a serious contrition for their former sins, and bring them back in tears of undissembled penitence to their heavenly Father's home.

From this general view we may collect the character of those, to whom this Beatitude is assigned. They mourn to a religious use those various evils of human life, which they either experience themselves, or endure by sympathy in their families, in their country, or in the world at large. They consider their afflictions either as the judgments of God for sin, and therefore they submit with patience to his afflicting hand, or the chastenings of his parental care, and therefore they are earnest in their repentance and amendment, or the trials of their faith, and therefore they resolve to persevere in well doing. Thus they improve a transient and a partial evil to substantial and eternal good. Moved also by his warning they mourn that greater evil, the moral wretchedness of the world, more especially that, of which they have the most lively sense, their own sins and transgressions.

sions. While they lament the sins that are prevalent in the condition of all men, they most heavily lament their own. But they do not rest in unproductive grief: They mourn a godly sorrow to repentance.

To those that mourn in this religious sense our Lord assigns a correspondent blessing: *For they shall be comforted.*

This is a Beatitude which the world is unable to bestow. Amid the afflictions and miseries of life there is but faint and cold consolation in all sublunary things. Philosophy, though proud of its resources, could yield no efficient relief. And the grave, when considered without any view beyond it, is but a melancholy refuge from the sorrows of our nature. This we may observe in the practice of the Heathens. Having but faint notions of a superintending providence and the remunerative justice of a holy God, they were ready to sink under the pressure of calamity.

The Jews, when oppressed with affliction, were taught to resort for consolation to the God of their Fathers, who had promised, that if they turned unto him, he also would turn unto them, that if they adhered to him with all their hearts, he would never leave them nor forsake them. It was the office

fice of the Prophets, not only to call them to repentance, but also to comfort them in all their depressions. It was the frequent theme of Isaiah, the Herald of most welcome tidings to the House of Israel, to invite his people to pious acts of joy and gratitude : For God would comfort Sion, and would have mercy on them who had been afflicted. He declares it to be one important and most gracious part of his prophetic office, “ to heal the broken hearted, to comfort them that mourn, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness¹.” And in the opening of his more exalted series of prophecy he breaks out into this cheering and animating strain : “ Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquities are expiated, that she shall receive at the hand of the Lord blessings double to the punishment of all her sins^m. ”

All these promises of divine consolation were fulfilled in the letter on the people of Israel, in their redemption from captivity to freedom ; in their restoration from exile to

¹ Isa. lxi. 1, 2, 3.

^m Isa. xl. 1, 2.

the land of their Fathers. But in the spiritual sense they have a plenary accomplishment on all that are Israelites indeed, in their redemption from the bondage of corruption to the glorious liberty of the children of God. It was the peculiar character of our blessed Lord to be the Minister of peace and consolation to the world. Thus at his nativity the company of heaven announced to their fellow-servants upon earth good tidings of great joy, which was to extend to all people. And when he entered upon his ministry, it was his gracious office, as Isaiah had presignified in his own person, to bind up the broken hearted, and to comfort them that mourn. He did not indeed gratify the carnal and ambitious views of those, who waited in a literal sense for the consolations of Israel. Yet to those, who mourned in a truly religious aim, he gave consolations of another kind, which did not depend upon the revolutions of earthly states or the vicissitudes of worldly things. And as he was liberal of his mercies to all, who laboured under the maladies and afflictions of human life, by restoring sight to the blind and health to the sick, by giving soundness of body to the palsied and the lame, and soundness of understanding to the lunatic and the demoniac, so he was also liberal of

his comforts to all those, who mourned with undissembled sorrow for their sins. To the truly penitent he laid open for their consolation the pardon and the peace of God. And as to those who laboured under the burden and anguish of bodily disease, he said, "Be whole," so to those, who laboured under the heavier burden and the keener anguish of a troubled conscience, he said, "Your sins be forgiven you."

The same consolation, which he gave in his personal ministry, he still extends in the dispensation of grace to all who mourn after a godly sort. Though he does not suspend the operations of nature to administer relief, yet in his written word and in the still small voice of conscience he whispers peace to the troubled and dejected soul. The words, which he addressed to his primitive Disciples, will apply to all who look upon him in full assurance of faith : "Ye shall be sorrowful; but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." Whether they mourn the miseries and calamities, which await this scene of discipline, or whether they mourn that far greater evil the moral miseries, which they see in others, and more sensibly experience in themselves, they find in his Gospel a certain source of consolation. Therein they have assurance,

assurance, that those natural afflictions, under which they groan, are designed by a wise and gracious providence to promote their own and the general good, that the moral evils, by which they are still more heavily oppressed, are upon their repentance absolved and forgiven through the atoning merits of their Redeemer. This indeed is a comfort beyond all sublunary blessings ; it is such a satisfaction as the world cannot give. To all that truly mourn consolation is given in the words of their Redeemer : “ Ye now therefore have sorrow : But I will see you again, and your hearts shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the worldⁿ. ”

But the full and perfect fruit of this religious mourning is reserved for the life to come. In the present state of being, however we may strive to elevate our minds above terrestrial sorrows by the contemplation of celestial joys, yet as long as we bear about us the relations and the passions of mortality, we must necessarily feel as mortal men :

ⁿ John xvi 20, 22, 33.

nor is it the design of providence to detach us altogether from the cares of the body, till this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality. Again, whatever advances we may have made in righteousness, yet in our present state of frailty we still are liable and prone to sin; and whenever we do sin, we renew to ourselves the necessity to mourn. In the future life, to all the truly faithful in Christ every source of mourning shall for ever cease. It is the essential character of the heavenly state, that the tears shall be wiped from all eyes, and there shall be no more sorrow nor wailing: for the former things are passed away^o. There will then be no room either for natural or for moral evil, the two great objects of mourning now. For death and sin shall be swallowed up in victory. Then they, who have improved their afflictions to a religious use, and they, who have cherished a godly sorrow to repentance, shall close their mourning in eternal consolation.

^o Rev. xxi. 4.

S E R M O N XII.

MATTHEW v. 6.

*Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness :
for they shall be satisfied.*

AMONG the different objects of human desire there is none perhaps more prevalent than that of gratification in meats and drinks. It is good and comely in the general opinion of men to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all their labour all the days of their lives : more especially, if God hath given them riches and substance and means of enjoyment, do they account it wise to take their portion, and to rejoice in their abundance ^a.

Among the Heathens in general, whose views were limited to the present life, it was the solicitous enquiry, as our Lord himself observes, “ What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be

^a Eccles. v 18, 19.

clothed?" Attending entirely to the wants of the body, they totally overlooked the necessities of the soul.

And this sentiment also predominated among the Jews. When therefore they hungered and thirsted in the wilderness, and cried unto the Lord for relief, it was agreeable to the divine wisdom to instruct them, "that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God^b:" He requires, not only material bread for the sustenance of the body, but also spiritual food for the nurture of the soul. And when they were replenished with the corn and wine, the milk and honey of the promised land, it was still more necessary to remind them again and again of those more important wants essential to the spiritual life, which required a superior diligence and care to satisfy.

Some few indeed among them, more seriously touched with a sense of what was necessary for their better part, expressed a desire for a more solid and permanent repast. Thus David, when he sojourned in a dry and barren wilderness, wherein his tears had been his food day and night, declared his

^b Deut. viii. 3. Mat. iv. 4.

hunger and thirst after spiritual things; and solicitously bent his hopes to the time of his reappearing in the sanctuary of the Lord, when his soul should be satisfied with plenty in performing the duties of devotion to his God ^c.

It was one part of our Saviour's teaching to incite this desire after spiritual food. He directed that solicitude, which is commonly employed in making provision for the body, to the sustenance which is necessary to the strengthening and refreshing of the soul. To this intent he said, *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.*

The righteousness, which is here proposed for the desires of men, has been accepted by some in the more limited sense of equity in their dealings toward one another. From the station and order, which it holds in this place, I do not scruple to understand it in the most comprehensive signification of holy Scripture, namely, the whole of what we owe both to God and Man, the cultivation and exercise of all religion, the studies of its doctrines, and the observance of its laws. As in the foregoing sentence our Lord pronounces a blessing on them that mourn, that

^c Psalms xlii. xlivi.

mourn after a godly sort, and to a religious use and end; so in this he pronounces a blessing on those, who, leaving the principles of Christian discipline, resolve to persevere, and to go on to perfection; who, having already laid the foundation of their religious life in repentance from dead works and faith towards God, are animated with a holy zeal to be fruitful in every good work, and to increase in the knowledge of God, to be filled with the fruits of righteousness, and, to adopt a still more forcible expression of holy writ, to be filled with all the fulness of God^d.

Of this religious hunger and thirst our Lord was an eminent example. When he took upon him a human form, he submitted to sustain the feelings and infirmities of human nature. Thus immediately before he entered upon his ministry, when he was tempted in the wilderness, he fasted forty days and forty nights, and was afterwards a-hungered^e. And in his travels through the land in the exercise of his mission he was frequently exposed to the same bodily want. But while he occasionally hungered and thirsted after temporal sustenance, he continually hungered and

^d Heb. vi. 1. Col. i. 10. Phil. i. 11. Eph. iii. 19.

^e Mat. iv. 2.

thirsted after righteousness. Thus when his Disciples after the fatigue of a journey brought him food to eat, and urged him to take it, being then engaged in the contemplation of a far more important concern, the instruction and conversion of the Samaritans, he answered; “I have meat to eat, that ye know not of.” And when they questioned among themselves, whether any man had given him aught to eat, he again made answer; “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work^f.” He hungered and thirsted after righteousness, inasmuch as he cherished an ardent desire “to fulfil all righteousness^g;” in other words to execute the great scheme of providence and grace in becoming righteousness to us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him^h. This we may contemplate both in his retired and in his social life, when he fasted in private, and when he sat down to meat in company, when he prayed alone, or when he preached to the multitude, when he supplied them with material food, or when he administered to them the bread of life.

Among the several exercises, in which he displayed his hunger and thirst after righte-

^f John iv. 31—34.^g Mat. iii. 15.^h 1 Cor. i. 30. 2 Cor. v. 21.

ousness,

ousness, was the zeal that he invariably shewed, to turn mankind from the love of temporal to the love of spiritual things, to direct that anxiety, which is commonly entertained for the aliment of their mortal bodies, to that more essential food, which promotes the nurture and conduces to the welfare of their immortal souls. Thus in the sequel of his Sermon on the Mount he cautions his Disciples against that immoderate solicitude, so much indulged by those who had no notion of a superior good : “ Be not full of care, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek. But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto youⁱ. ” According to this instruction must we understand that petition in our daily prayer, which in the same discourse he has given us, both as a model how we ought to pray, and as a summary of all we have to ask. When we implore of God to give us every day our daily bread, we are taught to implore not only material bread for the nurture of the natural, but also the bread of life for the sustenance of the spiritual man. The same was the moral application of the miracle

ⁱ Mat. vi. 31, 32, 33.

which

which he wrought, when from a casual and very scanty store of food he fed many thousands in the wilderness. Thus when the people followed him in the hope of a continual supply of the same provisions, he reprehended them for the motive on which they came, and he added this instructive caution ; “ Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth to eternal life, which the Son of man shall give unto you ;” namely, the doctrine of righteousness, which, if duly cherished in the heart, and cultivated in the practice, is essential to eternal life^k.

From this general instruction of our Lord we may collect the character of those that hunger and thirst after righteousness. In general they are such, as having already passed the severer discipline of repentance, at their entrance on the Christian life, by mourning in a godly sort for sin, have a fervent zeal to fulfil every branch of Christian righteousness. Having learnt to moderate their desires for the aliment of the body, they direct their principal concern to the sustenance of the soul. Paying only a subordinate regard for their advancement in the world, or the im-

* John vi. 27.

provement of their knowledge in temporal things, they are solicitous to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Disencumbering their minds, as far as their station in the world will conveniently allow, from the many cares of life, they have chosen that better part which shall never be taken from them. Considering themselves as candidates for the high prize of their Christian calling, as children of the Kingdom and heirs of immortality, they employ their contemplations on that copious field of heavenly truth, the ways of divine providence and grace; and by the stedfast cultivation of their Christian faith, and a diligent observance of the Christian law, they endeavour to conform themselves to the will, the character, and image of God in righteousness and true holiness.

To such as these belongs the promise expressed in this Beatitude, that *they shall be satisfied.*

It is the radical defect of all temporal meats and drinks, that they can never satisfy. This appears more especially in those, who place their happiness in luxurious indulgence. Not confining themselves to the ordinary bounties of providence, which almost every

every country liberally supplies to the needs of its inhabitants, they create to themselves artificial desires ; they hunger and thirst after the luxuries of other climes ; they compass land and sea, they exhaust the elements to yield them a superfluous provision for their pampered appetites. But in vain do they look for happiness in all this profusion of imaginary goods. By extravagant indulgence their appetite is cloyed without being satisfied ; their bodies are disordered ; their years are diminished ; and the evening of life is passed in a gloomy penance for the excess and intemperance of their brighter day.

What the luxuries of this world promise in vain, is only to be found in the pursuit and cultivation of righteousness. By that alone can man be finally and completely satisfied. That alone can yield a solid and enduring pleasure, which will always continue with him, and will remain for evermore his own.

Of this the Heathens had little or no perception. Of righteousness in general according to the scriptural sense they had no vital knowledge ; and after a good yet unestimated and unknown they could have no intense desire. Of the fruits of righteousness they had made no sensible discovery, sufficient to animate

animate their zeal, and to stimulate their endeavours to acquire them ; and therefore they continued in the pursuit of such frail and transient and unsatisfactory goods, as the world presented to their immediate hopes and aims, without considering what was the will and design of Heaven, and without enquiring what was their own business and end.

The Jews were better taught of God ; though their practice was by no means correspondent with their instruction. It was necessary to remind them, both when they were miraculously supplied with food and water in the wilderness, and when they had entered upon the possession of a good and fruitful land, that the full satisfaction of man did not consist in these things, but in a faithful observance of the law and will of God. It was the observation of the Psalmist, that they who put their confidence in God should be abundantly satisfied with the plenteousness of his house ; and he would give them to drink of the river of his pleasures. “ For with thee,” he continues, “ is the fountain of life ; and in thy light shall we see light^m. ” And this was the result of all Solomon’s investigation

^m Ps. xxxvi. 7, 8, 9,

of the true good of man. After trying every worldly good, and finding the event of all but vanity and vexation of spirit, he made this at length the conclusion of his solicitous enquiry ; “ Fear God and keep his commandments ; for this is the whole of man ;” this is the whole business and duty, the whole happiness and end of man ⁿ.

In the same vein of sentiment the Prophet Isaiah invites men to partake of that spiritual sustenance, which God is always ready to bestow on them who diligently and devoutly seek it : “ Ho, every one that thirsteth, come to the waters ; and he that hath no money, come, buy, and eat ; yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread ? and your labour for that which satisfieth not ? Hearken diligently unto me ; and eat ye that which is good ; and let your soul be replenished with fatness ^o. ”

This gracious invitation by the Man of God applies, not so much to that dispensation under which he lived, as to that which he contemplated with prophetic eye, when the Kingdom of the Messiah should

ⁿ Eccles. xii. 13.

^o Isa. lv. 1, 2.

be established in the world. It was the peculiar care of our blessed Lord to satisfy the hungry and the thirsty soul with goodness. He omitted no opportunity to relieve the wants and to repair the infirmities of human nature. But in all these acts of temporal benevolence he had a far more important and valuable aim in view. In satisfying the necessities of the body he was anxious at the same time to satisfy the more important necessities of the soul. Thus when he had miraculously relieved the wants of the multitude in the wilderness, when from the scanty store of a few loaves and fishes several thousands ate and were satisfied, he took care to instruct his Disciples in the moral purpose and improvement of this temporal relief : “ I am the bread of life. He that cometh to me shall never hunger ; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” Wherein he affirmed that he was the true source of spiritual sustenance, that all, who professed his faith, and obeyed his precepts, should have all their spiritual wants effectually and eternally supplied^p. And similar to this was the language which he employed at the well of Sychar to the woman of Samaria: “ Whoso-

^p John vi. 35.

ever drinketh of this water shall thirst again : But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst ; but it shall be to him a well of water springing up to everlasting life ⁴."

The virtue here proposed to the cultivation of Christians is attended by its appropriate reward. To them that hunger and thirst after righteousness is given a fulness of satisfaction both in time and in eternity.

In time they have the blessing of a tranquil conscience, " that peace of God which passeth all understanding." They have satisfaction in the ways of providence and grace : And having every want of their spiritual part supplied, they are indifferent about the enjoyment or privation of inferior good. They have satisfaction in the complacence of their own hearts, and in the favour of God, which is better than life and every thing dear in life. In all these respects " the righteous have a continual feast," a feast far superior to every temporal festivity, as it will never surfeit, yet will always satisfy. It is continued and renewed every day without producing languor and disgust; but invariably yields an undiminished and unchangeable satisfaction.

⁴ John iv. 13, 14.

But this feast of the soul on earth is no more than an antepast or earnest of that spiritual banquet in another life, provided for them that hunger and thirst after righteousness. Our Lord himself represents the happiness of the world to come by the expressive image of sitting down as at a Feast with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven^r : ” And in the Book of Revelations the beatitude of those, who are invested with the white robe of righteousness, is represented by the privilege of attending the marriage of the Lamb of God, or, to divest this language of the veil of parable, the spiritual union of our great Redeemer with his Church triumphant in heaven. And blessed indeed are they, who shall be called to this Marriage Feast! Blessed are they, who are bidden to eat bread in the Kingdom of God^s !

In the same divine Volume the happiness of the heavenly state is pictured to us by the Tree of life, overshadowing the pure River of the water of life, and yielding fruits through the succession of months in great abundance and variety. If we so hunger and thirst after righteousness, as to give ourselves

^r Mat. viii. 11.

^s Rev. xix. 9. Luke xiv. 15.

entirely

entirely to the cultivation of holiness both in heart and life, we shall partake in that Beatitude pronounced by the Captain of our salvation ; “ To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the Tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” The Tree of life was originally planted in the Garden of Eden ; and there it thrrove, while Man continued innocent. But when by tasting the forbidden fruit he fell, the whole earth was corrupted by his depravity, and it could no longer thrive on that degenerate soil. But it still subsists in undecaying health, fertility, and bloom in heaven. It there expands its leaves for the healing of the nations. It there abounds in salutiferous fruits for the reparation of all those disorders, which the mortal taste of the forbidden Tree produced in all the progeny of Adam. Whoever hungers and thirsts after righteousness, shall partake of its fruits, and be completely satisfied ¹.

¹ Rev. xxiii. 2. ii. 7.

S E R M O N XIII.

MATTHEW V. 7.

Blessed are the Merciful: for they shall obtain Mercy.

IN the four first of his Beatitudes our Lord has delineated the more general features of the Christian character. In the sequel he proceeds to specify four particular dispositions, which have a claim to a preeminent and distinguished place in the roll of Christian Virtues.—The first of these is Mercy, a disposition very nearly allied to Charity or brotherly Love, and therefore easily admitting of a joint consideration with it.

The disposition of Mercy seems on the first reflexion to be congenial to the soul of man. It may be regarded as a primary affection of our nature to take an interest in the welfare of our fellow-creatures, to feel a satisfaction in being able to increase their comforts and to alleviate their miseries. When thus it so immediately arrests the moral feeling of man-

kind, we cannot wonder that it should be approved by the Teachers of moral truth even in the Heathen world. But when we bring this sentiment to the test of experience, we find it had but a feeble hold upon their practice. It is true the Heathens in private life might cultivate friendship, and in public life might display a zeal for the welfare and prosperity of their country. Yet if we explore their characters in private, they were ready to give way to a revengeful disposition towards those who had given offence ; and they were immoderately severe to their slaves and dependents : if we survey their characters in public, they looked with a hostile eye on foreign states ; and when hostility broke forth, they were strangers to the exercise of compassion and clemency. Hence they are represented by the Apostle as full of envy, murder, and malignity, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful^a.

The Children of Israel had been instructed in better principles. As the first great commandment of their Law was, To love the Lord with all their hearts, so the second bore a close resemblance to it and a near degree of kindred, To love their neighbour as them-

^a Rom. i. 29, 31.

felves,

selves, which unquestionably comprehends every branch and every form of mercy and charity to mankind. They were more especially enjoined a practical benevolence to those, who stood more immediately in need of their assistance, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. And there were many equitable laws for alleviating miseries and imparting mercies, not only to the human species, but even to the brute creation. And the Prophet recommends as duties virtuous in themselves, and more acceptable to God than every kind of formal service and ritual obedience, that they undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free, that they deal their bread to the hungry, that they cover the naked with a garment, and that they receive the houseless poor under their roofs^b.

But the Jews in general did not live in the exercise of this law; for they had in a great measure impaired their sense of obligation to it, and thereby virtually rendered it of none effect, by their glosses and traditions. This appears from the testimony of our Lord in his Sermon on the Mount; who after professing, that he was not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them, has

^b Isa. lviii. 6, 7.

marked in different instances their erroneous acceptation, and in consequence also their defective practice of the Law, and who at the same time has established a more correct interpretation and a more vital practice.

The ancient Law had said, “Thou shalt not kill,” and had sanctioned this prohibition by the punishment of death to the transgressor of that commandment. Our Lord, not satisfied with prohibiting the act itself, forbade under far severer penalties all kinds of calumnious, intemperate, and uncharitable language to the prejudice or offence of their neighbour ; and to strike at the root of all bitterness and malice, he forbade men to be angry with their brother without a cause. And this disposition he inculcated with greater energy and effect, as he made it a necessary qualification for approaching God with any gift or offering, that they come in a state of reconciliation and charity with their brethren ^c.

On the same principle of justice, by which it denounced blood for blood and life for life, the ancient Law decreed retaliation for inferior wrongs, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth :” or in more general terms, As one man hath done to another, so be it done

^c Exod. xx. 13. Mat. v. 21—26.

~ to

to him. This ordinance for the punishment of personal offences in the public distribution of justice they were too ready to interpret as an indulgence to revenge in their common intercourse between man and man. Our Lord requires his followers, that they resist not evil, but rather expose themselves to a repetition of wrongs, than violate the law of mercy and benevolence. And for a general rule of conduct in their social intercourse he established this principle of justice and charity combined, which, however it had been misapprehended by the Jews, he acknowledged to be the spirit of the Law and of the Prophets. “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them.” The same doctrine of forbearing and forgiving one another he repeatedly asserted in the sequel of his ministry. Thus when Peter put this question to him, “How often shall my Brother sin against me, and I forgive him ? until seven times ?” he received this answer ; “I say not unto thee, Until seven times, but until seventy times seven.” He was not to limit his forgiveness to any certain number or compass of offences, but he was continually to forgive his brother, whenever he shewed a disposition to repentance ^d.

^d Exod. xxi. 24. Mat. v. 38—42. vii. 12. xviii. 21, 22.

The ancient Law had said, “Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself.” This commandment was holy, wise, and good. But the Jews had in a great measure disannulled its virtue by their contracted interpretation. For they limited the relation of neighbour within the pale of their own country and religion. Toward persons of another state and of another creed they considered themselves as released from all obligations of benevolence: and were moved, in consequence to regard them in the light of enemies. Thus the Heathens in general they regarded with contempt; and the Samaritans they beheld with enmity little short of abhorrence. Even those, who were of the same communion both civil and religious, they were far from loving with the spirit of their divine law. As divisions arose among them, the partizans of one sect considered themselves authorized to hate and even to persecute another sect. Our Lord observed of the Publicans, that they limited their good offices to those, who paid them the same good offices in return. And he gave this character of the Pharisees, that they laid heavy burdens on the shoulders of others, which they would not move themselves with one of their

their fingers. Thus their charity was impaired by any difference of opinion ; and as the circle of their benevolence was gradually contracted, the scope of their mercy became very limited indeed ^e.

Our Lord on the other hand has given the fullest compass and effect to this law of social love ; for he requires us to consider all under the relation of neighbours, and intitled to the benevolence of this law, who partake in the same common bonds of nature and the same common benefits of providence. Hence he requires us to love our enemies, to do good indifferently to all, and instead of satisfying ourselves with paying courtesy for courtesy and benevolence for benevolence, to pay them to those who can make us no return, and to render good for evil in every form of charity, by our exertions, by our services, and by our prayers.

On the same great social duty he took all occasions to expatiate in all his doctrines. Let me instance his conversation with the Lawyer, who, proud of his own attainments in the knowledge of the Law, was disposed to try the proficiency of our Lord. When

^e Lev. xix. 18. Mat. v. 43—48. xxiii. 4.

they

they came to touch on the second great commandment of the Law, “Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself,” the Lawyer put this question, “And who is my Neighbour?” To which our Lord discreetly answered by a parable : A Traveller had fallen among Robbers, who had stript and wounded him, and left him on the road half dead. A Priest, and a Levite, as they journeyed on the same road, severally looked on him, and continued their journey without extending to him any relief. But a Samaritan coming by had compassion on him, and without pausing to enquire what his country and religion were, he immediately took him under his hospitable care, and gave him every necessary assistance and support. Hereupon Jesus asks the Lawyer in turn ; “Which now of these three thinkest thou was neighbour unto him that fell among thieves ?” Prejudiced as the Lawyer was to his own contracted interpretation of the Law, he could not hesitate to say in answer ; “He that shewed mercy on him.” On which our Lord immediately brought the instruction home to his conscience ; and the admonition, that he has given to him, he has given indifferently to all ; “Go and do thou likewise.”

^f Luke x. 25—37.

This virtuous disposition, so powerfully recommended in our holy Teacher's precepts, was more fully represented and embodied to us in his own example. It was in mercy to mankind, that he left his Father's bosom, and submitted to experience in his own person the infirmities, the sorrows, and the wants of our nature. His whole pilgrimage on earth was one continued exercise of charity to men. He went about doing good, dispensing benevolence both temporal and spiritual, healing the diseases of the body, and correcting the disorders of the soul, speaking consolation to the broken-hearted, and preaching the glad tidings of salvation to all. This he did impartially to those who valued, and to those who despised his mercy, to Publicans and Sinners, and to Pharisees and Scribes. His beneficence to mankind, thus continued through a life of toil and sorrow for our sakes, he still more abundantly testified by his death. To bring us into a state of reconciliation with God, and to procure for us that mercy at his Father's hands, which we had forfeited by our sins, and which we were unable to recover by any act or service of our own, he submitted to the greatest agonies that can befall our nature. And though they were inflicted on him through

through the malice of his persecutors, yet so merciful was his disposition, and so solicitous was his mind for the general good of all, not excepting those who had done the worst to him, that even in the extremities of his sufferings he put up this prayer for his murderers, “ Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do.”

And this virtuous disposition, which he exercised himself in so eminent a degree, he has earnestly recommended to the imitation of all his Disciples : “ A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another ; as I have loved you : that ye also love one another.” As he had given this commandment an energy and compass unknown to the Gentiles and unacknowledged by the Jews, he had good reason to call it a new commandment ; and he therefore takes the exercise of this virtue for the peculiar badge of his profession : “ By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another^g. ”

From this precept and example we may collect who are the merciful in the eye of our religion. Sensible of the undeserved goodness, which they derive from the Father of

^g John xiii. 34, 35.

mercies,

mercies, they are anxious to express their gratitude by mercy to their brethren. They have a feeling sentiment of affection for them, as children of the same Father, partakers of the same nature, and inheritors of the same graces. The charity, which they feel for them in their hearts, they are ready to express in their actions. They grudge no sacrifice of time or labour or expence or ease to do them good. They shew this charity without partiality or respect of persons not only to their neighbours in the literal sense, but to all with whom they are allied by the common bonds of humanity. But not contenting themselves with this general exercise of benevolence, they practise it in cases, where a sacrifice is made of the more turbulent passions of our nature ; they suppress all motions of anger and malice against their brethren ; they check every disposition to revenge or retaliate wrongs ; they freely forgive all injuries received ; and while they are careful not to do injuries or to give offence to others, yet where a shadow of injury has been given, or offence however groundless has been taken, they make no delay to solicit reconciliation. On the whole, that there may be no restriction in their exercise of mercy,

mercy, they do good even to their enemies, and they render good for evil.

All they, who in these respects obey the law, and copy the example of their divine Master, have a title to the name and character of the Merciful, and consequently have a portion in the blessing here assigned, that *they shall obtain mercy.*

In the ordinary course of things they will obtain this recompence with men. When in all their social intercourse they shew a forbearing and forgiving, a merciful and charitable disposition, by the natural order of providence they will engage from men the exercise of the same disposition in return. But the spirit of our Saviour's promise applies more especially, perhaps entirely, to the mercy which they may hope from God.

This motive had little or no influence upon the Heathens, as they had little or no notion of a superintending providence and the remunerating care of Heaven. And therefore, when they had opportunity to exercise a spirit of revenge, they were seldom restrained by the apprehension, that in the vicissitude of things they might be exposed to a severe retaliation from the hands of men.

Nor

Nor did this motive operate with great effect upon the Jews, who were taught of God himself his nature and attributes, and among these his compassion and clemency. To this people he appeared in the majesty of his justice more than in the softer beams of mercy, as the Law which he gave them denounced certain punishments for certain transgressions without mitigation or reprieve. Notwithstanding this, even under that severer Dispensation he is frequently characterized as long suffering and of great mercy, as full of compassion and forgiveness, even to those who had rebelled against him, provided they returned again in repentance; as shewing mercy to thousands of them that love him and keep his commandments. This divine attribute is the continual theme of the Psalmist, who had known it by experience both in his domestic and his civil capacity. And there is no sentiment which has a more frequent recurrence in the book of Psalms than this, "that his mercy endureth for ever." This mercy he was always ready to shew to them, who repented of their sins, corrected and amended their ways, and turned unto him with all their hearts. It was particularly shewn to them, who copied him in the same attribute of mercy. Thus the Psalmist af-

serts it for an established principle in the government of God; “With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful.” And it seems to have been in the dispensations of his providence a law of retributive justice, that as men dealt with others, so also would he deal with them.

It was reserved for the Gospel of Jesus Christ to represent the Lord of all in the fulness of his mercy, compassion, and benevolence. Of this we have a feeling sense, when we consider at the same time what the Gospel more fully represents, the demerit of mankind. It is one chief element of Christian knowledge, that we are all by nature in a state of sin, and therefore liable to the wrath of God. Yet if he were extreme to mark our transgressions, we should not be able to abide the severity of his just displeasure. To cheer our doubtful and dejected hearts under this conviction, he is manifested to us in the last revelation of himself as the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. As brotherly love was the peculiar quality, by which our Saviour sought to distinguish men, so mercy was the peculiar attribute, by which he represented God to human view. His Gospel is fitly styled by the Apostle “The grace of God, which bringeth salvation to all men.”

men." Therein his mercy is most conspicuously shewn in that great mystery of redemption and atonement by his only Son, by which he reconciled the world to himself. Therein he is pourtrayed in the character and relation of a tender Father, as taking complacence in the good conduct of his prudent and virtuous Children, as lamenting over those who go astray, yet even in their apostasy looking upon them with parental regard, solicitous to reclaim them, and exerting every means consistent with a state of discipline to recover them from the error of their ways; and when by salutary warnings they are brought to themselves, as going forth in the spirit to meet them on their return, receiving them with compassion and clemency, readmitting them into his household, and rejoicing over their restoration from the death of sin to the life of righteousness^h.

But this divine mercy must not be regarded as an unconditional indulgence. In order to have an interest in the atonement of Christ on the cross, and his intercession at the mercy-seat of Heaven, we must comply with those terms of grace, by which alone this mercy can extend to us. We must have

^h Luke xv. 11—32.

a lively faith in God's mercies through Christ, we must repent us truly of all those sins which demanded the atonement of his precious blood, and we must stedfastly resolve with the assistance of divine grace to present ourselves both body and soul a living sacrifice to God, to yield him the reasonable service of a holy life. But the more immediate condition, the more appropriate means of obtaining compassion for ourselves, is to shew compassion to our brethren. It is highly agreeable to the reason of things, as well as to the word of God, that if we would prevail on him to be merciful to us, we must imitate his character in being merciful to one another. For this purpose our Lord has taught us in his Sermon on the Mount, when we think of offering any gift upon the altar, in other words, of paying any sacrifice of prayer, any tribute of devotion, to consider first, whether we are in charity with men, and if we recollect any matter of offence between us and our brethren, to suspend on the instant our tribute of devotion to God, and to seek immediate reconciliation with them; for then, and not before, we shall be competent to yield an acceptable offering to God. To the same intent, having taught us in our daily prayers to supplicate of God the remission

sion of our debts, even as we forgive our debtors, he adds in support of this instruction, that if we forgive our brethren, we may hope for ourselves the forgiveness of God ; but if we do not forgive them, we can have no ground of hope that we shall be forgiven ourselves.

This doctrine is well illustrated in the Parable of the King, who took an account of his Servants. Of these one was brought before him, who owed him a sum immense, and such as he could never pay. In the severity of his justice he commanded, that he and his family and all his possessions should be sold, and payment as far as that would reach be made. Hereupon the Servant fell at his feet, and said, “ Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.” His Lord was moved with compassion, and forgave him all the debt. Notwithstanding this great act of clemency, the servant was no sooner released, than he went and arrested one of his fellow-servants, who owed him a sum comparatively very small. The poor debtor made the same supplication to him, which himself had recently made to his Lord ; “ Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.” But he rejected his suit, and committed him to prison till he should pay the debt. On

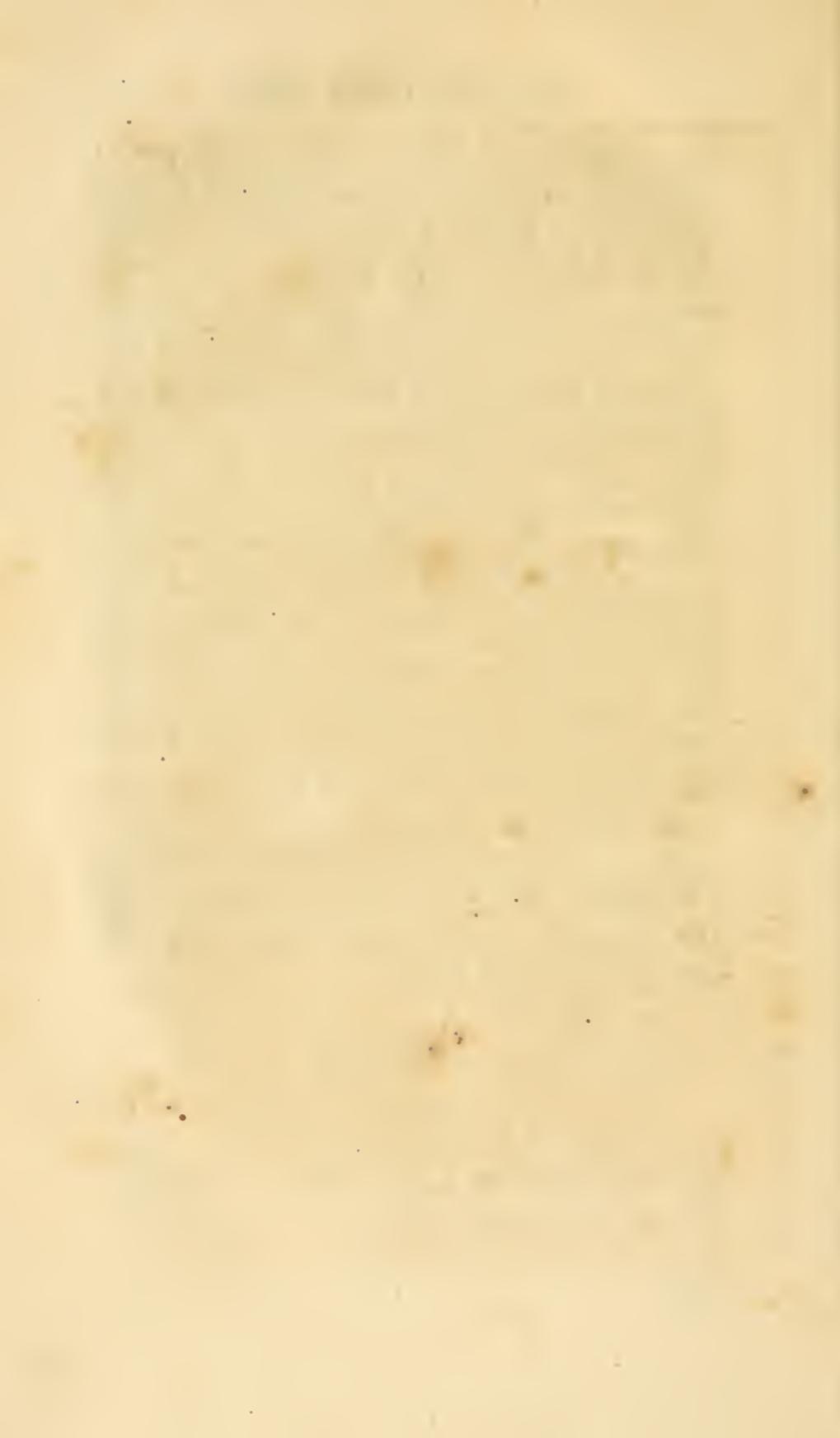
hearing this, their common Lord called this unmerciful servant into his presence, and upbraided him for his conduct, saying; “Oughtest thou not to have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had mercy on thee?” In conclusion, he retracted that mercy, which had been lately shewn to him; and as he had rigidly insisted on payment from another, so was payment rigidly required of himⁱ. The application of this parable is obvious. We are all in the condition of this insolvent servant. We owe our Lord an immense debt in sins committed and in duties left undone: and if he were rigid in exacting what we owe, who indeed would be able to endure it? Yet on our earnest supplication for pardon or forbearance, with our sincere resolution and endeavour to surrender all we can, he generously remits the boundless debt we owe him. But one condition on our part is implied in this promise of grace and clemency on his, that we also be merciful to our brethren, even as God is merciful to us all: Otherwise we can have no pretension to suppose, that his overtures of mercy can apply to us.

But this motive is placed in the clearest and most impressive light in that solemn pic-

ⁱ Mat. xviii. 23—35.

ture, which our Lord has given of the day of judgment, in which the final destinies of men are stated to depend on the practice or omission of mercy or charity to others. All those, who have neglected their brethren in distress, he will regard in the same light, as if they had neglected him ; and as they shewed no mercy to their fellow-Christians, in like manner he will shew no mercy to them. But those on the other hand, who have relieved the several wants, and alleviated the several miseries of their brethren, who have administered food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, who have clothed the naked, and visited the sick, and comforted the imprisoned, he will receive with the highest marks of approbation and regard, will accept what they have done to the least of his brethren as done immediately to him, will call them the Blessed of his Father, and will invite them to inherit the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world ^k.

^k Mat. xxv. 31—46.



S E R M O N XIV.

MATTHEW v. 8.

Blessed are the Pure in heart : for they shall see God.

IN the series of Beatitudes pronounced by our Lord, with the Merciful are associated the Pure in heart, as forming an essential character in his Followers, and being entitled to a correspondent reward. The Disposition here commended engages no cultivation, the Blessing here assigned induces no attraction, among the children of this world. Perverted by their carnal passions they have no estimation of internal purity, they have no desire of seeing God. Such in general has been the case ever since the first disobedience of Man. While Man remained in innocence, he was blessed in the presence, he had complacence in the sight of God. But when by transgression he had lost the purity of his nature, he was no longer worthy of that blessed privilege, he was no longer competent to enjoy it. And seeing he was now become alienated from

from the love of God and the desire of his countenance, God withdrew his face from him, and left him to the vain pursuit of his own imaginations. The consequence was evident in the Heathen world. Having lost all perception of the divine presence, they also lost the apprehension of his providence and government ; they fell into most extravagant idolatries ; they changed the truth of God into a lie ; and they worshipped the creature rather than the Creator. This perversion of their understandings had its necessary effect in the corruption of their hearts and the depravity of their lives. Because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, he gave them up to a reprobate mind ; and they surrendered themselves without restraint or remorse to the vilest affections and the grossest impurities^a.

When God revealed himself to the Children of Israel, he restored in some degree that knowledge of himself which had been lost in the world. But in order that they might continue under the vital sense of his more immediate presence and protection, he required a conformity of character in purity and holiness. Being set apart from the na-

^a Rom. i. 25, &c.

tions of the earth for the service of a pure and holy God, they were pronounced a holy Nation, a peculiar People ; they were taught to separate themselves from every thing unclean. For this intent was published the Moral Law, which not only prescribed the general rule of duty both to God and Man, but also regulated their personal deportment, being designed to control and moderate their carnal passions, and to restrain them from gross and impure gratifications. It guarded, though not indeed with rigid penalties, against the flagrant and irreparable injury of seduction ; it pronounced a sentence of excision for the violation of the marriage vow ; it smoked with vengeance against all inordinate affections. Still however some allowances were made, and some indulgences were granted, to the people of Israel, because of the hardness of their hearts. Though the Law of Moses could not countenance, it seems to have connived at concubinage and polygamy; and it admitted of divorce on very slight and even imaginary grounds. Together with the Moral a Ritual Law was also appointed, which appears among other reasons to have been ordained in compliance with the rude conceptions of a carnal people, who are more advantageously controlled by external form than

than by internal regulations. But the principal and final aim of all this ordinance was to shadow forth the moral purity required of those, who would be acceptable in the sight of God. Thus the rite, by which they were instituted into the Legal Covenant, was expressive of the duty imposed upon them to renounce and abandon every species of impurity. To the same purpose also was that variety of washings and sacrifices and other ritual observances ordained by the same authority; the spirit of all which, as their law expressly taught, was "that they might be clean from all their sins before the Lord." And indeed it was allowed by the wise and good among them, that as the Ceremonial was a shadow of the Moral Law, it was no otherwise acceptable in the sight of God, than as it was accompanied with a faithful observance of moral purity. Thus the Psalmist, when he humbled himself in penitence for his sin, makes this confession to God; "Thou desirest no sacrifice, else would I give it thee: but thou delightest not in burnt offerings." Though sacrifices and offerings of various kinds had been expressly enjoined by their divine Lawgiver, yet unless accompanied by moral services, they would not be pleasing to him, nor available to the pardon and acceptance
of

of the worshipper : “ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit : A broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” Accordingly the Psalmist thus devoutly and in spirit prays ; “ Wash me from mine iniquities ; and cleanse me from my sin. Create in me a clean heart ; and renew a right spirit within me^b. ”

Thus also Isaiah in reproof of his countrymen declares, that the multitude of their sacrifices, oblations, and solemn observances were so far from being acceptable to God, though they all were of his appointment, that they were hateful in his sight, because they were offered by hands that were stained with blood and defiled with iniquity. For the recovery of the divine favour he exhorts them to purify themselves in a moral sense, by a complete repentance from sin and a total amendment of life ; “ Wash you, make you clean : put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes ; cease to do evil ; learn to do well ; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.” On condition of which radical change and renovation of spirit they might hope for the pardon and the peace of God. “ Though

^b Psa. li. 2, 10, 16, 17.

their

their sins were as scarlet, they should be white as snow ; though they were red like crimson, they should be as wool ^c."

Notwithstanding this remonstrance of the Prophet, and many more injunctions to the like effect, it was a prevailing error, even among those who professed themselves to be masters of divine truth in Israel, to cultivate the ritual, yet forget the moral Law, to observe the letter, but overlook the spirit of the Mosaic ordinances. This especially was the error of the Pharisees and Scribes ; who accordingly are open to our Lord's reproof for washing their hands with punctilious attention, yet neglecting to purify themselves from the grosser turpitude of extortion and excess ; for scrupulously paying tithe of mint, anise, and cummin, yet carelessly disregarding the weightier matters of judgment, mercy, and faith ; for outwardly appearing righteous unto men, yet inwardly being full of hypocrisy and iniquity ^d.

To rectify the understandings and the hearts of men in this important branch of human duty he pronounced a Blessing on the Pure in heart. In support of the character, which he thus proposed to the cultivation of his Dis-

^c Isa. i. 10—18.

^d Mat. xxiii. 23, &c.

ciples,

ciples, he stands forward himself a full and perfect Exemplar. He was pure and spotless both in heart and life. Though he submitted to all the other infirmities of our nature, he was totally free from every moral stain. When he offered himself a propitiation for our sins, he had that essential quality of an acceptable sacrifice in its true and spiritual purpose, that he was without blemish and without spot. Thus being essentially holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, he was not only qualified to make a full atonement for sin, but also to yield a complete example of holiness. And while he shewed in himself an unexceptionable pattern of moral purity, he was able to impress it with greater weight and influence on the hearts of his Disciples. To this intent the Prophet Malachi had foretold, that he should purify the Sons of Levi, as gold and silver is purified, that they might offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness.^e

As it became him to fulfil all righteousness, he not only exemplified the Moral Law in all its parts, but he submitted also to the observance of the whole Mosaic ritual. And as in his infant years he had undergone the initiatory rite

^e Mal. iii. 3.

of

of that Covenant, and in the capacity of eldest born had been presented in the temple and redeemed by the appointed offering; so when he arrived at maturity of years, he regularly attended the more solemn ordinances of the temple; he paid the accustomed tributes; he performed the established services; and when he had healed any lepers, he enjoined them to shew themselves to the Priest, and to offer the gift, which Moses had commanded. Yet may it be collected from the spirit of his conversation, that he did not insist upon a continued observance of the Mosaic ritual as an obligatory law upon the professors of his faith. Thus when he signified, that the time was come, when they should no longer worship God either at Jerusalem or at any other fixed and peculiar seat of public worship, he no doubt implied, that with the appropriate place the appropriate solemnities of that place should cease: as indeed may be clearly inferred from the sequel; “For the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him^f. ” Nor was it expedient that men should be tenacious of the semblance, when once they

^f John iv. 23.

were possessed of the substance. When a more perfect rule was come, the more partial rule might reasonably be done away.

But on the observance of the whole Moral Law he constantly and strongly insisted, as the indispensable and unchangeable duty of man. He gave it greater energy, and spread it into a wider compass, than had ever been conceived before. He constantly taught mankind to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; having given himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works^g. Not satisfied with the form, he required the power of godliness. This might be instanced in that purity of worship, which he taught in reference to God, and that law of equity and charity, which he enjoined in relation to men. But this is most especially to be seen in the obligation which he imposed of personal purity. The spirit of his law undoubtedly struck at the root of those two prevailing indulgences in the ancient world, concubinage and polygamy. And the liberty of divorce, which the Law of Moses had permitted to the

^g Titus ii. 12, 14,

Jews, because of the hardness of their hearts, he expressly disallowed, except in the case of adultery on one part ; in which it is granted on a principle of reason and justice, that the chaste may be separated from the unchaste. On the whole he reduced the law in this important article of social life to the original design of God in creating male and female^h. But in order to purify the whole man from every moral taint, he did not account it sufficient to enjoin the purity of the body, he insisted on the purity of the heart. Not satisfied with forbidding adultery in act, he forbade it even in imagination and design ; “ Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery already in his heart.” He therefore taught men to suppress every loose and licentious thought, and to divest themselves of every passion or desire, though incorporated so much into the nature and habit, as a right hand or a right eye, which might incite them to transgression. On the whole he required them to consider themselves as consecrated both in body and soul to God, and on that principle to keep themselves entirely pure to his honour and serviceⁱ.

^h Mat. xix. 3—9.

ⁱ Mat. v. 27—32.

And

And hence we may collect the characters of those, whom our holy Teacher here distinguishes by the title of the Pure in heart. Assisted and encouraged by divine grace they have made such proficiency in Christian holiness, as to have brought the body in subjection to the spirit, and to have surrendered the will of man to the will of God. Animated by faith in his merits, who hath made a perfect expiation for the truly penitent, they have washed away their sins by the baptism of repentance, and have purified their hearts by the regeneration of the Holy Ghost: they have stedfastly purposed, not only to forego the actual indulgence of unlawful appetite, but also, as far as human infirmity will allow, to keep their hearts with all diligence from entertaining any licentious thought or affection. Sensible that God is a spiritual Essence, they are solicitous to yield him a spiritual service. Conscious of his continual presence and inspection, they are cautious not to commit any thing, which may tempt him to withdraw his countenance and withhold his approbation from them. Fully estimating the price, that has been paid for their redemption and sanctification by the blood of Christ, they are assiduous to present

themselves both body and soul a living, holy, and acceptable sacrifice to God.

To persons thus disposed our Lord assigns a special Blessedness, that *they shall see God.*

To see God is a privilege, of which the children of this world do not seriously think. It could seldom enter into the minds or engage the contemplations of the Heathens; for so far were they corrupted in their understandings, that they retained no knowledge of God, and therefore they could not estimate the happiness of seeing him.

To see God under the ancient economy of the Hebrews was a privilege imparted but very rarely and occasionally to some few Favourites of Heaven. With the Patriarchs and the Prophets he conversed at sundry times and in diverse manners, by vision, by dream, by Urim, by the message of an angel. To the most distinguished among them he displayed himself in a visible form. Thus he conversed with Abraham as with a friend; hence he was called the Friend of God^k. He conversed with Moses face to face^l. And Isaiah testifies, that he saw the Lord in his temple encompassed by the Seraphim, who

^k James ii. 23.

^l Exod. xxxiii. 11.

sung his holiness and glory^m. But with these rare exceptions, he had not personally divulged himself of old. And from the terrors which invested him, though veiled from public view, when he delivered the Law from Mount Sinai, an opinion had prevailed in Israel, that none could see God and live.

Under the Christian Revelation God is represented, as divested of all those terrors in which he gave the Law, and is arrayed to our conceptions in the most endearing attributes of paternal grace and goodness. And hence to see God is proposed to our desires and hopes as the fulness of happiness. To see God in the literal sense is not indeed indulged to us yet, while we remain under the veil of mortality. Yet in the spiritual dispensation of the Gospel he is manifested to us more freely and fully, than under the carnal economy of the Law; “ For the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath revealed himⁿ.” He hath manifested the Father to the eyes of the faithful in the fairest and brightest attributes of grace and truth, as continually present with them in his holy Spirit, defending them against all the assaults and seductions of the Tempter, supporting

^m Isa. vi. 1, 2, 3.ⁿ John i. 18.

them in trials both temporal and spiritual, promoting in their souls good desires and designs, and finally guiding them to that scene of glory, where being disengaged from this mortal veil they shall see him face to face among the Saints in light.

But in order to see God in any sense, it is expedient that we be like him. And in no respect can we more closely resemble him than in being pure in heart. For as God himself is pure, and as he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, so he admits none to see him, but those, who are conformed to his image in the inner man, who by purity of heart are in some degree restored to that likeness of God, in which man was originally made. They, who are thus conformed to his character, are disposed by nature, and are qualified by grace, for every thing implied in this Beatitude of seeing God. Being purified from that film of carnal passion and prejudice, which obscures their spiritual sight, they are enabled to contemplate him in his works of providence and grace. They discern him as a Parent, a Benefactor, a Guardian, and a Friend, as working their present comfort, and making every thing conducive to their final peace. They feel him present with them in the fabric and operations of their bodies,

bodies, in the motions and meditations of their minds: for in him they are convinced that they live and move and are: And seeing all that he does contributes to their happiness, they seek in return to do every thing to his glory. They live under a vital sense of his continual presence and regard; and they maintain a stedfast hope, that when their eyes are closed to all terrestrial things, they shall wake to the true and vivifying sight of God.

For while they are invested with the veil of mortality, they see him only in the natural operations of his providence, or at most in the spiritual operations of his grace: Hereafter they shall see him without any mist or obscurity. They see him now through a glass darkly; hereafter they shall see him face to face. In what the blessedness of this divine vision shall consist we are not clearly and distinctly told. For we cannot in our present state comprehend the nature and extent of those faculties, by which the Pure in heart shall finally perceive him. “ It does not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him: for we shall see him as he is.” And there-

* 1 John iii. 2.

fore we may conclude, that all, who purify themselves as God is pure, shall be rendered competent to behold his face in righteousness; and when they awake from the sleep of death, they shall rise in his likeness, and be completely satisfied ^P.

^P Psa. xvii. 15

SERMON XV.

MATTHEW v. 9.

Blessed are the Peacemakers: for they shall be called the Children of God.

ANOTHER Christian character now engages our notice, not commonly esteemed by the children of this world, but eminently distinguished by the beatitude of our Lord. The character of a Peacemaker has always obtained the low or silent approbation of the truly wise: But the loud applause of nations has been given to the Warrior. In evidence of this we need only transiently look into the records of any people or of any age. The annals of all Barbarians are annals of cruelty and carnage. And if we turn our eyes to more civilized countries, the story may be softened by some rare characters of heroic or civil virtue, but the prominent feature of their history is war. The several States of Greece were continually at variance either with

with foreign nations or with one another. And their wars were conducted with a ferocity little suitable to our notions of a polished people. Through the whole extent of the Roman Government from the foundation of the City to the approach of that auspicious age, when the Prince of Peace was born, the temple of War had only twice been closed. They were continually extending the sphere of their dominion by the sword. Whatever nation came in contact with their progressive empire, opened to them a new field of military enterprize. And their efforts were generally closed by leading kings in chains, and subjugating another people to their arbitrary power. Amid these celebrated empires the name of Warrior was a title of distinguished honour. And on several of their Chiefs, who with large opportunities of conferring durable and extensive good were really the scourges both of their own and of other States, have been perversely lavished the most sacred appellations of, The Fathers of their Country, The Saviours of the People, The Benefactors of Mankind.

A kindred spirit actuated the Jews. The general injunction of their Law, to love their neighbour as themselves, might incline them to cultivate amity and concord within their

own

own nation ; and the promise of peace within their borders, as the recompence of their fidelity to their heavenly King, might encourage them to study peace among themselves. But the instruction, that had been given to them, to possess themselves of the promised land by the sword, and the abhorrence, which they had been taught to entertain, of those idolatries, to which the nations all around were prone, would naturally discline them to cultivate peace toward other States. Indeed from their peculiar character and circumstance, as a people set alone among the nations, it was expedient for their safety, that a military spirit should be maintained among them. And when once they were prepared for defensive measures, the step was easy to offensive war. Hence a similar complexion of warfare pervades the history of the Jews with that of nations unenlightened with the truth of heaven. Their most distinguished men were warriors: Their Princes, their Judges, and not unfrequently their Priests, were exercised in arms.

Yet men of deeper contemplation among them had notions more agreeable to the true happiness of men. Even David, who was professedly a Warrior, gave his testimony to the blessings of peace. Though from the

history

history of his actions, as recorded in the book of Kings, it appears that he was continually involved in warfare, yet from the history of his mind, as displayed in the book of Psalms, it also appears that he continually sighed for peace ; “ I am for peace : but when I speak, they are for war^a. ” And it deserves observation, that the Hebrew Historians, whenever they arrive at an interval of peace, insensibly fall into the language of complacency. After some time expatiating on the achievements of David, they seem to enjoy the satisfaction of repose in the pacific reign of Solomon his Son : “ He had peace on all sides round about him. And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his own vine, and under his own fig-tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon^b. ” In these artless expressions we have a most lively picture of the blessings of peace. And the effect of such a reign is told with equal beauty and simplicity : “ Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and making merry^b. ” This however was a singular instance of moderation and happiness. Through the series of succeeding reigns a spirit of am-

^a Psa. cxx. 7.^b 1 Kings iv. 24, 25 ; 20.

bition

bition and turbulence involved them again in continual hostilities with the nations all around them: And Peace, [a short-lived guest, again became a stranger to the people and the land of Israel.

The same military spirit, which they cultivated so much in practice, they carried into their contemplations of the Messiah's government. Taking their conceptions of his promised reign from that of David, whose throne they imagined that he was literally to fill, they also imagined that it would be maintained and extended by the sword; and predisposed to understand it as a great and glorious Kingdom, they could form no notions of its rising to preeminence of power and splendour, but by extensive warfare, and triumphant arms.

And yet how very different were these conceptions from those mild and peaceful characters, in which his Kingdom is repeatedly described by the Prophets! which surely that people could not possibly have misunderstood or misapplied, if a thick veil of prejudice had not been upon their hearts. Among other high distinctions, by which he is foretold by Isaiah the great Herald of the Gospel, he is expressly styled "The Prince of Peace;" in sequel to which is added, that "Of his government

vernment and peace there shall be no end." Thus also in the opening of his prophetic Book he has these expressive images of that wonderful conversion of human sentiments and manners, which, wherever the government of the spiritual King were firmly established in the hearts of men, would by moral consequence most happily prevail: "They shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning hooks: Nation shall not rise against nation; neither shall they learn war any more." In like manner, when he announces this extraordinary Prince under the metaphor of a rod from the stem, of a cion from the root, of Jesse, he represents that signal change of disposition, which under his most powerful influence would be wrought in the hearts of men, by these images, among others to the like effect, of the wolf and the leopard divested of their savage and ferocious nature, and peaceably associating with the lamb and the kid^c.

Agreeable to these prophetic declarations was the character, which our Lord invariably bore in his intercourse with men. To this purpose, when he first assumed the nature and the form of man, the Host of Angels fa-

^d Isa. ix. 6, 7. ii. 4. xi. 1—9.

luted

luted their fellow-servants on this lower world with the welcome tidings of great joy, in which all people had an interest, of a Saviour born, the Messiah, that had been foretold so long; which was immediately followed by the gratulating song of peace on earth, and of good will to men ^d.

Of the same complexion was the tenor of his ministry; whether we regard his doctrine, or his example. Very different from the expectations of the Jews, his whole conversation breathed, not only a spirit of good will and amity to men, but also the more active and ardent zeal of conciliating peace among all the several orders and relations of mankind. It was one principal object of his mission to break down the wall of separation, which had hitherto subsisted, and had maintained a spirit of hostility, as well between Jew and Gentile, as also between the several divisions and distinctions of society; in order that he might form them in the unity of faith, hope, and charity into one great household holy to the Lord. For though it was his primary concern to preach the Gospel to the Poor, who were favourably disposed to hear him, yet, as occasions offered, he also preached it to the Pharisees and Scribes, who

^d Luke ii. 8—14.

vilified and opposed his doctrine. Though he was sent more immediately to the sheep of the house of Israel, yet, as he declared in the same style of parable, he had other sheep which were not of that fold, namely, the whole Gentile world : They also should hear his voice ; and they should all become one fold under one Shepherd ^e.

This is instanced on two different occasions, in which he had intercourse with the Samaritans ; who, though acknowledging the same Law, and pretending to the same descent, were divided from the Jews by a spirit of schism, which precluded all kinds of social communion and all common offices of reciprocal benevolence. In his conversation, held-en at the well with the woman of Samaria, he had given such evidence of his preternatural knowledge, that she confessed him for a Prophet. Hereupon she put this question to him on the principal point of difference between these two contiguous nations, whether Jerusalem or Gerizim was the proper seat of public worship. In answer he acknowledged, that according to the ancient institutions the Jews were more correct in the general forms of divine service. But at the same time he signified, that the difference be-

^e John x. 16.

tween them was now become of small comparative importance; as an Economy was now commenced, in which there would be neither local seat nor peculiar people, set apart for the exclusive service of Almighty God; but all mankind, without respect of nation or lineage, would be admitted in one common bond of union to worship him at every time and in every place, provided they worshipped him in the character, in which he was now made manifest to men, in spirit and in truth^f.

On another occasion, as he passed through a village of Samaria, he experienced a striking instance of that rancour of hostility, which the schism between these two people had produced. Collecting from the circumstances of his journey, that he was going to perform some act of public worship at Jerusalem, to the disparagement as they inferred of their temple at Gerizim, the Samaritans refused to receive him. Provoked at this inhospitable treatment, two of his Disciples asked him if he would not call down fire from heaven to consume them, as Elias had done on a similar occasion. But Jesus answered, “ Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not

^f John iv. 9—24.

come to destroy men's lives, but to save them^{g.}."

The same desire of conciliation pervaded all his doctrines. This is manifested in that peculiar ordinance of his religion, that we love one another, even as he hath loved us. And here it may be acknowledged, that the same precepts, which breathe a spirit of mercy, breathe also a spirit of peace ; as may be exemplified in his several injunctions through the Sermon on the Mount, to forbear all intemperate and causeless anger with our brother, to suppress a disposition to retaliate injuries, and to agree with our adversary without delay ; for the observance of these not only stamps the character of the Merciful, but also of the Peacemakers. Above all, this character is most feelingly impressed by that evangelical precept of social love, which our Lord opposed to the more contracted interpretation of the Teachers of moral law among the Jews ; " But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." For the general cultivation of this precept would most effectually contribute to the maintenance of perpetual and universal peace^{h.}

^g Luke ix. 51—56.

^h Mat. v. 21—48.

To the same purpose also were his intercessions to the throne of grace for harmony of sentiment through the whole household of the faithful. “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are oneⁱ. ” Wherein he supplicates the Author of peace and Lover of concord, to grant unto those who embrace his faith, above all other kinds of social unity, an unity of spirit in divine concerns, that all may together constitute one compact and undivided body, of which himself is the head ; and being all of one heart and of one soul both in doctrine and in communion, may with one mind and one voice present their devotions through the same Mediator to the same great Father and Governor of all.

Thus was he in an eminent degree a Peacemaker both in his precept and example, inasmuch as he laboured to establish peace between man and man. But he was a Peacemaker in a more important sense, inasmuch as he undertook the most arduous office of a Mediator between God and man. He came into the world in order to reconcile the world to the Father. This was not only the object

ⁱ John xvii. 11.

of all his labours in life, but of all his sufferings in death. On this account it was, that he surrendered himself a sin-offering and a peace-offering to God. Greater love can no man shew than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. This is an act of extraordinary virtue, of which a few solitary instances appear in the extensive page of human history. But while we were sinners, and therefore in a state of enmity to him, Christ died for us^k. Great applause is usually paid to those, who have devoted themselves to death for their country. But who can be placed in competition with him, who yielded up his life for an offending and in consequence a hostile world? By taking upon them the punishment that was due to the sins of men, he has harmonized the mercy with the justice of God, he has reconciled them to the Father, and procured for them the covenant of eternal peace.

From this precept and example we may learn what constitutes the character of Peacemakers in the Christian sense. Not confining their attention to the precept of the Apostle, that as much as lieth in them they live peaceably with all men^l, they employ their

^k John xv. 13. Rom. v. 8.

^l Rom. xii. 18.

whole

whole influence and endeavour to maintain and to conciliate peace in the sphere of that society in which they live. Instructed by the law of Christian charity to extend the relation of neighbours to all who partake of the same common nature, they labour to promote a spirit of amity and affection between persons and societies, that are distinguished by difference of sect or party, of country or religion; and they labour to establish upon earth the dominion of the Prince of Peace both in common and in public life, by promoting a spirit of brotherly love and social affection.

The same zeal, which they manifest for the peace of men in their civil relations, they also exercise in promoting a harmony of sentiment in the more important concerns of religion. They earnestly endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. They labour to render men of one accord both in doctrine and discipline, that there be no schism or division in the Church of Christ, that all may be bound together in the fellowship of the Spirit, all may be animated with one soul, and as they profess one faith, and are called in one hope, may with one mind and one mouth glorify God even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ^m.

^m Eph. iv. 3. Rom. xv. 6.

But they do not limit their exertions of brotherly love to the conciliation of peace between man and man. In concurrence with the labours, in imitation of the example, of the Prince of Peace, they are no less assiduous to promote the reconciliation of man to God. When they see their brethren both in nature and in grace unhappily withdrawn from the presence of their heavenly Father, and abandoning themselves without reflexion to a course of vice and irreligion, still regarding them as children of the same household and heirs of the same promises, they embrace a fair occasion to warn them of the danger they incur by this inconsiderate course of life; and by the united weight of exhortation and reproof, of admonition and example, of supplication and intercession, they strive to move them to repentance, to reconcile them to their divine Parent, and to bring them back to the household of the faithful. By this truly charitable conduct they establish their claim to the character of Peacemakers; and they acquire a title to the blessing here assigned, that *they shall be called the Children of God.*

A name so distinguished has engaged the desires of men in different ages of the world. The Heathens of diverse nations would sometimes

times boast of their celestial origin. Whether Greeks or Barbarians, they generally derived themselves from some divine Founder or Progenitor. The Philosophers in their speculations on the great First Cause would sometimes style him the Father of Gods and Men. And Saint Paul, when addressing himself to the Athenians on the subject of the unknown God, whom they ignorantly worshipped and whom he now declared unto them, has quoted certain of their Poets who had said : “ Τὶς γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν. For we also are his offspringⁿ.” But they derived no privilege from this relation ; and it was to them rather a source of pride, than an encouragement to virtue.

The Children of Israel had a better claim to boast of their divine origin. For they had been called by divine authority “ A holy Nation, a peculiar People.” God is pleased under their Economy to style himself the God of Israel ; and he acknowledged that People in an appropriate sense his own. Accordingly the Apostle enumerates the privileges which they derived from that relation ; “ To whom pertain the adoption, and the glory, and the

ⁿ Acts xvii. 28. These words are literally quoted from Aratus and Cleanthes ; but the sentiment is common to the Greek and Latin Poets.

covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the service, and the promises ; whose are the Fathers ; and of whom according to the flesh is Christ, who is over all, God blessed for ever^o." But at the same time he testifies, that they are not all Israelites indeed, neither are they all virtually the Children of God, who are of the House of Israel in their civil relation, who are of the seed of Abraham by natural descent. The high privilege of being his Children in the true and most important sense was reserved for those, who are Israelites in heart, who are of the seed of Abraham by the righteousness of faith. As many as receive the divine Word in the person of Jesus Christ, as many as believe in his name, to them gives he power to become the Sons of God ; being admitted to this distinction, not by natural generation, or by civil adoption, but by the special grace of God^p.

In the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who is himself in a preeminent and peculiar sense the Son, and therefore is so frequently styled, the first, or only, begotten Son of God, we have larger privileges than were ever imparted to the house of Israel, as the relation to which we are called approaches nearer to the Father of spirits. And therefore the beloved Apostle

^o Rom. ix. 4, &c.

^p John i. 12, 13.

invites

invites us to contemplate that extraordinary token of affection, which we have now received from Heaven ; “ Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the Sons of God ! ”

But while we with gratitude rejoice in the privilege now set before us, we must not overlook the means, by which we may call this privilege our own. When by the ministry of our blessed Lord it is offered to those that receive him, it is offered to those only that acknowledge and regard him as a Teacher come from God : When it is proposed to them that believe in his name, it is proposed to no others but to those, who substantiate and verify their belief by cultivation of his precepts and adoption of his character. We cannot otherwise become the Sons of God, than by strenuously seeking to be like him, by copying into our own dispositions all those graces of the divine nature, that come within the sphere of human imitation, and by labouring to be renovated and restored in moral goodness to that image of God in which man was originally made.

But by no course of duty can we be brought to a closer resemblance to God, than

by comprehending all men in the bonds of brotherhood, and by promoting peace among our brethren both with God and man. To this purpose our Lord, after enjoining his Disciples to love their enemies and to do good to those that hate them, presents this engaging motive; “That ye may be the Children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain both on the just and on the unjust.” And the same motive we may reasonably extend from the economy of nature to that of grace, which under the Christian government is coextensive with the divine providence over all the nations of the earth. As in the common ordinances of nature the Father of the universe has appointed his sun to shine and his rain to fall indifferently on all men; so in the dispensation of his Gospel he hath caused the Sun of righteousness to shine and the dews of heavenly grace to fall, without respect of nations or communities, on all men.

Inasmuch therefore as we all indiscriminately partake of God’s paternal care and goodness in both economies of nature and of grace, an obligation rests upon us, that we

^r Mat. v. 45.

treat all mankind, however they may be distinguished by sect or order, by nation or profession of faith, as brethren, and that we labour in our respective spheres, and according to our several means and capacities, to promote among them a spirit of peace and brotherly love in their social and civil relations, and, if it be possible, an unity of sentiment in religious faith and worship. And while we thus study to maintain the relation and benevolence of brethren among mankind, a further and more important obligation rests upon us, that we labour to reconcile them to him, who is the Parent of the whole family both in heaven and earth, that all may have access with one spirit unto the Father, and, being no longer strangers and foreigners, may be rendered fellow citizens with the Saints and of the household of God⁴. For hereby we shall shew ourselves brethren to all, not only in the participation of the same nature, but also in the closer fellowship and unity of the Spirit. And hereby shall we establish our title to that most honourable of all appellations, of the Children of God.

Nor is this a mere name of honour. The most valuable privileges are attached to that

⁴ Eph. ii. 18, 19.

relation.

relation. For it comprehends the paternal favour of God on earth, the paternal inheritance of God in heaven. This blessedness is assigned on an infallible word to all, who are Peacemakers in the sentiment of the Gospel. In the paternal favour of God they shall have that peace on earth which the world cannot give. It will enhance those benefits which his providence may confer upon them; and they shall have all the natural goods of cheering suns and fertilizing showers, and all the civil goods of calm and peaceful days, as the gifts of a Father most affectionately disposed for the welfare and prosperity of his children. It will equally give them comfort in all the troubles and afflictions of life, whether natural or civil, whether national or domestic. In every trying hour, though they may be troubled for the sins, and for the necessary consequence of sin, the miseries of men, they will not be afraid for themselves ; but supported by the sentiment of their near relation to God, they will serenely commit themselves to his protection and disposal, fully trusting in his tutelary care, that, although for a season he may suffer them to endure afflictions, yet he will make even their afflictions to work together, if not always for their present, yet assuredly for their future,

their

their substantial and eternal good. By the same paternal favour they shall also be invested with all manner of spiritual gifts essential to their growth in grace, more especially the continual presence of the Holy Spirit, to guide them into all truth, to support them in all dangers, to carry them through all temptations, to animate them to perseverance in well doing, and thus constantly to train them up for their appointed mansion in the realms of happiness, when they shall be no longer under tuition or discipline, as is the necessary case in the nonage of their beings, but being received into their divine Father's more immediate home, shall be admitted to the full inheritance of Children : For if they are Children, then are they also Heirs ; Heirs of God, and Coheirs with Christ ^t.

Of what this Beatitude consists is equally a mystery to mortal men with that expressed in the preceding sentence, of seeing God. “ Beloved, says the Apostle John, now are we the Sons of God : But it doth not appear what we shall be : But we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him ^u. When once men have acquired a title to that most honourable name, they know by experience

^t Rom. viii. 17.

^u 1 John iii. 2.

the blessings, which attach to that relation here: but in the state of mortality they do not so distinctly comprehend the far superior blessings, which by divine promise await it hereafter. This however may be entertained with full assurance of faith, that it implies the greatest good, which their purified natures can be capable of enjoying. For being restored to their divine Parent's image in holiness, they shall by necessary consequence be restored to his image in happiness. Having faithfully studied, during their mortal discipline, by the practice of impartial and universal peace and charity to their brethren, to attain some resemblance of their Father which is in heaven in the several dispensations of his providence to men, they shall finally be rendered both in grace and glory perfect, even as their Father which is in heaven is perfect^x.

^x Mat. v. 48.

SERMON XVI.

MATTHEW v. 10.

*Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake :
for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

IN my last discourse I treated on a Character, illustrious in the roll of Christian graces, and distinguished above the rest by energy of action ; namely, that of the Peacemakers. I have now to treat on another Character, placed in parallel to the former, being no less illustrious in the same divine catalogue, but distinguished in a very different manner, by fortitude of suffering ; namely, that of those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

To endure persecution, abstractedly considered, does not seem to fall under the description of virtue, as it implies what is merely passive on the part of the receiver. But to endure persecution for the sake of righteousness has every title to that honourable name ; since it implies “out of a pure heart, of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned^a,”

^a 1 Tim. i. 5.

in open avowal of religious truth, a voluntary submission and a patient resignation to every kind and to every degree of persecution, which the malice of the world can inflict. This was the sentiment of our blessed Lord, an infallible Judge of moral excellence; who has not only given it a place in the series of his Beatitudes, but from the station he has assigned it at the close of all may be understood to have marked it with peculiar praise, as finishing the scale of spiritual worth, as accomplishing the Christian character, as rendering the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works^b.

A disposition of this kind is peculiar to the true Religion; as no system, that wanted the stamp of truth, could engage mankind to render any very extraordinary sacrifice. Thus we find it foreign to the sentiment and practice of the Heathen world. The morality of their philosophers was of so loose a kind, as to recommend a compliance with the religious customs and observances, and I may add opinions, of the age and place in which they lived. And the practice of the people in general was so easy and indifferent, that in the united history of all Heathen States it might

^b 2 Tim. iii. 17.

be difficult to produce an unquestionable instance of persecution for the sake of righteousness.

The Children of Israel were animated by a principle of faith, which moved them to make many sacrifices and to undergo many sufferings. Thus the Minister of their Law is commended by the Apostle, that he chose rather to endure reproach and to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy all the honours and all the treasures of the kingdom and court of Egypt^c. And the same energy of faith was frequently displayed among the Hebrews in their intercourse with the several idolatrous nations round about them. And though it cannot be dissembled, that in the different periods of their more ancient history they shewed many symptoms of apostasy from the law and worship of the true God, yet in later times, as the recompence of another life gained a firmer hold upon their faith, they shewed so zealous an attachment to the religion of their Fathers, as in testimony thereof to submit to every species of persecution; as is recorded by the Apostle: They wandered in desarts and in mountains; they concealed themselves

^c Heb. xi. 25.

in dens and caves of the earth ; they were exposed to bonds and imprisonments ; they had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings ; they were stoned, they were fawn asunder, they were slain with the sword ; they were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection ^d.

But this disposition must have had a deeper hold upon the souls of men, when a fuller assurance of a better resurrection was given. And therefore in that Dispensation, which brought life and immortality to light, our Lord had firmer ground to establish this as one of the principal virtues of his Religion. Accordingly he not only brings it forward in this catalogue of Christian graces, but he dwells upon it in the sequel, as if it had a superior claim to the regard and cultivation of his Followers. Thus he adds, with a more immediate reference to his personal Disciples, who for the sake of his religion would be exposed to persecution far beyond the common orders of Christians ; “ Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake : Rejoice and be exceeding glad : for great is your reward in

^d Heb. xi. 35, &c.

heaven :

heaven : for so persecuted they the Prophets which were before you^e." And if the ancient Prophets were supported under afflictions by the promises of God, while given only in figures, much more indeed might the Disciples of Jesus, to whom these promises were more distinctly and openly conveyed.

In like manner he says in another place ; " If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it ; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it^f." Thus he inculcates on his disciples the duty incumbent on them, to follow him, not only in acting, but also in forbearing and in suffering for the sake of righteousness. The suffering, to which he here alludes, had been foretold many ages before by the Prophet Isaiah, when he says, that he was despised and rejected of men ; that he was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities ; that he was oppressed and afflicted ; that he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, yet he opened not his mouth ; that he was cut off out of the land of the living ; that for the transgressions

of his people was he stricken^g. And all this was accomplished in the history of his passion. After leading a life of poverty and sorrow, after submitting to scorn and slander during the whole of his ministry for the sake of righteousness, he was at length arraigned before an iniquitous tribunal ; he was buffeted ; he was scourged ; he was nailed to the cross. The fury of his persecutors was wreaked upon him ; and the cup which was given him to drink was the bitterest, which ingenious malice could devise to mingle.

From this great pattern of resignation to suffering in so good a cause, the Apostle exhorts his Disciples to submit with patience to griefs and persecutions, even if wrongfully inflicted, for conscience toward God : for to this, he asserts, were they called on taking upon them the Christian name ; and it was expedient that they should submit to these things ; “ because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps : who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth ; who when he was reviled, reviled not again ; when he suffered, he threatened not ; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously : who bore our

^g Isa. liii. 3, &c.

fins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sin should live to righteousness : by whose stripes we are healed ^h."

On this precept and example was formed the glorious company of the Apostles, who in obedience to the parting injunction of their Lord went forth to preach his gospel to all nations, and to establish the sceptre of his righteousness over all the kingdoms of the world. However feeble their minds, however timid their characters had been at the time, when their Lord was delivered into the hands of men, yet as soon as they were instructed in the real purpose of his death, as soon as they comprehended the true nature and constitution of his Kingdom, they did not hesitate to undergo every toil, to confront every danger, and to encounter every fiery trial, in accomplishing that work for which they were called: they gloried in tribulation, and rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesusⁱ. What the Apostle Paul has asserted of his own feelings and sentiments on the certain prospect or the actual endurance of persecution, may be applied indifferently to all the Apostles : "Behold, I go bound in the Spirit

^h 1 Pet. ii. 21—24.

ⁱ Acts v. 41.

unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself; so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God^k." In his Second Epistle to the Corinthians he glories in the trials, to which he was exposed as a Minister of Christ: "In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft:—In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren: In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness^l." And in his Epistle to the Romans he endeavours in these solemn strains to impress upon their hearts the divine Love of their blessed Redeemer: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or fa-

^k Acts xx. 22, 23, 24.^l 2 Cor. xi. 23—27.

mine,

mine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?— Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither the fear of death, nor the desire of life; nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers; nor things present, nor things to come; nor height of prosperity, nor depth of calamity, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord ^m."

By the same precept and example was also formed that noble army of Martyrs, who during the several persecutions under the Heathen Emperors submitted patiently to every kind of evil; who encountered death in every form of terror; who sung in the midst of flames, and gloried in suffering for the name of Christ and in the cause of the Gospel. All those come literally under the description of our Lord, of them that are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

In the present age of the world, when the Faith of Christ is diffused far and wide among the nations, and is adopted and established for the religion of the State, this character of the Christian Soldier cannot literally be put to

^m Rom. viii. 35—39.

the proof. Yet without the test of martyrdom the true Followers of Christ will find an ample field for the exercise of their religious fortitude. For though they are not exposed to persecution for the sake of righteousness, yet they are exposed to temptations of various kinds in their common intercourse with the world. They encounter them in the pleasures and in the pains, in the riches and in the penury, in the honours and in the dishonours of human life. By temporal goods they are tempted to forget their God and their religion; and by temporal evils they are also tempted to fretfulness and impatience, and sometimes even to dishonest means of repairing their unhappy lot. The true Followers of Christ are not moved with any of these things. In every condition and in every vicissitude of life they hold fast their integrity unshaken, and they continue faithfully to maintain their ground against the several forms and species of temptation. Unsubdued by those trials to which so many yield, they are determined with the Apostle, that nothing shall separate them from the love of God in Christ. Neither discomposed by the soft seductions of prosperous fortune, nor the rude attacks of adverse, they continue true to the cause of Christ, and under his

his banner they persevere unto the end. They bear the same mind with the Martyrs of the primitive Church ; and if they were called to the same trials, they would be ready to meet them with the same fortitude. They may therefore be understood to be comprehended in the spirit of this description with those that are persecuted for righteousness' sake ; and in common with the Martyrs of more arduous times they shall be admitted to the same transcendent reward ; *For theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

The Kingdom of Heaven, as I have had repeated occasion to observe, is the spiritual reign of the Messiah, or Anointed of the Lord ; in which are comprehended the two different states of present Grace and of future Glory. Thus containing whatever is essential to the spiritual man both in holiness and in happiness, it is presented to all, who acknowledge Christ for their spiritual King, as the great motive to a faithful allegiance, both at the beginning and at the close of the Christian life. And accordingly we find it equally advanced as the appropriate blessedness of the first and of the last in the series of Christian virtues, of the Poor in spirit, and of them that are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

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To both these characters it unquestionably applies in both its parts: For every one of these Beatitudes comprehends in a greater or a less degree both a present and a future good. But if there be any shade of difference in the application of the same Beatitude to different characters, it may be assumed with some colour of reason, that as offered to them, who commence the Christian character in being poor in spirit, it has a more immediate reference to the State of Grace: as offered to those, who complete the Christian character in submitting to persecution for the sake of righteousness, it more expressly points at the State of Glory.

This Kingdom was very different from what was the great object of ambition among the Heathens; who thought a temporal crown the consummation of human enterprize, and the accomplishment of all that was desirable for man. Too little did they know or even conceive of things beyond the grave, to make them objects of their attention and pursuit; and less did they fix their thoughts on the attainment of a seat or crown in heaven.

It was also very different from what engaged the expectations of the Jews. They had been styled in the Law a Royal Priesthood,

hood, or a Kingdom of Priestsⁿ. But this character of royalty they understood to be fulfilled in the independent possession of the land of Canaan, as augmented by the sword of David, and as established under the more peaceful, yet splendid reign of Solomon. Their ambition was further elevated by that animating picture which the Prophets had given of the Messiah and his Kingdom. But not comprehending the spiritual character of either, they exalted their ideas to the highest pitch of worldly greatness; and they became ambitious to enroll themselves under the banners of this promised King, and to partake in the triumphs of his glorious Kingdom.

The appearance of the meek and lowly Jesus did not correspond with these ambitious hopes. In the poor and humble Peasant of Galilee they could trace no vestige of the glorious and triumphant King of Israel. Hence he was disapproved, despised, and rejected at once by the superior orders of the Jews. And though the energy and benevolence of his words and works engaged the regard and gratitude of the common people, yet they also were disappointed at the humili-

ⁿ Exod. xix. 6.

lity of the form in which he came among them, and could no otherwise reconcile what they saw with what they hoped, than by supposing that he was now under a temporary shade, from which he would suddenly break forth to public view in all the power and splendour of a mighty King. The same prejudice was entertained by the Apostles themselves, who had fuller advantages of contemplating his character and mission. On this idea the Mother of James and John requested for her Sons, that the one might sit on his right hand, and the other on his left in his Kingdom; in other words, that they might have the two first offices of temporal eminence and honour. But what was the answer of our Lord to this? To sit on his right hand and on his left, he assured them, were not his to give, being reserved for the disposal of those, who were appointed to the kingly station by the ordinary providence of God. What they had to expect from following him in this life would not be honours, but indignities, not preferment, but sufferings. They would have to drink with him of the cup of sorrow, to be baptized with him in the baptism of calamity. But in compensation for all those indignities and sufferings, which they might endure for his sake,

sake, he had finally a reward far transcending any temporal crown: He had a Kingdom to bestow in the realms of heavenly bliss. Thus he assured his Apostles, who had forsaken all and followed him, that in the regenerated world, when he should be established on his Throne of glory, they also should sit on twelve Thrones, judging the twelve Tribes of Israel^o.

For a time they were suffered to misconceive the nature of this promise; and worldly prejudice still maintained possession of their understandings. But as soon as the great mystery of godliness was accomplished in the passion, the resurrection, and ascension of their Lord, the light of celestial truth broke forth at once upon their minds. And they intuitively understood the purpose of his sufferings and the nature of his Kingdom. They sought no more for temporal honours and distinctions: They strove no longer who should be the greatest upon earth. Animated by the promise now sufficiently understood of being finally advanced to that high and holy place, where their Lord was gone before, they resolved to take up his cross, and to follow him.

^o Mat. xx. 20—28. Luke xxii. 24—30.

in suffering: they despised all worldly terrors: they did not hesitate to encounter every kind of danger: they did not scruple to undergo any labour or persecution to advance the profession of his Gospel and the establishment of his righteousness. They were faithful unto death, in full assurance that hereafter they should receive a crown of life. As their Lord had overcome by suffering, so also they should overcome; having the infallible word of divine truth, that as he was enthroned with his Father, so also should they be enthroned with him^p.

Transported with the prospect of this vast reward, the Apostle Paul thus expresses the blessed hope, with which himself and his Brethren were buoyed up under all those extraordinary evils, to which they were exposed for the sake of righteousness: “ We are troubled on every side, but not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed: Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.—For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the

^p Rev. iii. 21.

inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a more exceeding and eternal weight of glory^{q.}" On the same principle this great Apostle, having passed an unwearied life of spiritual warfare in extending the faith of Christ over the various regions of the civilized world, was enabled without emotion, and even with complacence, to contemplate that scene of martyrdom, which he was conscious was now drawing nigh to involve him: "For I am now ready to be offered; and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge will give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing^{r.}"

Under this description must be comprehended all those faithful Soldiers of the cross of Christ, who are so far animated with a love of their Redeemer and a zeal for righteousness, as not to scruple any sacrifice, however difficult and painful to human nature, in testifying his name, in promoting his

^q 2 Cor. iv. 8—17.

^r 2 Tim. iv. 6, 7, 8.

faith;

faith, in establishing his credit and authority. Nor need we confine the application of this Beatitude to them, who in that sacred cause are called, like the Prophets and Apostles, to undergo the full severities of persecution ; as those are peculiar to very troublous and stormy times. We may also extend it to them even in a serener age, who strenuously “ hold the faith and a good conscience” amid the ordinary trials of human life. Although not called in the present establishment of the true religion, for the cause of Christ and his righteousness to forsake their home, their kindred, and their country, to abandon temporal goods, or worldly comfort, yet as long as they have resolved to deny themselves, to take up their cross, and follow him, in other words, to mortify their affections for the pleasures, the riches, and the honours of the world, and to cultivate his precept and copy his example in the uniform practice of all righteousness, they shall be admitted to the same common reward with those, who are called to suffer persecution in all its terrors ; as they are animated with the same spirit, which, if put to the proof, would have equally sustained them under the same fiery trial. For every privation or affliction, to which they are exposed for the sake of righteousness,

they

they shall receive a hundred fold, in the peace of God shed abroad into their hearts, and in the blessed hope which is set before them in the Gospel of his Son: and at the close of all their temporal sorrows this peace shall be accomplished, and this hope shall be realized, in eternal life. As they determined manfully to fight, and still more strenuously to suffer, with the Captain of their salvation, so shall they also overcome and triumph with him: They shall be advanced with him to kingly dignity, and shall reign with him for ever and ever.

THE BEATITUDES,

CONCLUDED.

THUS have I attempted to delineate the several Dispositions, which form the Christian Character, and in correspondence therewith the several Beatitudes, which constitute the Christian Recompence. In conclusion of these discourses it may be expedient to offer some remarks in illustration or improvement of the whole.

I. In this series of Beatitudes we behold the necessary connexion between holiness and happiness. To the several virtues of the Christian life are severally assigned their appropriate rewards.—But far be it from us to infer from hence, that the separate cultivation of any single virtue, or indeed of any number less than the whole, will suffice to the attainment of the happiness proposed. All the virtues here commended, though separately considered, are connected together by one indissoluble chain. They must all indispensably combine to form the perfect man of God; nor can one of them be omitted without in-

fringing the integrity of the Christian character, and in consequence annulling our title to the fulness of divine beatitude. It is the strong expression of the Apostle James ; “ Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” And the reason is, that the several commandments form one entire and indivisible code, being so many branches of the same royal Law, and breathing the spirit of the same divine Lawgiver. “ For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill ^a.” And what the Apostle thus affirms of the prohibitions, will equally apply to the positive injunctions. Whosoever shall attempt to cultivate all the other virtues, yet shall indulge himself in an habitual disregard of one, is deficient in the Christian life, and hazards his interest in the Christian recompence : For the same Lawgiver, who said, Blessed are the Poor in spirit, and the Meek, said also with the same authority, Blessed are the Merciful, and the Pure in heart. To all, who have enrolled themselves under the banners of the Christian discipline, it is not permitted to choose their favourite virtues, to the neglect of others, which may not be so agreeable to their pre-

^a James ii. 10, 11.

vailing habits and inclinations. As connected in spirit, they must not be separated in practice. As equally enjoined by the same divine Lawgiver, they must be equally obeyed by all, who acknowledge his authority to require their obedience. If we would be complete in him to whom we profess allegiance, we must cultivate the whole without exception, we must exercise ourselves without reserve in all. To this purpose is the exhortation of the Apostle, that “ giving all diligence we add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in us and abound, they will make us neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” If we thus assiduously labour to be perfect in the whole will of God, not however depending on our own powers, but on his grace, not trusting in our own merits, but in his mercies, we may hope for the united recompence of all the Christian virtues in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ. “ Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let us be stedfast and unmoveable in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know,

know, that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord^b."

II. The cultivation of all these dispositions in union is essential to all who bear the Christian name. For whatever be their station or condition in life, whatever be their endowments by nature or education, it is the primary concern of all, that they adorn themselves with every grace of the Christian character, that so they may have an interest in every branch of the Christian recompence.— But if there be any class of men, on whom there is a peculiar claim for a more luminous and distinguished exercise of these dispositions, it is more especially incumbent on those, who are professedly Teachers of Christian righteousness. This was the preeminent advantage of our Saviour's teaching, as has been severally traced through all this series of Christian virtues, that his character in every point was in harmony with his mission, and what he taught in his doctrine he exemplified in his life.

And this impressive mode of teaching he commended to his Disciples to cultivate

^b 1 Cor. xv. 58.

themselves

themselves in their several spheres of relation and society ; more especially did he enjoin it as an indispensable task on those, who were afterwards ordained to be the Apostles of his Gospel, the Ambassadors of his Kingdom through the world. Thus in the close of his Beatitudes, after making a particular application of the last to those, who should be called to suffer persecution for the sake of righteousness, he proceeds to make a general application of the whole.

He signifies to them, that in the future ministrations of his doctrine a most active and most arduous office would devolve upon them. In the language of parable he calls them “The Salt of the Earth;” inasmuch as it was their concern to purify mankind from the corruptions of sin, and to preserve them a living, holy, and acceptable sacrifice to God. To answer which purpose it was incumbent on them to maintain very carefully this principle themselves : Otherwise they would be like insipid salt, which is of no value either in the house or in the field ; they would be totally useless in their appointed offices of dispensing the Gospel, and might as well be consigned to the meanest and most insignificant stations of common life.

He calls them “The Light of the World;”
in a-

inasmuch as it was their office to illuminate and cheer the world by the radiance of heavenly truth. And therefore it was incumbent on them, as they hoped for success in their ministry, not to place their lamp in an obscure position, where the effect of its radiance would be concealed and lost, but to expose it in so public and conspicuous a point of view, that it might extend its beneficial influence in as wide a sphere as possible through the household and family of the faithful.

In the course of the same similitude he compares them to "a City set on a Hill, which cannot be hid." As public Teachers of a new Religion, as chosen Ambassadors of the Kingdom of God, they were elevated above the common ranks of men, and were exposed to the notice of the world. And therefore it was incumbent on them to do credit to that sacred character which they bore, by the purity and excellence of their practice.

In application of these similitudes he requires them to let their light so shine before men in the brightness of their example, that men beholding the energy of their faith in the good works which it produced, might be moved to learn and embrace the faith themselves,

selves, and might glorify God by a life of holiness correspondent with the faith embraced ^c.

All this admonition of our Lord may be addressed with advantage to Christians in general in all conditions and relations of life. For there are none even in the humblest spheres, so totally secluded from the society or detached from the notice and view of men, as to be wholly destitute of means and opportunities of being useful to others in the concerns of religion by their conversation and example. But it has an appropriate and most advantageous application to those, who stand in the same capacity with the primitive Apostles, in being Ministers of Christ, and Stewards of the mysteries of God ^d.

In this place more especially it may be addressed with peculiar advantage to those, who are in a course of education for the ministry of the Gospel, or, in the language of our Lord, are Scribes instructed for the Kingdom of Heaven ^e.—Ye are the Salt of the Earth: It is your intended office to purify and preserve mankind from all moral and spiritual corruption. How highly therefore does it behove you to cherish and maintain this vital prin-

^c Mat. v. 13—16.

^d 1 Cor. iv. 1.

^e Mat. xiii. 52.

ple within your own hearts, that so you may be able to diffuse its saving influence through all the sphere of your appointed ministry !— Ye are the Light of the World : It is the purpose of your future calling to dispense this light of religious truth over the great household of the faithful. How highly therefore does it become you to give this light its full effect, and to place it in the most conspicuous and most profitable station ! For which purpose it is not sufficient, that you be clear and luminous in the doctrine that you preach: it is expedient also that you adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things ; that the several dispositions of the Christian character, which after the model of your divine Master you assiduously preach to others, may likewise be distinctly read and emphatically taught in the tenour of your Christian life and conversation. For so shall ye most effectually display the Mission and illustrate the Character of him, to whom you are now preparing to devote the service of your riper years.

Thus making your light to shine before men, you will bring them to acknowledge the beauty, the energy, the excellence of Christian virtue. And while they see it represented, not merely in word, but in deed, not merely in description, but in actual life,
they

they will be moved to glorify God, not only with their lips, but also with their hearts ; they will be taught to adopt into their lives what they approve in yours ; and by putting on the several graces of the Christian character will procure to themselves an interest in the several Beatitudes of the heavenly Kingdom.

While thus you labour for the final happiness of others, it is humbly to be hoped, that you will no less advance your own. For the Scripture has assigned no common degree of blessedness to those, who convert the sinner from his errors, and who turn many to righteousness.—Let me therefore conclude with the earnest exhortation of the Apostle to a Disciple set apart for the Christian ministry : “ Be ye examples to believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.—Meditate upon these things ; give yourselves wholly to them ; that your profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto yourselves and unto your doctrine ; continue in them ; for in doing this ye shall both save yourselves and them that hear you ^f. ”

^f 1 Tim. iv. 12—16.

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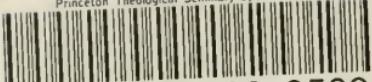
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