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SERMONS

ON

PARTICULAR OCCASIONS.

Dixerit hic aliquis: "Quis ista noscit? Adfer aliquid novi."
Scio ista quotidie audiri in concionibus. Sed—————
Erasmi Ecclesiastes.

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SERMON I.



PREACHED IN THE MORNING OF JAN. 1ST, 1809, PREVIOUS TO THE ORDINATION OF A COLLEAGUE.

1 THESS. v. 12, 13.

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you ; and to esteem them very highly in love for their works sake.

MY brethren, as you intend this evening to introduce into the church another pastor, no text appears more suitable for this morning's discourse, than that which I have read, and no subject more proper to be treated on this occasion, than the duty which the members of a christian congregation owe to their minister.

The relation, in which a minister of the gospel stands to the people whom he serves, is one, which is not only the source of mutual satisfaction, but it is also one, which calls for the exercise of the kindest affections of the

human heart. In this country particularly, where he is chosen and supported by the flock, over whom he is placed, and not imposed on them by a superior authority, and where the rights of a minority are so much attended to, that few clergymen venture to accept a call, unless it is nearly unanimous, he is the object of their general approbation ; and he is viewed, not as a lord over the heritage of God,* not as a domineering priest and spiritual tyrant, but as their father and friend, as the companion of their social hours, as their counsellor in perplexities, and as their comforter in affliction. If his lot is cast among a people of religious and sober habits, and he is a man of such decent talents, that they have no reason to be ashamed of him ; if his character, though not faultless, is yet free from any scandalous stain ; if his heart is sincere and kind ; in particular, if he is circumspect in his conversation and discreet in his behaviour, he will pass through life the object of their love ; if his talents and virtues rise still higher, he will be the object, not only of their love, but of their veneration. The obligation then of a christian congregation to their minister may be comprised in

* 1 Pet. v. 3.

these two words ; they should love him, and they should esteem him. From this obligation of love and esteem result several duties ; some of which I now proceed to lay before you.

1. I MIGHT suggest, in the first place that it is the duty of a religious society to provide for the comfortable support of the minister, whom they esteem and love. But it is not proper to say much on this head ; because it is not easy to touch it, without appearing to love the world more than God. A preacher of the gospel, it is true, has physical wants like other men ; but wretched is that preacher, whose principal motive of entering into the ministry is the emolument, which he expects to derive from the office ; for he possesses the temper, which effectually prevents him from discharging the duties of his station with pleasure to himself and profit to others. He should be disinterested and heavenly minded ; but his heart is distracted with avaricious anxieties. Every page of the gospel reproaches him for his selfish care ; for the gospel every where proclaims this precept, Love not the world, nor the things of the world ; if any man love the world, the love

of the Father is not in him.* The wealth, which he delights in, he cannot easily obtain; for in such a country as this the salaries of ministers, though sufficient for comfort, for ease, for content, are not sufficient to satisfy the demands of covetousness. He is compelled therefore to turn his attention to pursuits foreign from his profession, by which he soon loses his reputation; or he contrives to save money by a mortifying course of meanness and inhospitality, which renders him the object of derision.—I will only say then, that a generous people will attend to the wants of their minister, and will never put him to the painful necessity of giving them any hints on the subject.

2. A SECOND duty, which results from the love and esteem of a people to their minister, is that of attending his ministrations. Christians go to church for the sake of worshipping God, of joining in the celebration of the holy ordinances, of hearing the divine word, and of being instructed and confirmed in the belief of the doctrines and in the practice of the precepts of the gospel. These higher motives are not incompatible with another of an infe-

* 1st John ii. 15.

rior kind, esteem of their pastor. If they entertain a sincere affection and respect for him, they will delight to meet him in the house of God. Though he may be neither a weak nor a vain man, though he may have a humble opinion of the merit of his own performances, and may not be fond of popular applause ; yet he cannot fail of being mortified, if the seats of the church are frequently empty, and if he commonly preaches to a listless congregation. For in this manner is not treated the man, who is revered and loved. The people plainly manifest by such conduct, that they think what the preacher delivers is of no importance ; which is saying, as emphatically as actions can say, that he is the object of their indifference or contempt.

3. A THIRD duty, which flows from the esteem of a people to their minister, is that of receiving his instructions with candour. Of the man, whom we respect and love, we are always ready to suppose the best ; and we do not attribute to him improper motives, when his words and actions admit of a favourable construction. In reprovng particular vices, a preacher will give offence to his hearers, unless their hearts are filled with affection

toward him ; but if they love him, they will believe, that he means nothing but their good, and that he is not indulging himself in satirical invectives, or bringing against them a railing accusation.* If he would describe any vice naturally, he must think of an individual, who has been guilty of it ; and though if he has seen much of the world, he can easily direct his thoughts to times which are past, and places which are remote ; yet as one sinner resembles another sinner, one slanderer—another slanderer, one miser—another miser, provided any of his congregation are of a similar character, he may appear to deduce his observations directly from their practice. A preacher is in particular exposed to uncandid interpretations, when he is condemning the vices of the rich. On the wealthy men of a religious society a minister principally depends for his support ; they expect therefore to be treated with distinguished attention and indulgence. But the rich are exposed to sin as well as the poor. Ill would it become a messenger of Jesus, who, when he was upon earth, had not where to lay his head,† and who came to preach the gospel to

* 2 Pet. ii. 11.

† Matt. viii. 20.

the poor,* to flatter the rich, and to reserve all the severity of reproof for the indigent and wretched. The gospel in many places declares, and experience confirms the truth of the declaration, that a continued course of prosperity has a tendency to harden the heart, to render men haughty, and to remove their affections from God to the world. These solemn and painful truths the rich men of a society, if they have pious minds, will hear with candour; and if they love their minister, they will rejoice that he has so much independence of sentiment, as to dare to do his duty.

4. A **FOURTH** duty, which results from the affection of a people to their minister, is to view him with indulgence, not to expect too much of him, that he should be exempt from weaknesses and imperfections, and that he should possess qualities, which do not often meet in the same person, or which are even incompatible with each other. We wish that he whom we love should excel; but we are ready to pardon him, if he does not. A knowledge of human nature will convince us, that no man excels in all points. For God, the benefactor of all his creatures,

* **Luke iv. 18.**

imparts his gifts variously to different men ; on no one does he bestow every talent ; whilst few are left destitute of some valuable endowment, by which they can gain esteem, and benefit the world.

The ministers of the gospel, like other human beings, differ very much from each other in their several qualifications. One is remarkably gifted in prayer ; another reads the scriptures in a solemn and impressing manner. One shines in conversation, and communicates in a familiar way many valuable religious and moral hints ; and another, though he is silent or cold, when he visits those who are in health, has still the power like a blessed angel, of imparting light and consolation to the chambers of the sick. Of preaching as it relates both to matter and manner, there are various kinds of merit. One minister excels in the composition ; and another, in the delivery, of a sermon. One is not known to be a great man till his sermons appear in print ; and another who loses his reputation by publishing his discourses is animated and eloquent in the pulpit. One displays profound learning and a critical knowledge of the Greek and oriental languages ; another is not well acquainted with any language except the

English, but that he manages with sufficient dexterity. One is a deep logician ; his method is clear ; his distinctions, accurate ; his arguments, powerful : Another is pathetick, affectionate, interesting. The voice of one preacher is sonorous, alarming ; it makes the hearer almost start involuntarily from his seat ; and expands his eyes, his ears, his mouth, with terror or with admiration : The voice of another preacher is soft, gentle ; it sounds in the ear like the breathings of a flute ; it charms the heart, and fills the eyes with tears.

These are valuable endowments ; for they all contribute to the benefit of the church and the edification of christians. Every preacher would wish for himself to possess them all ; but it is impossible ; and you, who are hearers, ought to confess that it is so. In the beginning of life, before a young man has become well acquainted with the nature of his talents, he will endeavour to acquire many different treasures of knowledge ; but he will soon be carried, by the propensity of his genius, toward those attainments, in which he is formed to excel. This inclination will divert his attention from other things of equal value ; and he will remain in a great measure unskilled in them. Censure him not for his deficiencies ;

but if you have no reason to doubt his industry applaud his exertions; and enjoy the benefit of the gifts, which he has obtained.

The indulgence, for which I am pleading, is in particular due to the settled ministers of the gospel, who are constantly preaching to the same people, and who, in the course of a year, deliver a hundred sermons in the same pulpit. It is vain to demand of them the same style of eloquence, which distinguishes the celebrated preachers, who have appeared only on particular occasions. The sermon, which is filled with tropes and figures, with glowing language, with pathetick addresses, in a word, with the graces and energies of the superior kinds of oratory, is loudly called for by many. Why do not our ministers, it is asked, preach like the divines of the French nation, or deliver their sermons with the life and pathos of Whitefield? The answer is, that the French divines, who have gained so much renown, preached only in Lent and Advent; and that Whitefield, who, it must be confessed, possessed astonishing powers of oratory—and great knowledge of human nature—never remained long in one place, but as soon as he perceived that the attention of his auditors was beginning to droop, he

flew to another part of the country. In truth the animated style of eloquence is not designed for common use ; it is a mere luxury, a dish to be served up on holydays. The figures, which enrich this species of style, do not grow on every tree ; correct and elegant similes and metaphors are rare productions. The settled ministers of the gospel must be content to supply their flocks with the plain and substantial food of religion. If they are constantly aiming at something more exquisite, they will ere long become declaimers and enthusiasts ; they will soon get to the end of their stock of images and glowing expressions, and will go over them again and again ; they will grow affected and artificial ; and though there will still be an appearance of heat, yet it will be a mere appearance ; for their language will be colder than the rays of a December moon. As the truth of these observations is established by experience, you, my brethren, will be satisfied with that moderate warmth, which will last through life ; and you will consider him as a useful preacher, who wins you to virtue and piety, or confirms you in them, by little and little, though he seldom makes a deep impression in any particular discourse.

V. A FIFTH duty, which may be derived from the love that a people feel for their minister, is a willingness to allow him sufficient time for exercise and strengthening his body. Though man is a being, who is formed in part for contemplation ; yet, from an examination of his frame, it is evident, that he is principally constituted for action, which is necessary for the preservation of his health and the continuance of his cheerfulness. Publick speaking may in general be salutary ; but the preparations of the study impair the constitution, wear away the fine parts of the brain, which are seated so near the region of thought, cover the face with paleness, and fill the breast and head with pain, and the heart with palpitations. The best remedy for these evils is daily exercise, either riding, walking, or manual labour. But the time, which a minister spends in these employments, must be taken from his study. He cannot therefore be always meditating and writing ; he cannot compose two, or even one discourse every week, and continue the practice during life. There are ministers, who boast that they are able to do it ; but such persons ought to be regarded as prodigies, as men whose bodies are made of brass, and nerves

of iron. If a minister cannot frame two sermons in a week, and yet two sermons are expected to be preached in the same pulpit, recourse must be had to some practicable means of supplying this demand. The way, which our fathers judged the best, and which you, my brethren, have now wisely adopted, is to have two ministers in every church. But even this is not sufficient, unless recourse is also had to the other custom, which generally prevails in this country, that of frequent interchanges. There are congregations, who have so much misguided affection for their minister, that they do not readily acquiesce in the practice. But if they have a real love for him, they will be willing that his mind should be occasionally relieved from the exertion of thought, that the cord of invention should not be constantly stretched. If they rejoice in his good name, they should consent to give him an opportunity to acquire a reputation abroad, as well as at home. If they are truly benevolent, they should allow other religious societies to be illuminated with his instructions, as well as their own. I am sensible that to these observations it may be replied, that not any person attempts to control his minister in this respect. But he certainly

does attempt to control him, if he laments to him, or complains to others, that he can seldom hear him preach ; and in particular, if he absents himself from publick worship, when a neighbouring minister is in the pulpit. How often these exchanges should take place, is what I shall not undertake to decide ; but they ought to be frequent, particularly in the former part of a minister's life. The hearing of a variety of preachers is beneficial on several accounts. It renders christians more candid, less bigoted, less attached to their own dogmas ; it connects religious societies together by the ties of charity ; and affords them an opportunity of listening to the best sermons of the ministers in the vicinity, as such are the discourses, which are commonly carried abroad.

VI. A SIXTH duty, which results from the esteem of a people to their minister, is to treat him as their equal, without attempting to deprive him of his freedom. As the pastor, on his part, should not lord it over the church ; so the church, on their part, should not domineer over him. Liberty is one of the most precious of all blessings ; it is dearer than riches ; it is dearer than fame ; but though every man ardently desires to secure it to

himself, yet there are too many, who endeavour to subject others to their control. In this country a minister depends for his daily bread, and even for his existence as a pastor, on the good will of his people, who can withdraw from him, and leave him without a congregation, whenever they please : Those, therefore, who have generous hearts, will take pains to prevent him from feeling this dependence too sensibly. In every thing which is innocent or indifferent, they should permit him to conduct himself by his own discretion. For in the performance of many actions there are various manners, one which is nearly, nay quite as good as another ; and no man has a right to control his brother in this respect. Such is human nature, that any direct attempt to command a minister will in most cases be resisted, and resisted with effect, though not without the loss of peace ; but the indirect attacks on his freedom he cannot so easily repel ; they ought therefore never be made. One indirect way, in which a minister may be deprived of his liberty, is supporting him by grants, that is, gifts, instead of a fixed stipend ; for whatever is bestowed on him under this name is considered as a favour conferred, and not as his due ; and he cannot

receive it without being degraded in his own eyes, and losing a portion of his independence. Another indirect way, in which a pastor may be deprived of his liberty, is praising him to his face ; for those who thus applaud him, either with or without judgment, think that they have the same right to reprove and command him, with as much or with as little reason. The preacher, who has the misfortune to be told that he is admired, is always more or less a slave. By courting popularity he binds a chain about his neck, which bends him to the ground ; so true is it that those motives of conduct only, which descend from heaven, such as the love of God and the love of man, advance the dignity of human nature ; whilst vain and selfish feelings render it mean and wretched. An affectionate people ought not to debase the character of their minister ; but they should leave him in full possession of his independence ; and not corrupt his mind by pouring commendation into his ear.

VII. ANOTHER duty, which immediately flows from the love, that a people entertain for their minister, is a friendly intercourse with him. They should view him, not merely as their instructor, but as their neighbour,

as their associate ; and they should cheerfully manifest their good will to him, by paying him visits, and by receiving them in return. In youth, he should be regarded as the son of the old ; when advanced in years, as the father of the young ; and in every period of his life, as the brother of those of his own age. Happy is a pastor, when he is connected with a flock, who are disposed to live with him on such amicable terms ; who demand of him neither austerity nor cant, but the honest flow of a warm and pious heart ; who are not ashamed that he should be the spectator of their pleasures—for they are innocent ; that he should be the hearer of their conversations—for they are chaste ; who break off no diversions at his approach—because they indulge in none, which are inconsistent with the gravity of his profession ; in whose company not only the aged delight, but in the presence of whom the young smile with renewed cheerfulness, and children gambol with redoubled glee. It would afford him satisfaction, if the duties of his office would permit him to spend much of his time in this pleasurable way. But it ought to be observed, that no minister has leisure to visit an affectionate people, as often as they wish.

His mornings, except when he is called to visit the sick and afflicted, ought to be entirely devoted to study and exercise. Beside which, the evenings of winter ought generally to be consecrated to books. If he has a family, the care of it will require much of his time. In short, he has not more leisure for visiting than any other industrious man, who faithfully discharges the obligations of his station. Those who are disposed to complain, that their minister does not visit them enough, I would ask, whether it is not right, that a lawyer should spend most of his time in his office, a merchant in his counting-house, a mechanick in his work shop, a husbandman in his field, and consequently a clergyman in his study? He, who desires to be either eminent or useful, must employ in business the greatest part of the day, and must give even to innocent pleasure, only a few of his hours. The minister, who is constantly running about from house to house, will soon exhaust every pleasant and instructive topick of conversation; and though he may gain the fondness, yet he will lose the respect of his people.

8. FINALLY, another duty, which a people owe to a minister whom they esteem, is the practice of the rules of godliness and

righteousness. As they receive instruction from his preaching, they ought to return the obligation, and to improve him by their good example. A pastor, who is happily seated in the midst of a religious flock, is as much indebted to them for his progress in the christian life, as they are to him. The established habits of goodness, which have long existed in a well ordered society, which have not originated from sudden impressions, but which have been formed and strengthened by all the means of a pious and virtuous education, and which have been continued from father to son, and from mother to daughter—are in particular highly beneficial to a young minister of the gospel.

It is here, my brethren, that you can show yourselves the friends of the man, whom you this day ordain over you. Let him learn wisdom and experience from your aged christians ; a knowledge of the human heart from those of you, “who have seen many men and many cities ;” and let him be confirmed in tenderness, in sympathy, in resignation to the will of God, by those of you who have been afflicted ; let him be improved in delicacy and purity by your women, and in simplicity and innocence by your well-educated

children. Hold up to him the image of your departed friends, in particular of those, who were distinguished for their piety and benevolence, and who, whilst they lived, were the supports and ornaments of this church.

You my brethren, who survive, are a society of friends ; you respect each other ; and you have chosen for your pastor a man, who has every disposition to prolong your tranquility and increase your felicity. Without saying any thing of his talents, which speak for themselves, I shall only observe, that he has been blessed with enlightened and virtuous parents ; and that having passed his childhood under their discreet and tender guidance, his youth has been favoured with the best means of intellectual and moral improvement, which the country affords. With such advantages, you have reason to expect that he will be an affectionate pastor ; that he will be, not only your instructor, but your son, your brother, your friend, and your comforter.

My young friends of this society, who, by the ordination of a new pastor, begin a new era of hope, of love, of joy, how happy would you be, if you would determine at the same time to commence your religious course !

Precious are the first fruits of life, when they are offered to God ; fragrant is the perfume, which ascends to heaven from the flowers of spring ; melodious is the song of devotion, when it is chanted by a youthful tongue. Give yourselves up therefore to your heavenly Father ; become in every sense the disciples of your benevolent Redeemer. You are his friends, if you do what he commands you :* He commands you to celebrate his dying love. Hesitate not a moment to obey his reasonable, his affectionate call. Join the parents, whom you venerate, and the pastor, whom you esteem, at the table of the Lord ; and there may you find increase of strength in every good resolution, and growth in every christian grace, till at length you rise up a holy temple in the Lord,† fair without and beautiful within, and in which the spirit of the Almighty will delight for ever to dwell.

* John xv. 14.

† Eph. ii. 21.

SERMON II.



PREACHED ON GOOD FRIDAY

JOHN xix. 26, 27.

When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, woman, behold thy son. Then saith he to the disciple, behold thy mother.

THE virtues, which Jesus displayed during his life, shone with the greatest lustre in its closing scenes. Such an assemblage of divine graces then appeared in his character, that the grateful christian contemplates it with love, delight, and admiration. Happily the evangelical writers are sufficiently minute in the concluding chapters of his history, which constitute the most affecting parts of the gospels. We here see a personage, of sublime dignity and heroick fortitude, voluntarily submitting to pain and death, that he may promote the most important of all purposes, the glory of God, and the felicity of mankind.

Among other virtues, which he manifested on this occasion, none was more conspicuous than his tenderness. By tenderness I mean the soft affection, which filled his susceptible heart, his kind attention to his friends, and his anxiety for their happiness. This will be my theme at present ; and I purpose, in the first place, to consider it ; and secondly, to show what inferences we should draw, and what practical uses we should make of the subject.

I. IN treating the tenderness of our Saviour, it may be sufficient to mention some of the instances of it, which are recorded in his history, without dwelling on them particularly ; for there is always danger, if we expatiate on them, that we should weaken their effect by too diffuse a style, or by cold exclamation. The Evangelists have related them with so much simplicity and pathos, that we cannot, by adopting an expanded manner, render them more forcible. Passing by the instances, which appear in the former parts of the gospels, I will remind you of those, which took place at the close of his life.

1. THE first instance, which I shall mention, is the tenderness of our Lord to the

family of Lazarus.* There must have been something very amiable in the character of this young man and his two sisters ; for it is said by St. John, that Jesus loved them. When therefore Lazarus died, though our Saviour had determined to restore him to life by his miraculous power, yet he was much affected with the sorrow of his sisters, and he wept at their tears. The Jews, who were present, were so struck with his tenderness to the deceased, that they could not forbear saying, Behold how he loved him. The sensibility, which, amidst the display of his majesty, our Lord discovered on this occasion, renders his character extremely interesting. He thought it not beneath his dignity to mingle his tears with the tears of the afflicted sisters, and to exert his kind attention, and to make use of soothing words, to comfort their hearts. He becomes the object of affection and delight ; but we do not perceive that he debased himself by cherishing and expressing the feelings of tenderness.

2. THE second instance of the tenderness of our Saviour, of which I would remind you, is that which he manifested to his disciples in

* John xi.

his last conversation with them. I refer particularly to the account of it, contained in the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters of St. John's Gospel. It would be too long to repeat at this time; nor is it necessary, as you have the New Testament in your hands, and can read it in the Evangelist's own affectionate language. The whole is one display of tenderness. Your hearts will burn within you, whilst you peruse it, particularly such passages as the following: "Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God; believe also in me. I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love. This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Ye now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

3. AFTER these compassionate addresses, our Saviour retired to the garden of Gathsemane, where he suffered inexpressible agony of body and mind; but amidst the horrors,

by which he was surrounded, his tenderness did not forsake him ; for he kindly excused the disciples, who accompanied him, and who fell asleep through sorrow : The spirit, said he, indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

4. THE look, which he gave to Peter, when in the presence of his Lord, he denied that he knew him, may be interpreted in the same manner. It reproved him for his inconstancy ; but it reproved him with tenderness. It condemned the cowardice of his friend ; but it conveyed pity for his frailty. The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter,† and that affectionate look immediately filled the heart of the disciple with sorrow and repentance.

5. THE address, which he made to the women, who accompanied him to Calvary with tears and lamentations, and who probably were his relations or friends, breathes the same spirit. And there followed him, says St. Luke, a great company of people, and of women, who also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them, said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.‡

* Matth. xxvi. 41.

† Luke xxii. 64.

‡ Luke xxiii. 27, 28.

6. **BUT** the most remarkable instance of the tenderness of our Saviour is that, which is contained in the text. In order to conceive of the sublimity of this tenderness, it is necessary to advert to the situation of Jesus. He was fixed to a cross, to which he was suspended, not by cords, but his whole weight was supported by the wounds, which the nails had made in his hands and feet. The nerves of those sensible parts were cruelly lacerated; and he knew that he should hang in this manner, till by a lingering death of agony his spirit departed from him. The people and their rulers were passing by and reviling him. The greatest part of his disciples had abandoned him, and left him to his fate; for none appear to have been present, except John, his mother, and two or three other women. A horrible darkness overspread the land of Judea. In this awful situation, when both the comforts of friendship and the light of heaven were withdrawn, it is not surprising that he should fear that his Father had forgotten him, and that he should cry out in the anguish of his soul, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* But amidst this terror and this agony, his tenderness was as much alive as ever; and when he saw at the foot of the

cross his mother, compassion for her grief and anxiety for her future welfare almost erased the idea of his own suffering. Directing therefore a look of affection, first to Mary, and then to the beloved John, he saith to his mother, Woman, behold thy son. Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother.

II. SUCH was the tenderness of Jesus. Inferences may be drawn, and practical uses made of the subject.

I. THE tenderness of our Saviour adds one proof to the many others, which may be alleged, of the truth of his history, and the divinity of his mission. The character of Jesus, compounded as it is of sublime and amiable qualities, can be demonstrated by sound philosophy to be the only one, which is truly great. But before the period, in which it was exhibited, no example of it had ever appeared on earth; nor had imagination ever risen so high as to conceive it, though imagination had taken many adventurous flights. The model is not to be found among any of the civilized nations of antiquity; the Evangelists therefore could not have copied it from their writings. It could not have been taken from the Hebrew scriptures; because the character of Jesus is as much supe-

riour to that of Noah, Daniel, Job,* or any other of the worthies of the Old Testament, as their characters are to those of Achilles or Agamemnon. The Evangelists, in describing it, seem hardly to have been conscious of what they were doing. They were men destitute of genius and invention, and appear not to have aimed to draw a perfect character ; for one of them has not portrayed the whole. Like four painters, they have worked on the same piece : one has given a feature or an outline, which another has omitted ; but there is not a redundant stroke ; and from their combined labours has arisen an harmonious, a godlike form, which is the wonder and delight of heaven and earth. The conclusion therefore is, that they have not drawn a fiction, but that the image of their Lord was before them ; and that the portrait possesses such exquisite symmetry, because it is painted from real life. The unexampled perfection of the character of Jesus has always made a deep impression on the minds of those, who have studied human nature, and who have perused with care the pages of history. It could not have been invented ; it must have existed ; and if it existed, his re-

* Ezek. xiv. 14.

ligion is true. The external evidence of christianity is of great force ; but this particular species of internal evidence is nearly irresistible.

2. THE character of Jesus is proposed as a model for imitation : It is your duty therefore, my brethren, to imitate it as far as you can. You should copy his tenderness. There are few of you, who do not ardently desire to die, like your Saviour, with tenderness in your hearts. You cannot forbear to reflect sometimes on death ; and whatever lives you may lead, however obstinate may be your tempers, however harsh your words, however unkind your behaviour, and however implacable your resentments, you cannot endure the thought of leaving the world with such manners and feelings. If any sparks of affection are left in your bosoms—and in whose breast are they totally extinguished ?—you fondly hope, that in your last moments they will be enkindled into a vivid flame. In your imaginations you sometimes paint to yourselves the manner, in which you shall give up your spirits. You cannot promise yourselves, that you shall die with complete fortitude, with perfect resignation to the divine will ; but you hope that

you shall die with good will in your souls. You anticipate a disease, which may be lingering and painful, but which will not deprive you of your reason. There will be assembled round your death bed the objects of your affection ; the person, with whom you have been sometimes provoked, but who has still been always the nearest your heart ; the children, who are dear to you ; the domesticks, who have served you faithfully ; and the friends, who have rendered life pleasant. To some you will give affectionate advice ; and to all you will speak words of kindness. They will anxiously watch over you ; and they will lament your death with unfeigned tears of the tenderest sorrow.

Such is the pleasing picture, which the imagination of those, who possess any goodness of heart, delights to paint. But it is not given to many to die in this manner. For some are tormented with such remorse of conscience, that they have no other idea than a dread of future punishment ; and their hearts being filled with an apprehension of misery, there is no room in them for the benevolent affections. Others lose sight of the friends, to whom their tenderness is due, amidst the crowds of admiring spectators,

who surround their beds, and who are called in to hear their last vain speeches, and to witness their intrepidity in death. Some die with acute pain ; and not being able, like Jesus, to rise above it, they have no thought except that of their own agony. Some die suddenly, without having an opportunity of addressing their friends ; others die at a distance from them ; and many have their senses and reason so disordered, that they are incapable of speech, and even of reflection.

This being the usual state of things, it behoves you, my brethren, not to postpone your love to your friends, and your forgiveness to your enemies, to your last moments, but to treat them with tenderness, whilst you are in health. The text particularly refers to the case of you, who are sons. A brave and faithful son would be willing to die in defence of his mother. But to this you will not be called ; nor will you probably, like Jesus, be required to commit her, in your last moments, to the care of a faithful friend. Wait not, till her last sickness, or your own, draws from you expressions of tenderness : Now is the time to comfort and bless her. Make her happy with your attention, your

kindness, your good name, your virtue. What shall we say of a son, who, instead of cherishing his mother, plunges a dagger in her breast by his vices? What of a son, who, instead of living to be her support and defender, by debauchery, or other criminal practices, voluntarily deprives himself of existence, and leaves her in old age helpless and in misery?

The spirit of the text applies to other relations beside that of a son. There are evils in life; but the worst of them proceed from the want of tenderness to your friends; from your irascible passions, from your resenting the injuries of those, who immediately surround you; from your proud, unyielding, and implacable dispositions; from your harsh speeches; from your rude and unkind behaviour. How many persons might become happy, if they would fill their hearts with mildness and tenderness! Some of you are wretched; and the cause is, that you cast from you the means of felicity, that you rashly squander the precious treasure of life. One after another the friends, who, notwithstanding your injuries and resentments, are on the whole dear to you, will be taken away; and when they are in their graves, you will then think with regret on your want of tenderness

to them, and the happiness which you have irretrievably lost.

I CONCLUDE with observing, that it is not the design of this discourse to contract your affection. In imitation of your benevolent Saviour, it is your duty to wish well, and to the extent of your power to do good, to all men. But the love of mankind is nothing more than the love of individuals, whom either you have seen, or of whom you have heard, or of whom you can form an image in your mind. As objects, which are near, are more in your heart, than those, which are at a distance, your tenderness must, of necessity, be confined, for the most part, to those within your reach; to the friends, with whom you daily converse; to the poor, who pass under your eyes; to your fellow citizens; to the members of the society, whether christian or any other, with whom you are associated. By loving and doing good to these persons, you will produce a habit of benevolence, which, as opportunity occurs, will be extended to others of your fellow men, with whom you are more remotely connected. It must be confessed that the regard, which a selfish man feels for his family, who loves his children, merely because they are parts of himself, and because they

add to his importance and pride, has very little effect in producing this habit of benevolence. But where children, parents, or brethren, are loved for their own sakes ; where real good will exists in the heart ; where there is a spirit of meekness and condescension ; there the man, who is most tender to his friends, will generally be most beneficent to others. Such tenderness ought not to be styled selfish ; for it requires much humanity, self-denial, and mental discipline. It is a good affection, which is enlarged by the repetition of its outward acts ; and it resembles an exuberant river, which is not always confined within its banks, but which frequently overflows and enriches the adjoining fields. Fear not then, that your tenderness will render you selfish ; but be kind and condescending to the friends, whom you daily see, and to whom you have an opportunity of doing good ; and do not afflict yourselves, because your power is limited, and you cannot bless those, who are out of your reach. The time, we hope, will come, when, in an other world, your capacities will be increased, and you can promote the felicity of innumerable beings, whom on earth you have never beheld.

SERMON III.



PREACHED ON EASTER-DAY.

JOHN viv. 19.

Because I live, ye shall live also.

THE doctrine of immortality was believed by the ancient Greeks, at least as long ago as the time of Homer. The Persians were in possession of it at a remote period, and probably by the instructions of their great master Zoroaster. The Israelites had some obscure intimations of it from Solomon; and perhaps the Arabians received it, though still more obscurely, from Job. That Daniel was acquainted with it, there can be no doubt; but he says nothing very particular on the subject. Others of the Hebrew writers contain hints, and nothing more; for it was not completely manifested by divine revelation till the time of our Saviour, when life and immortality were brought to light by his gospel.* In what manner the ancient heathens

* 2 Tim. i. 10.

became acquainted with it, whether by a tradition derived originally from a divine communication, or by a lucky conjecture, it is difficult to say. If from the former, it had suffered, like every other branch of true theology, many alterations, in passing through their hands; their ideas of it were exceedingly fanciful; and as none of them supposed that the immortality of man depended on his resurrection from the dead, it is not easy to reconcile their notions of it with the doctrine of the sacred scriptures. The arguments alleged by the ancient philosophers in favour of immortality, and which have been brought forward again by several modern writers, are, it is confessed, of some weight; and after the truth is discovered by a divine revelation, they tend more strongly to confirm it. But they are not sufficient to demonstrate the doctrine; for neither did they satisfy the minds of those ancient philosophers, as one of the ablest of them acknowledges, nor do they satisfy ours. The only satisfactory evidence, which we have of the doctrine, is derived from the New Testament. If the gospel is the genuine word of God, man will be immortal, but if the gospel is a fable, man may be immortal, but we cannot prove that he is. Our hope de-

pende on Christ ; he is the author of the resurrection and the life.* We shall live forever, if their is to be a resurrection from the dead ; but there will be no resurrection from the dead, if Christ is not risen,† if he is not now alive, if he has not received power from the Father to call the dead from their tombs. A restoration to life being a point of the utmost importance to man, the resurrection of Christ is of consequence the primary article of the christian religion. In this light it is viewed by christians in general. It is not to be wondered at therefore, that they should universally appropriate to the publick worship of God the day of the week, on which Jesus arose from the dead ; and that many churches should, in addition to this, devote a particular day of the year to the commemoration of the great event. This is the day, which we now consecrate ; a day, which the Lord has made ;‡ a day, which should fill the heart of every believer with joyful hope and grateful exultation.

The subject, which on this festival we are called to consider, is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and its consequence, the immortality

* John xi. 25.

† 1 Cor. xv.

‡ Ps. cxviii. 24.

of man. This cause and its happy effect are both contained in the text : Because I live, says our Saviour, ye shall live also.

I. THE first part of the text is, that Christ arose from the dead, and is now alive. It is not my design at present to dwell on this head ; because it would be impossible to do justice to it in one discourse ; for though the argument is sufficiently clear, yet it consists of many parts, all of which require an ample discussion. I will only observe at this time, that our belief of the resurrection of Christ, and the demonstration of its truth, are derived from the testimony of credible witnesses, such as we should admit in any other case ; from that of the Roman soldiers, who guarded his tomb, and who saw him rise ;* of the women, who visited it at an early hour, and perceived that the body was gone, and one of whom spoke to him, before she left the place ;† of two disciples, whom he accompanied, as they were going to Emmaus ;‡ of the eleven apostles, to whom he frequently appeared, and who had the evidence of all their senses that he was alive ;§ of above five hundred brethren at once,¶ to the testimony of a majori-

* Matth. xxviii. 12. † Matth. xxviii.—John xx. 15.

‡ Luke xxiv. 15. § John xx. xxi. ¶ 1 Cor. xv. 6.

ty of whom St. Paul boldly appeals; of St. Paul himself, who saw and conversed with him, after he had ascended to heaven;* of the chief men of the Jewish nation, as well as of a large assembly of the people, in whose presence the apostle Peter openly declared the fact, whilst not one of them durst deny its truth, or attempted to convict him of falsehood: Ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that Jesus of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, God hath raised from the dead.† In fine, the truth of the resurrection of Christ is proved by the primitive martyrs, who sealed it with their blood; by the uninterrupted tradition of the church, and other circumstances, which demonstrate the credibility of the books of the New Testament,—because if these books are genuine, if they were really written by the authors whose names they bear, the reports contained in them must of consequence be true; and lastly it proved by every argument, which establishes any other part of the christian religion; because the several facts of the gospel are closely bound together, like the atoms which compose

* Acts ix. 4, 5, 6. 1 Cor, xv. 8. † Acts iv. 8, 10.

an indissoluble rock, so that if one is firmly fixed, the whole mass becomes immoveable. The hints, which I have suggested, are an imperfect sketch of the argument ; but I shall be happy, my brethren, if they induce you to look into the books, in which the subject is fully discussed. Every man of impartiality and seriousness, who entertains any doubts, will examine it with care ; for it is the most essential of the doctrines ; because if Christ lives, we shall live also. This constitutes the second part of the text, to which I now proceed.

II. THAT the dead will be raised, and that men will exist in another state, is asserted every where in the New Testament. As this is a point, which no one denies, and as the passages of scripture, which relate to it, must be in every one's recollection, it would be superfluous to multiply quotations. It will be sufficient to cite a single text : The hour, says our Saviour, is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth.* Taking therefore for granted the truth of the gospel and the resurrection of Christ, there

* Joha v. 28.

can be no doubt that man is made for immortality. This is a doctrine, which is in the highest degree important, as all must feel, and as I shall endeavour to evince by several considerations.

1. I FIRST observe, that the love of life is a natural sentiment of the human heart. The ancient philosophers inferred from this, that man must be immortal ; and though, as has already been hinted, the sentiment is not sufficient alone to discover or prove the doctrine ; yet it must be allowed, that after it has been made known by a divine revelation, it corresponds with and strongly confirms it. Though every man knows that other men die, and consequently can have no doubt, that ere long he must die himself ; yet perhaps he never does, or can, view himself as in a state of non-existence. He conceives himself still beholding, after death, what passes in the world ; and even whilst his body is mouldering in the tomb, as breathing and thinking. These conceptions are not often expressed in words ; but we may appeal to any man, who is accustomed to look into himself, whether he does not often feel them in his bosom. The simple and illiterate, who may be said to think aloud, are sometimes heard to speak

them openly. From this strong sentiment of life proceeds in part the affection, which we have for our children, and still more for our grandchildren; we prolong our life, we live over again, in every animated being, who proceeds from us.

The love of a name is nothing more than a particular modification of this love of life. Hence arises the desire to extend ourselves in our works, to impress marks of our existence on every thing which passes through our hands. Even the lowest of the vulgar feel this sentiment: They inscribe their names on monuments, not as durable as brass or marble, but the best which they can find, and where they hope to enjoy a kind of immortality. Others of a higher class build houses, which they never can inhabit, that they may be known to be theirs; and call lands, the fruits of which they can never taste, after their own names.* The love of a name is a principle, which operates most powerfully in the breasts of the learned, the heroick, and the ambitious. For this do some men wear out their eyes in writing books; whilst others wade through blood, that they may live in

* Ps. xlix. 11.

the memories of their contemporaries and posterity. The desire of posthumous fame is the passion of great minds. It may be thought singular, that those, who disbelieve a future state of existence, should generally be the most anxious to obtain it ; but perhaps, on reflection, it will appear natural enough that men, who do not expect any other life, should wish to secure that of their name. A celebrated atheist, who professed to believe that in a few months he should be nothing more than an insensible heap of dust, at the close of his life, wrote a vain book, in which he describes and extols himself, and makes large demands on posterity for their praise. The licentious poets of ancient times boast in proud language of the perpetual monuments, which they have built to their fame. Alexander, we are informed, undertook the conquest of Persia and India, chiefly for the sake of being celebrated by the orators and historians of Athens ; and the all-conquering hero of the present day, whose terrific roar alarms even these distant shores, if we may judge from his arrogant and bombastick language, appears to be governed by a similar motive, and hopes to rival in the opinion of posterity the *Attilas* and the *Selims*, the

Genghischans, and the Kouli Kans of former ages.

These persons are all great men ; but in the eye of the christian, whose breast is animated with nobler prospects, their ambition is insanity, and their wisdom, folly. He also is filled with the most ardent desires of life ; but he hopes for the immortality, not of his name, but his soul. He expects to live, not in the memories of misjudging posterity, but when neither a licentious poet, an immoral philosopher, nor an atheist will be left on earth, when both tigers and heroes will be tamed, when every vestige of tyranny will be removed, when the globe itself will be renovated, and when there will be no longer usurpation, or conquest, or destruction in all the holy mountain of God.

Judge you, my brethren, which hope is most substantial. The life of a name is a mere idea, a phantom, which can be enjoyed a few moments only, by anticipation ; which vanishes away, as soon as a man expires ; and which can confer no honour, no pleasure, on his unconscious ashes. Besides, if there was any thing real in it, it would not be worthy of our anxious pursuit, because experience and history convince us, that few can

with reason expect to obtain it. How many of us are there, of whom it will be known a hundred years hence, that we ever existed? A tasteless antiquary, in poring over an old gazette, may possibly find our names in an obituary; but as we shall be painted with exactly the same features, and with the same colour, as a thousand others who have preceded us, we shall remain undistinguished in his mind. We have, however, no particular cause to be mortified; because like our names, the names of most of our fellow-citizens will soon be sunk in the gulf of oblivion. Even great men, if they have not an opportunity of acting a conspicuous part, or the good fortune to make an important discovery, or to strike out something remarkably brilliant, are not long remembered. The heroes and patriots, who achieved our revolution, and to whom we owe our independence, are fast hastening to the land of forgetfulness. We still talk of eight or ten warriors and statesmen; but probably, after the lapse of twenty centuries, only one name will be left in our annals. I appeal to history and the sacred scriptures in support of this opinion: Who knows now any thing of the generals of Joshua and Cyrus? Or, in later periods, of

those of Charlemagne and Alfred? Authors, who treat original subjects, have a more probable prospect of immortalizing their names than either statesmen or heroes; but even with them the chance is small. Of few ancient writers have we ever heard; and even of the authors, who are near our own times, not many are remembered. In truth, time, like a mighty giant, treads down every thing before him: He spares here and there a great name, to mark the existence of former ages; but the rest he tramples under foot, and sinks them in oblivion. But over the immortality of man time has no power. The christian consoles himself with the thought, that though men may not hear of him, yet that he is known to God. Secure of the remembrance of his Creator, he is raised above all the temptations of the world, and inspired to make the most heroick efforts of virtue.

2. This leads me, in the second place, to observe, that the belief of a future state of existence is in a high degree important; because it supplies a strong motive, to restrain man from sin, and to animate him to the practice of holiness. That the hope of reward, and the fear of punishment, are adapted to make an impression on the human heart, is

what no rational person denies, and is what I need not undertake to prove. But if it was supposed that this world is our all, much of this hope, much of this fear, would be taken away ; and too many men would become less scrupulous of the means, which they used to obtain the pleasures and advantages that are to be enjoyed here. I mean not to assert, that virtue does not on the whole contribute to our happiness even in this life ; for there can be no doubt that it is the cause of felicity in the present state. It must be granted, that the world is a part of the kingdom of God ; that it is governed by its infinitely wise and benevolent Sovereign, and not by a malignant demon, who has usurped its throne. But though there can be no dispute that this earth is such as its maker intended it should be, a well contrived piece of work, with marks of intelligence and goodness impressed on every part of it ; yet at the same time it must be allowed, that compared with what we are able to conceive, it is a state of imperfection. This imperfection appears to be the necessary consequence of its being a first state, a state of probation, in which moral agents are to begin to form those associations and habits, which will finally result, in another life,

in disinterested benevolence and the unbounded love of God. Considering the other world as a magnificent temple, this world may be compared to the porch ; it is good and fair, but chiefly so, because it is the introduction to something which is better and more beautiful. The two states ought always to be viewed as connected together. If we know nothing, or believe nothing respecting that which is future, the motives, which ought to govern our conduct, will often be perplexed with mazes and involved in darkness. When we are assaulted by temptation, we shall sometimes not hesitate to taste the pleasures which it offers ; for though conscience may make objections ; yet we may fancy, that, after all, the evil which it threatens may never take place, or if it does, that it will be transient. We shall sometimes see the wicked man externally prosperous, and not having yet learned by experience that wealth is not felicity, that honours are not felicity ; not being able to look into his heart, and to see the remorse which rends it ; and overlooking besides the secret satisfactions, which the virtuous enjoy, but of which he is entirely deprived ; we shall think we run no risk in imitating his example, and in seeking the objects of our guilt-

ty desires by the same nefarious means, which he has pursued. Ignorant moreover, that God, as the Psalmist expresses it, sets the wicked in slippery places,* even in this world, that he is suddenly cast down and loaded with infamy, we shall fix our eyes on nothing, but the imaginary good which he has acquired, and eagerly snatch the same blessing. A belief of a future state corrects these false notions; for every man, whose heart is deeply impressed with it, necessarily concludes that it is folly, that it is madness, to commit a crime, for which he knows he shall be severely punished in another world. That this motive influences the hearts of many there can be no doubt; and the reason why more persons do not appear to be affected by it, probably is, that a secret infidelity lurks in their minds: They believe that there is no future state of punishment, at least not for them. They are conscious that they practise some of the duties of virtue—for what vicious man does not?—And these, they hope, will excuse their omission of the rest. Or they substitute the strength of their faith, their ardent zeal for the dogmas and ceremonies of the particular church to which they

* Ps. lxxiii. 18.

belong, and their imaginary piety, in the place of the essential duties of morality. Being thus right, as they conceive, in their principles, they suppose that they are in no danger of falling into any damnable sins. They pluck therefore the fruits of vice, which strongly tempt their sight, such as the inheritance of the widow and the portion of the fatherless. In the mean time they do not feel entirely at ease within; but this very uneasiness gives them comfort; because they flatter themselves that it is godly sorrow and evangelical contrition. They die as they have lived, without making restitution to those whom they have wronged; but they trust that they shall escape future punishment; because they do not depend for salvation on their own good works, but rely entirely on the strength of their faith. These erroneous ideas prevent the doctrine of a future state of punishment from having its proper influence on the minds of some of the wicked; but after all, there are so many who believe it, and so many who, notwithstanding their false theological opinions, are duly affected by it, that it produces the most beneficial consequences. It renders vice and impiety less common than they otherwise would be; and whilst it in-

duces us to qualify ourselves to become inhabitants of another world, it promotes the order and harmony, the tranquility and happiness of society in the present state.

3. I OBSERVE, thirdly, that the doctrine of immortality is of great importance, because it is the best comfort under affliction. The true christian, when he loses his wealth, consoles himself with the reflection, that he has laid up his treasures in a place, where neither moth nor rust corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal.* When he is deprived of his health, he is soothed with the hope, that he shall soon go to a world, where there will be no more sickness and pain, but where he shall eat of the tree of life, the fruit of which will heal every malady, and exclude every pang.† When his friends die, his grief is chased away by the belief, that they are not destroyed, but only removed. What satisfaction is there in thinking, that we shall again meet the virtuous companions of our youth, who though they have been dead many years, we have not yet forgotten ; that we shall meet our father, our mother, our children, our friend, who was dearer to us than our own soul ! We shall meet them :—But

* Matt. vi. 20.

† Rev. xxi. 4.—xxii. 2.

this supposes that we shall know our friends in the other world. And what reason have we to fear that we shall not? On the contrary have we not cause to wonder that it should ever be made a question? Shall we remember nothing which passed on earth? Shall we forget the most essential duties, which we performed here, the duties of parents and children, of brothers and husbands, the very virtues which have admitted us into paradise? And if we remember them, shall we not recognise those who were their objects? Shall we forget all our good feelings and fond affections? Will there be no friendship, no love there? Shall we not be conscious, that we are the same individuals, that we were in this state? And if we possess such consciousness, how can it possibly be conceived that we shall not know our friends? This hope cheers the mind of a christian; but the man who disbelieves a future state, has no firm support, when he meets with affliction. He is either obliged to fly for relief to amusements, for which he has then no relish; or he is compelled to harden his heart, that it may not be penetrated by the sharp points of grief. He may succeed and shut out misery; but in the mean while he excludes every

thing, which deserves the name of felicity. He had a heart of flesh, and he has turned it into stone. He has now no anxiety, when his friends are sick ; and he feels no sorrow, when they die ; but he has no sympathy, no tenderness ; he knows nothing of the delights of friendship, or the joys of love.

4. I OBSERVE, in the fourth place, that immortality is not only a comfort to the afflicted, but that it is also a consoling doctrine to the prosperous. Some of you, my hearers, possess health, and youth, and admiring friends : The world smiles on you ; your hearts beat high with ardent expectations ; and every object promises you a new pleasure. Others of you have wealth, and honours, and comely and well disposed children, who both obey and love you, who are daily improving in knowledge and good habits, and on whom you depend for comfort and support in your declining years. These things are all charming : It is fervently to be wished that they may last, and that you may not be disappointed in your fond anticipations. You have now such a taste for happiness, that you must be very unwilling to lose it. But you know it cannot continue long in the present world. Youth and all its pleasures are pass-

ing rapidly away ; you will soon be in the middle of life, and ere long on the confines of old age. Those of you, who have reached either of these terms, cannot promise yourselves a lasting continuance of your prosperity. Time is giving you repeated warnings, that you will soon be summoned to depart. He is daily robbing you of a part of yourselves ; breaking your teeth, tearing away your hair, stiffening your limbs, covering your face with wrinkles, untuning your voice, quenching the fire of your eyes, and impairing your memory. The wealth and honours, which you possess, those who are younger than you are eagerly snatching from you ; and if not, you cannot carry them away ; you will soon lie down in the grave, and leave them all behind you. Is it not then desirable, that there should be a state, in which your youth will be restored and rendered immortal ; in which you will receive your bodies cured of every defect ; and in which, though you do not recover your wealth and honours, you will obtain what is infinitely more valuable ? Is not this what you all wish ? And must not the prosperous in particular most ardently desire, that there may be truth in the doctrine, which promises them a restoration of

their felicity with unfading lustre and never ceasing improvement ?

I HAVE thus endeavoured to show, that the doctrine of a future state of existence is in a high degree important. Some persons, however, may be ready to inquire, Is it also, as you pretend, a consoling doctrine ? If men are immortal, is there not reason to apprehend that few of them will enjoy a happy immortality ; that the greatest number will be miserable in the other world ? To remove this doubt I ought not to contradict myself, and say that there is no misery after death. It is a doctrine of the scriptures, that the wicked will be punished in the state beyond the grave ; and this doctrine is conformable to reason. Pain is the unavoidable effect of vice ; for if virtue produces pleasure, what is opposite cannot also produce it. Whilst therefore the sinner exists, he must exist in a state of misery. If his life is restored, his wretchedness, which is only another word for punishment, must be restored at the same time. Nor can he justly complain of this constitution ; for every thing which he suffers is his own fault : It is what he might have avoided, if he had so pleased ; the offers of salvation were made to him ; and he was

never placed under an irresistible necessity of sinning. All this is unquestionably true, provided he continues in his iniquities ; but whether he will finally be reformed by his sufferings, and whether punishment has a natural tendency to produce this effect, is another question, the consideration of which would lead us into a long inquiry.

Without entering into it at present, I think it my duty to observe, in vindication of the honour of the divine mercy, that as immortality is not, at least since the lapse of Adam, natural to man, but is the free gift of God through Jesus Christ,* it can never be believed that so wise and good a being would bestow what is, on the whole, a curse : It must therefore be allowed, that it is not an injury, but an advantage, to the human race in general. Of consequence, any doctrine, which is inconsistent with this supposition, ought immediately to be rejected. God is infinitely benevolent ; he hates none of the works which he has made ; punishment, as the scriptures express it, is his strange work, † not what he delights in. ‡ He will therefore not punish any, more than their iniquities de-

* Rom. vi. 23. † Isaiah xxviii. 21. ‡ Mic. vii. 18.

serve, nor for a longer time than is necessary to promote the purpose of his just government, which is probably the happiness of the creation. What will be the duration of the misery of the wicked, or their final destiny, I presume not to say : They are in the hands of a merciful God, who knoweth the frame of man, and remembereth that he made him of dust ;* I feel no apprehension that he will treat them with cruelty.

If we borrow light from philosophy, we shall have reason to suppose, that there will always be in the universe moral agents in a state of probation ; that there will always be some who are sinning, and some who are under punishment ; and consequently, that in this sense, misery may be said to be eternal. But a just philosophy will teach us, that natural evil is the result of moral evil, of which it is intended to be the cure. This great work has probably been carried on for ages of ages in the kingdom of God. World after world may have been disciplined, punished, renovated, and rendered a fit habitation for immortal beings. We are too apt to imagine that our little planet is the beginning,

* Ps. ciii. 14.

as well as the centre, of the universe ; but this conception is not agreeable to reason, nor is it authorised by the scriptures. All the information which Moses gives us is, that about six thousand years ago, God created the earth, the sun and the moon ; and that he made the stars also ;* but that many of the fixed stars must have existed ages before that period, and were not created when the earth emerged from its chaotick state, is evident from the late discoveries of astronomers ; for they have proved, that these stars are at such an inconceivable distance, that though light travels at the rate of twelve millions of miles in a minute, yet that their rays are in reaching us more than a million of years. As we therefore can see them, so long at least must they and the worlds which surround them have existed. This fact overwhelms our minds with astonishment of the grandeur, the unbounded power, the immense goodness of God. May we not without presumption conjecture, that the inhabitants of some of those distant worlds have for ages been in a state of security, free from sin, and enjoying consummate bliss ? We in this obscure corner of the creation are still in a state of

* Gen. i. 16.

trial and subjected to discipline ; But what have we to fear under the government of a monarch, whose goodness is as unbounded as his empire is extensive ? Our globe, it is true, and every living creature which it contains, might be struck out of existence, and would be no more missed in the universe, than a grain of sand from the shores of the ocean ; but we need not be alarmed. Though we are inconsiderable, yet we are not overlooked. The mind of God is capable of attending to objects which are infinitely minute, as well as those which are infinitely vast. "He views with equal eye the fall of a hero or a sparrow ;" an atom, or a system, teem with life ; and here an emmet blessed, and there the universe.

Whatever may be thought of the conjecture which has been offered, these truths are clear, that virtue is productive of happiness, and that the necessary attendant of vice is misery ; that the pain, which any being endures, will be no more than he deserves ; that sin is a voluntary act ; and that the sinner will cease to be punished, as soon as he ceases to transgress the laws of his Maker. These important truths we should impress deeply on our hearts ; and we should con-

sole our minds with the belief, that the Judge of all the earth will do right,* that his benevolence exceeds all that we can conceive, and that he is constantly employed in diffusing happiness through every part of the boundless universe.

* Gen. xviii. 25.

SERMON IV.



PREACHED BEFORE THE BOSTON FEMALE ASYLUM.

1 TIM. ii. 8, 9, 10.

I will therefore—that women adorn themselves—which becometh women professing godliness, with good works.

IN this chapter the Apostle treats the duties of christian men and christian women, in the church of God. I will, says he, that the men pray every where, that is, wherever a congregation of christian people is collected, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner I will also, that the women, in the congregations of christians, adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety ; not with broidered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array ; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.

The language of the text it is not difficult to comprehend. By professing godliness is to be understood the profession of the chris-

tian religion, which is the doctrine according to godliness. Christian women profess to love and worship God. Good works is a phrase of extensive meaning. In some places and probably in the text, it intends virtue in general ; but it sometimes more particularly signifies deeds of charity. Thus it is said of Dorcas, that she was full of good works, and alms deeds, which she did.* In like manner St. Paul, in the fifth chapter of this Epistle, by good works undoubtedly means works of charity ; for describing a widow, who is well reported of for good works, he says, she has brought up children, she has lodged strangers, she has washed the saints' feet, she has relieved the afflicted. Again, in the sixth chapter of this same Epistle, the Apostle charges the rich, that they do good, that they be rich in good works ; that is, as he explains himself, that they be ready to distribute, willing to communicate. I trust therefore, that I shall not pervert the sense of the Apostle, if, without losing sight of its more extensive signification, by good works, in the present discourse, I understand charitable deeds ; and treat the duty of women, who profess the christian religion, to practice beneficence.

* Acts ix. 36.

The conditions of women are various ; but it will suit the design of my discourse, to consider them in the two states, first, of prosperity, and secondly, of adversity. In both these states, there are some who neglect, and there are others who perform, works of charity. By taking a view of different characters, we shall see what effect the profession of godliness, or pious and christian principles, have on the heart, in rendering it tender and benevolent.

I. **T**H**E**R**E** are few, who do not desire to pass their lives in a state of prosperity. It is in particular the desire of young persons to be gay, and flourishing, and affluent ; to be exempt from toil ; to be able to command the services of others ; and to have power to gratify every wish, as soon as it is formed. But prosperity is a state of peculiar hazard. Where the mind is not imbued with piety ; where there is not a proper sense of the vanity of the world ; where there is a dread of looking at the miseries of human nature ; there is constant danger that the heart will become hard and selfish.

1. **W**E perceive the worst effects of prosperity in the woman, who from her infancy

has believed that she is born to command ; who has never been taught the lessons of humility, or the duty of humanity. It is not enough to say of her, that she makes no profession of godliness. In this cause she is not indifferent ; she has boldly taken a side, and is the undisguised enemy of religion. Her intelligence and her wit are employed in opposing and ridiculing christianity, the most absurd doctrine of which, as she endeavours to convince herself and others, is the doctrine of immortality. Affluent and powerful, she defies publick censure ; she cares not what the world says of her, if it only acknowledges that her means of expense are without limits. But though her fortune is so large as to require no increase, though she is negligent and prodigal ; still she is avaricious ; she withholds the hire of the labourer ; and she aims to augment her wealth by the mysteries of gaming, into which she deeply plunges. Her domesticks she views in the same light as the inferiour animals, which are in her service ; and them she regards as mere machines ; to which no other attention ought to be paid, than to prevent their wearing out ; but which are destitute of the nerves of feeling. Closed up in glass, she rides

securely, amidst the rains of March and the snows of December; and without pity beholds the pelting storm beat on the heads of the quadrupeds, which draw her splendid chariot, and the more unfortunate biped, who guides its rapid motion. For the poor of every description she has a supreme contempt. The persuasive tones of distress make no impression on her heart; but she banishes from her presence every object of pain, that her mirth and joy may receive no interruption. A faithful servant is seized with a burning fever, or pines with a lingering consumption. As he can now be of no further use, and has become an unpleasant spectacle, he is hurried out of her house, to die in a distant hovel of wretchedness. Though humbly implored, yet she will afford him no assistance; he is left to perish; and his orphan children would soon follow him to the grave, if the compassionate christians in the vicinity did not afford them an asylum.

You turn with disgust, and with a degree of incredulity, from the picture which I have exhibited to your view; but deformed as it is, every feature of it is copied from nature. We have to thank the goodness of God, that the character is as rare, as it is monstrous. The

prosperous, who lose sight of their Maker, or wilfully exclude him from their minds ; who think that they are not born for others, but for themselves only, that their wealth is given them to be spent on their own pleasures, and not to be imparted to the needy ; are constantly exposed to relapse into this lowest stage of depravity : Evil habits insensibly grow worse and worse ; and even woman, whose breast Heaven designed for the seat of soft compassion, may by degrees become thus selfish, proud, and inhuman.

2. I WOULD direct your attention to a less criminal, and more common, character. A woman has spent her youth without the practice of any remarkable virtue, or the commission of any thing which is flagrantly wrong ; and she is now united with a man, whose moral endowments are not more distinguished than her own ; but who is industrious, rich, and prosperous. Against the connexion she had no objection ; and it is what her friends entirely approved. His standing in life is respectable ; and they both pass along, without scandal, but without much approbation of their own consciences, and without any loud applause from others ; for the love of the world is the principle, which

predominates in their bosoms ; and the world never highly praises its own votaries. She is not absolutely destitute of the external appearance of religion ; for she constantly attends church in the afternoon, unless she is detained by her guests, and in the morning, unless she is kept at home by a slight indisposition, or unfavourable weather—which she supposes happen more frequently on sundays than other days—and which, it must be confessed, are several degrees less inconvenient and less unpleasant, than similar causes, which prevent her from going to a party of pleasure. This however is the end of her religion, such as it is ; for when she is at church, she does not think herself under obligations to attend to what is passing there, and to join in the worship of her Maker. She cannot with propriety be called a woman professing godliness ; for she makes no publick profession of love to her Saviour ; she does only what is customary ; and she would do still less, if the omission was decorous. Of domestick religion there is not even a semblance. As her husband does not think proper to pray with his family, so she does not think proper to pray with her children, or to instruct them in the doctrines and duties of christianity.

On the gospel however no ridicule nor contempt is cast ; and twice or thrice in a year, thanks are given to God at her table, that is, when a minister of religion is one of her guests. No time being consumed in devotion, much is left for the care of her house, to which she attends with worldly discretion. Her husband is industrious in acquiring wealth ; and she is equally industrious in spending it in such a manner, as to keep up a genteel appearance. She is prudent in managing her affairs, and suffers nothing to be wasted through thoughtlessness. In a word, she is a reasonable economist ; and there is a loud call, though she is affluent, that she should be so, as her expenses are necessarily great.

But she is an economist, not for the indigent, but for herself ; not that she may increase her means of doing good, but that she may adorn her person and the persons of her children with gold, and pearls, and costly array ; not that she may make a feast for the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind,* but that she may make a dinner or a supper for her rich neighbours, who will bid her again.† Though the preparations for these expensive

* Luke xiv. 13.

† verse 12.

dining and evening parties are more irksome, than the toils of the common labourer ; yet she submits to them with readiness ; for she loves the world, and she loves the approbation, which she hopes the world will bestow on the brilliancy of her decorations, and the exquisite taste of her high-seasoned viands and delicious wines. For this reputation she foregoes all the pleasure which she would feel, in giving bread to the fatherless, and in kindling the cheerful fire on the hearth of the aged widow. Thus, though she has many guests at her board, yet she is not hospitable ; and though she gives much away, yet she is not charitable ; for she gives to those, who stand in no need of her gifts.

I call not this woman completely selfish :— for she loves her family. She is sedulous in conferring on her daughters a polite education, and in settling them in the world as reputably, as she is established herself. For her sons she is still more anxious : because the sons of the rich are too much addicted to extravagance ; and she is desirous to preserve them from dissipations, which would tarnish the good name that she would have them enjoy in the world, and which above all would impair their fortunes. But here her affection

terminates. She loves nothing out of the bosom of her own family : for the poor and the wretched she has no regard. It is not strictly accurate to say, that she bestows nothing on them ; because she sometimes gives in public charities, when it would not be decent to withhold her donations ; and she sometimes gives more privately, when warmly solicited, and when all her friends and neighbours give : but in both cases she concedes her alms with a cold and unwilling mind. She considers it in the same light, as her husband views the taxes which he pays to the government, as a debt which must be discharged, but from which she would be glad to escape.

As a rational woman however must not be supposed to conduct herself without reason, she endeavours to find excuses for her omissions. Her first and great apology is, that she has poor relations to provide for. In this apology there is truth. Mortifying as she feels it to be, it must be confessed that she is clogged with indigent connexions, who are allowed to come to her house, when she has no apprehension that they will be seen by her wealthy visitants. As it would be a gross violation of decency, and what every one

would condemn as monstrous, for her to permit them to famish, when she is so able to relieve them, she does indeed bestow something on them; but she gives it sparingly, reluctantly, and haughtily. She flatters herself however, that she has now done every thing which can with justice be demanded of her, and that other indigent persons have not a claim on her bounty.

Another apology is, that the poor are vicious, and do not deserve her beneficence. By their idleness and intemperance they have brought themselves to poverty. They have little regard to truth; and though it must be allowed that their distress is not altogether imaginary; yet they are ever disposed to exaggerate their sufferings. Whilst they are ready to devour one another, they are envious toward the rich, and the kindness of their benefactors they commonly repay with ingratitude. To justify these charges, she can produce many examples; and she deems that they are sufficient excuses for her want of humanity. But she forgets in the meanwhile, that the christian woman, who sincerely loves God and her neighbour, in imitation of her heavenly Father, is kind to the

evil as well as the good,* to the unthankful as well as the grateful.

3. I PROCEED to a character still less criminal. A young woman, in a state of prosperity, is not yet much corrupted by the world, and has not entirely lost the simplicity and innocence of her early years. She has passed her childhood diligently and laudably, in the acquisition of those elegant accomplishments, which are so highly ornamental to the daughters of the rich ; and she is now the pride of her parents, and the object of general admiration. Of religion she has more appearance, than the character before described ; for she not only goes to church, but she attends there frequently and with pleasure. In truth, nothing, except a well-acted play or interesting novel, affords her so much delight, as a discourse, which is elegantly composed and eloquently delivered, and which sparkles with brilliant metaphors, and original similies. She is in particular charmed with sweet-toned, pathetick sermons, which fill her eyes with tears and her bosom with soft emotions. But for those plain discourses, which probe the human heart, which point out the danger of prosper-

* Matt. v. 45.

ity, and inculcate the necessity of self-denial and humility, she has very little relish. Humility in particular, that grace which is so essential in the character of a true christian, is a virtue to which she is a stranger. She entertains an exalted idea of her own dignity; and esteems nothing in this world so important, so sublime, so celestial, as a beautiful and accomplished young woman. But though she is not humble, yet she has somewhat of the appearance of humility; for she is modest in her thoughts and delicate in her manners. Religion with her is a matter of taste, but not of action. She makes judicious observations on the sermons which she hears, and on the prayers, as far as they are the subjects of criticism; but she neither prays with her heart, nor does she receive with meekness into her heart the engrafted word.* Of godliness she has not yet made a profession; for this is a business which belongs to the old and the wretched, and not to the young and the cheerful. Her behaviour to her family, and in society however, may in general be said to be without reproach. As she receives the homage of every one who approaches her, she is careful to return re-

* James i. 21.

spect ; and there is no want in her of that condescension, which is consistent with a high degree of self-complacence. Of candour she possesses, if not a liberal, yet not an unusual portion. She never calumniates any one ; and if she sometimes makes herself merry with the foibles of her absent friends, her wit is without malice, and is designed only to excite the mirth of the present company. In effect she loves, or at least thinks that she loves, her friends with uncommon ardour ; and her private letters to them are replete with the warmest expressions of affection, with the most generous and disinterested sentiments. For charity she entertains a fond regard. Charity, that divine nymph, which descends from the skies, with an eye beaming with benignity, a cheek glowing with compassion, a foot light as a zephyr silently stepping near the couch of anguish, and a soft hand gently opened for the solace of the daughters of wo ; charity, which she cannot figuratively describe, without literally describing the loveliness of her own face, and the graces of her own person ; charity is so charming a form, that no mind, she thinks, can contemplate her without delightful emotions. Her refined taste in benevolence, and

the books which she has read, teach her highly to value this godlike virtue ; and she impatiently longs for an opportunity of displaying her liberality in such a magnificent style, as to overwhelm with gratitude the object of her bounty. But the sufferer, whom she has imaged in her mind, is as elegant as herself ; and though poor, yet without any of the mean concomitants of poverty. For the real poor, who daily pass before her eyes, who are gross and vulgar, rude in their speech, base in their sentiments, and squalid in their attire, she has little sympathy. Farthings would comfort them, but she gives them nothing ; for her ambition is to pour handfuls of guineas into the lap of poor Maria, a lovely and unfortunate girl, who would thank her in pathetick and polished language. Thus she passes her youth, praising and affecting benevolence, but without the actual performance of good works ; and should not her heart in season be touched with piety and christian charity, when she enters the conjugal state, she sinks into the cold and selfish matron, whom I have already exposed to your view.

SUCH are the prosperous women, who adorn themselves with gold, and pearls, and costly array, but not with good works ; who

are vain and worldly-minded, and not meek and humble ; who live for themselves, but have no pity for the poor. May I not be permitted to address them in the bold language of the Prophet Isaiah ? Tremble ye women, that are at ease ; hear my voice, ye careless daughters.* These are not the steps, which lead to heaven. But the liberal woman deviseth liberal things ; and by liberal things only can she stand† without dismay before the judgment seat of Christ.‡

4. AFTER contemplating the worldly-minded and the selfish, we turn our eyes with pleasure on the pious and benevolent woman. As she professes and believes the christian religion, she is persuaded that the best, the only foundation of the love of her neighbour is the love of God ; or, as St. John teaches, that he who loveth God, will love his brother also.§ She erects therefore the superstructure of her good works on the basis of piety. For the affluence, with which Heaven has blessed her, she is thankful ; but she has a proper sense of the danger of her situation. She is therefore constantly on her guard to

* Is. xxxii. 11. 9. † Is. xxxii. 8. ‡ Matt. xxv.

§ 1 John iv. 21.

preserve herself from yielding to the temptations, to which she is peculiarly exposed; and she endeavours to convert what is the cause of the corruption and misery of so many, into the means of moral improvement and advancement in the way of salvation. As she is afraid of nothing so much as of forgetting her Maker, she directs her thoughts perpetually toward him; and as she fears that she may become vain and haughty, she is assiduous in cultivating the virtue of humility. She never loses sight of the solemn truth, that she must die; that the grave is the end of the rich, as well as the poor; that there the prosperous must lie down as well as the wretched; and that after death she must appear at the bar of God, where rank and fortune will be of no avail. Firmly persuaded of the vanity of sublunary objects, there is nothing which attaches her strongly to the world. She knows that the present life is a state of probation, in which she has to perform diligently and faithfully the part, which her Maker has assigned her; and that she must do all the good which she can. She determines therefore to devote her wealth to the glory of God, and the promotion of happiness among his rational offspring.

In her youth, whilst she is the delight, the joy of her parents, of her brothers, and of the servants of the family, by her obedience, her affection, her affability, condescension, and tenderness, she looks abroad for objects to whom she may impart consolation. She bestows meat and drink on the hungry and thirsty traveller. She clothes the naked poor with garments, which she makes up with her own hands. She carries cordials to her sick neighbours ; and as she sits by the side of their beds, her kind words infuse healing balm into their wounded minds. From the liberal allowance, which her indulgent parents commit to her discretion, she contrives to save a large portion, which she devotes to the support and education of one or two orphan children. I do not here delineate a fiction ; I speak of a woman, who once existed, but who now is in the tomb ; of a woman, who thus sanctified a state of prosperity by the practice of good works.

The christian woman, after she is established in life, and is no longer under the control of her parents, but has a more ample use of the gifts of fortune, pursues the same benevolent plan. Convinced that no person, who does not deliberate and reason, can con-

duct herself discreetly and virtuously, she determines to make herself perfectly acquainted with her duty, and to guide her heart and practice, not by instinct, not by enthusiastick and sudden impulses, but by order and rule. Judiciously weighing the relative importance of the several actions, which she is called to perform, she pays her first attention to those which are most essential. These are the duties that arise from the relations, in which she stands as a wife, a mother, and a mistress. But having discharged the obligations, which she owes to her husband, her children, and her domesticks ; having provided for her household, and been scrupulously just in all her transactions ; having paid the labourer his hire, and remunerated the services of the industrious ; she bends her soul to deeds of charity. As economy is one of the best supports of liberality, she is careful that in her house nothing should be wasted, which will afford comfort and relief to the poor. But she does not merely feed the hungry with the crumbs, which fall from her table, or clothe the naked with the garments, which she can no longer wear : she appropriates a certain part of her income to beneficence ; and she regards it as a sacred treasure, which she

cannot afterwards divert to her personal use. It would be impossible for me to enumerate all the benefits, which this fund diffuses around her. It beams on the chamber of the widow, and causes her heart to sing for joy ; it carries light into the dark cells of the prison, restores the debtor to his family, and brings tears of gratitude into the hard eye of the condemned criminal. She devotes, not only her wealth, but her time, her talents, her reason, to works of charity. Convinced that the miseries of the poor frequently spring from their vices, she exerts herself to remove the fatal cause. Without the haughty assumption of superiority, but with a mild and persuasive voice, when she imparts her bounty, she also imparts her good advice ; and so eloquently does she plead the cause of virtue, and such force is there in her arguments, that she has sometimes the happiness of finding, that she has not only relieved the wants of the poor, but that she has reclaimed them from the errors of their ways ; that she has not only preserved their bodies from death, but that she has saved their souls alive.* She is still more anxious to prevent wretched-

* Ezek. xviii. 27.

ness and sin, than she is to provide a remedy for them, after they exist. She therefore highly approves, and zealously promotes, such institutions as that, which occasions our present meeting, and which has this benevolent purpose in view. She rejoices that she is aided by other christian friends, in producing what she cannot effect by her single power : in snatching the helpless infant from the jaws of penury ; in assuming the place of a mother to those, whose parents are no more ; in placing them in an asylum, where they are out of the reach of the temptations, to which the female poor are peculiarly exposed ; where they are instructed to love and serve their Creator ; where, without filling their minds with extravagant expectations, they are taught to be industrious, discreet, and good ; and where, in fine, instead of being nuisances in the world, they are qualified to act a useful part in society. Whilst she thus diffuses blessings around her, the voice of gratitude attends her steps ; but she drinks not in with thirsty ear the flowing sound. Satisfied with the approbation of her heavenly Father, she seeks not the praise of men. She thinks little of herself, and lives not for herself ; but her whole soul is devoted to her family, to the poor, and to God.

II. I HAVE NOW completed the delineations, which I purposed to make in the first part of my discourse ; and I would request your renewed attention, whilst I proceed to the second, and exhibit women in a state of adversity, as neglecting or performing good works.

1. WHEN adversity falls on a woman, who is destitute of religion, it sometimes renders her heart more hard and insensible. As she refuses to make use of the remedies, which the gospel points out ; as she sees not the hand of God, and regards not her affliction as coming from a merciful Father ; as she turns not her eye on the hope of immortality, and does not calm her grief with christian patience and pious resignation ; she has no other resource than worldly considerations. She may endeavour to reason away her sorrow by fallacious arguments and false philosophy ; but should she succeed, the only effect of the attempt will be, that she will ossify her nerves ; that she will lose all love, all sympathy, all that renders life interesting and society precious. She may fly to the amusements and dissipations, which the world affords ; she may, amidst the tumults of pleasure, make haste to forget the friend, with whom she pass-

ed the flower of her years—and even the tender infant, who a few weeks ago smiled in her face, and whose marble form is now concealed by the clods of the valley ;—but, in the moments of silence and retirement, her breast will be filled with murmuring and discontent, and with envy against those, who are more prosperous than herself. In the heart of a woman, who makes so ill a use of adversity, no seat for charity can be found. The poor and every object of distress are chased away from her sight, as recalling recollections which it is painful to indulge ; and instead of being rendered more compassionate by her afflictions, she becomes more cold and inhuman.

2. OF the character, which I have thus drawn, there are examples in the world ; but the temper, which is manifested in it, is not the usual effect of calamity. For adversity not only in general makes a good heart better, but it also frequently makes a bad heart good. In truth, affliction is the school, where the lesson of humanity is the most thoroughly learned, and the most deeply impressed on the soul. When, my christian friends, you contemplate a young woman, at her first entrance into life, and, on the one hand, regard the sorrows, to which she is almost

unavoidably exposed, she is with you the object of the tenderest pity. When you perceive that she is as gay as she is innocent ; and discover from her conversation, that her bosom beats high with ardent expectation of felicity, that the face of nature is every where, in her romantick vision, covered with novelty and delight ; and reflect that ere long she will be called to mourn—you feel a painful reluctance in damping her joy by a disclosure of the simple and melancholy truth. But when, on the other hand, you anticipate the moral and religious improvement, which she may derive from her afflictions, and how pious, humble, gentle, compassionate, and charitable she may become, the adversity, which she is to suffer, is no longer considered as an evil, but is converted into a positive good, as it undoubtedly is in the eyes of the Father of the universe.

Even in her early years she is sometimes compelled to pass through the gloomy vale of misery ; and the loss of a mother at an age, when she requires the attention and love, which a mother only can bestow, overcloud her mind with the darkest sorrow. The afflictions of the young, however, if they were to end with youth, might in time be

forgotten ; but they are the preludes of griefs, which are still more poignant. She commences the career of domestick life, united with a man whom her heart and reason approve ; the prospect before her is pleasant ; but in a moment he is snatched from her sight. She has reared up a daughter, and enriched her understanding with many accomplishments, and her soul with many virtues ; but when the beautiful flower is expanding to the sun, it is nipt by the frost of disease, and all its sweets and all its glory are laid in the dust. She has a son, of whom, if it was lawful for a human being to be proud of any thing, she would have cause to boast ; for he is manly and brave, generous and discreet, and above all affectionate and obedient to her ; but neither her tears nor prayers can retain his breath ; he falls ; and with him all worldly hope expires. Sometimes death is so merciless, that he extinguishes the lives of all her children ; and though one darling child may be spared a few years after the rest, yet at last, to adopt the pathetick language of the sacred scripture, the only coal which remains is quenched, and she is left without a name or remainder on earth.* These representa-

* 2 Sam. xiv. 7.

tions, distressing as they may be, are not high coloured paintings ; they are events, which happen every day.

But the woman, who professes and believes the christian religion, whose soul rests on God, stands firm amidst the wreck of all her earthly bliss ; and the more she endures the collisions of adversity, the brighter do her virtues shine. For she beholds the hand of a Father and Friend, all whose dispensations, however dark they may appear, are wise and gracious ; and she believes that she is immortal, and that in a better world she shall find ample compensation for all her sufferings. We have seen her, when sorely bruised, look up to heaven with hope, with patience, and with resignation ; and whilst she has humbly prayed, that God would remove his hand from her, she has been ready to receive a still deeper wound if it was the will of him who made her. A heart thus meek and pious, which so sincerely and ardently loves the Supreme Being, is the place in which charity takes up its favourite abode. Of the woman, who possesses it, it is the desire and delight to do good. Whilst the noise of mirth passes unheeded by, her ear is open to the notes of grief. She listens to the plaintive sound, and repairs

with ready feet to the object from whom it proceeds. She imparts to the afflicted the light, which the gospel has shed into her own heart. She calms, and comforts, and supports, the mourning widow ; she weeps with, and soothes, and consoles, the bereaved parent. In her the poor, the sick, and the distressed find a constant friend ; and fatherless children are the objects of her tenderness and care.

I KNOW not how far the portraits, which I have drawn in this discourse, may suit the characters of any persons who are present ; but as the last, my beloved sisters, is most applicable to your situation, I would hope that it is also a just picture of your hearts. In contemplating the faces of the members of your society, though I perceive some, whose prosperity has yet been without interruption ; yet I see many more, who have passed through adversity. I behold the widow ; the daughter, whose parents are in the tomb ; the mother, whose child is dead ; the sister who cannot discern among the youths of this assembly the face of her beloved brother. That you should seek for consolation in the practice of good works, is what might be expected. A sight of the tender orphans, whom you have rescued from want,

from misery, and from temptation, must in particular sooth your agitated bosoms. Their helpless age must interest your compassion ; and sweet must their infantile voices sound in the affectionate ears. May the best of Beings reward you for your kindness to them ; and may you derive from your charitable exertions a remedy for your own sorrows.

But you must not terminate your labours here ; you must persevere in well doing without relaxation. As you profess yourselves the children of the God of love, you are bound to imitate his unlimited goodness ; as you call yourselves the disciples of the benevolent Jesus, you are obliged to copy every part of his merciful example. When he was on earth, he constantly went about doing good.* He not only took up young children in his arms and blessed them ;† but he healed the sick ; he expelled from the mind the demons of doubt and despair ; he bound up the broken-hearted ; he opened the prison doors to them who were in chains ; he comforted all who mourned.‡ As far as you can, you should go and do likewise. Wretched objects surround you on all sides ; but with the means and

*Acts x. 38. † Mark x. 16. ‡ Is. lxi. 1. Luke iv. 18.

talents, which you possess, it is in your power to lessen the evils which they endure. You have only piously and courageously to resolve, that you will forget yourselves; that you will not live for yourselves, but for others; that wherever the sound of distress strikes your ears, you will fly to its relief; and that you will not voluntarily add any thing to the mass of wo, which may load the earth. This as christians you ought to do; for the great object of the christian religion is to promote the love of God and the love of man. This is the point, in which all agree; and which has been acknowledged to be important in all ages of the church, as well in those which have been dark, as in those which are enlightened. This, if we may credit St. Paul, will never fail. Prophecies will fail, tongues will cease, and knowledge will vanish away; but charity, or love, will continue forever. Faith, it is true, abideth; and hope abideth; but love is the greatest of the three.* For when misery sprang up out of the earth, the Father of the human race, who pitied his erring offspring, and graciously determined to restore them to happiness, sent from heaven these three

* 1 Cor. xiii. 8, 13.

angelick messengers—faith, hope, and love. Faith sang the wonders of redemption ; and resounded through the air, Glory to the Most High, for the Saviour is come ; peace on earth ; forgiveness to the penitent ! Hope expanded wide the gates of immortality ; and disclosed to the enraptured eye of man the regions of everlasting bliss. But love, the most potent of them all, seized his willing hand ; and ascended with him, on rapid wings, to the throne of God.

SERMON V.



PREACHED ON THE SUNDAY BEFORE ADVENT.

ECCLES. xii. 13.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter ; fear God, and keep his commandments ; for this is the whole duty of man.

THE sermon, in which one subject is discussed, one doctrine explained, one vice condemned, or one virtue recommended, is allowed by judicious persons to be the most intelligible and the most useful. The reason is, that the attention is distracted amidst a variety of particulars, when more than one subject is treated in the same discourse. But though this reason is undoubtedly of weight, and the rule which is founded on it is highly proper, yet it may be necessary sometimes to deviate from it. It may be necessary sometimes to show what is the substance of religion and morality. It may be necessary sometimes to treat the several duties together, that we may point out their connexion with each

other. In fine, it may sometimes be necessary to do, what I purpose to do at present, to exhibit in miniature the sum of what has been spoken in many discourses.

On this day, which closes our religious year, I will take the liberty to recapitulate the substance of the sermons, which I have preached to you since Whitsunday, and to deliver a comprehensive exhortation on several important duties of prudence, virtue and piety.

THE fear of the Lord, says the wise man, is the beginning of wisdom.* I exhort you therefore, my brethren, in the first place, to build the whole of your duty on the foundation of piety. Love God above every other object ; and dread the violation of his commands as the worst of evils. Elevate your minds with the contemplation of his attributes. Let his power and wisdom excite your admiration ; let his justice inspire you with fear ; let his goodness fill your hearts with joy. Contemplate him, not only as your creator and judge, but as your tender father and best friend. Never speak of religion in a light and irreverent manner ; and dare not to blaspheme the Majesty of heaven ; for remember that God

* Prov. ix. 10.

will no hold him guiltless, who taketh his name in vain.* Let not the fear of being thought superstitious induce you to conceal the devotion, which glows in your heart. Consecrate your bodies as well as your souls to God.† Reverence the day of sacred rest, which in all christian countries is devoted to religion. Constantly attend publick worship, unless prevented by necessity or the calls of mercy ; but go to church, not for the sake of criticising the language of the preacher, who being, like yourselves, a weak and imperfect mortal, stands in need of all your candour ; and not for the sake of being charmed with the harmonious periods and ornamental diction of a splendid oration ; but for the sake of being instructed in your duty, and of paying homage to the Supreme Being. Let the Father of all the families of the earth be publicly worshipped each day in your houses ; and let your fervent and grateful prayers frequently ascend in secret to him, who seeth in secret, and who will reward you openly.‡ In a word, let God be in all your thoughts. Consider yourselves as ever in his presence, and as acting under his eye. This considera-

* *Exod. xx. 7.*† *Rom. xii. 1.*‡ *Matth. vi. 6.*

tion will preserve you from sin, and animate you to the practice of every good work.

Next to God, let your Saviour Jesus Christ be the object of your ardent affection. It is the happiness of the christian, that he has received his religion from a person, who has not only taught him a complete system of duty, but has also established the whole by his own immaculate example. Learn of Jesus what the Lord your God has required of you ; and you will obtain rest unto your souls. Obey all his commands ; comply with all the ordinances which he has instituted, particularly with the sacred rite of the Lord's supper, which was ordained to commemorate the highest instance of his love to you, his submitting to death for the salvation of mankind. You feel it to be your duty to be grateful to your benefactors : is it not then your duty in a supereminent degree to be grateful to your kind friend, to your generous benefactor, who has done and suffered so much for your benefit ? Let not the sophistry of infidels shake your faith, or induce you to reject the christian religion, before you have carefully examined its evidence. If you attend to it with seriousness and impartiality, you will probably believe that it is a system which came from

heaven ; and you will submit to the authority of God, who has established its divinity by many infallible signs, by many convincing arguments. When you are persuaded of the truth of the christian religion, dare to profess it openly. Be not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, even in an age of infidelity. Study the doctrines of divine revelation, as they are contained in the New Testament, carefully rejecting the corrupt additions, which have been made to them by the craft of the designing, or the weakness of the superstitious. Let your faith be simple and rational ; equally removed from the two extremes, of credulity on the one hand, and skepticism on the other. Be neither bigoted nor indifferent in maintaining your religious opinions. In a word, as the disciples of Christ, be liberal in your principles, but piously strict, and virtuously scrupulous in your practice.

AFTER the love of God and your Saviour, the most important duties of man are the relative duties. To few of you an opportunity is afforded of performing brilliant acts of virtue ; but all of you can fulfil the common obligations of life, by which the happiness of the world will be as effectually promoted.

Say not then, that the commandment, which God commands you, is hidden from you, and that it is far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto you, in your mouth, and in your heart, in your house, and in your daily walks, that you may do it.* If you act well in the relations of husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister, master and servant, ruler and subject, you have then performed the greatest part of the duty which God requires of you.

I exhort you, who are an husband, in the words of St. Paul, to love your wife, even as you love yourself.† Give honour to her as the more delicate vessel :‡ respect the delicacy of her frame, and the delicacy of her mind. Continue through life the same attention, the same manly tenderness, which in youth gained her affections. Reflect that though her bodily charms have decayed, as she has advanced

* Deut. xxx. 11—14. † Ephes. v. 33. ‡ 1 Pet. iii. 7.

in age, yet that her mental charms have increased ; and that though novelty is worn off, yet that habit and a thousand acts of kindness have strengthened your mutual friendship. Devote yourself to her ; and after the hours of business, let the pleasures which you most highly prize, be found in her society.

I exhort you, who are a wife, to be gentle and condescending to your husband. Let the influence, which you possess over him, arise from the mildness of your manners and the discretion of your conduct. Whilst you are careful to adorn your person with neat and clean apparel—for no woman can long preserve affection, if she is negligent in this point—be still more attentive in ornamenting your mind with meekness and peace, with cheerfulness and good humour. Lighten the cares, and chase away the vexations, to which men in their commerce with the world are unavoidably exposed, by rendering his house pleasant to your husband. Keep at home ; let your employments be domestick, and your pleasures domestick.

To both husband and wife I say : Keep a strict guard over your tongues, that you never utter any thing which is rude, contemptuous, or severe ; and over your tempers, that you

never appear sullen and morose. Endeavour to be perfect yourselves, but expect not too much from each other. If any offence arises, forgive it ; and think not a human being can be exempt from faults.

I exhort you, parents, to love your children. Make them as happy as is consistent with innocence. Remember that the periods of childhood and youth soon pass away ; and that they ought not to be deprived of any satisfactions, which of right belong to them. Let your government be mild and equable. Provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.* Irritate not their tempers with severity ; torture not their hearts with cruelty. The love of power is so natural to man, that even parents are in danger of displaying too much in the management of their children, and of exacting from them too slavish a submission. The wills of children should be regulated, but not broken. Be careful, therefore, whilst you aim to make them modest and obedient, that you do not render them diffident and servile ; that you do not stifle manliness of sentiment, and heroism of conduct ; that you do not disqualify

* Col. iii. 21.

them from serving their country as seamen and soldiers, as statesmen and orators. But in avoiding this extreme, guard at the same time against an excessive indulgence, an error, which is equally pernicious. Do not, for the sake of gratifying them in a present moment, lay up for them many future years of bitter repentance. Though the minds of children may be innocent, yet they are not, previous to instruction, positively virtuous. They are a soil, where every kind of seed will vegetate. Now the air is filled with the seeds of vice : Pluck up therefore the weeds of evil, as soon as they appear. Be constantly employed in cultivating the manners, the understandings, and the hearts of your offspring. Let the hours, which are not spent in the schools of judicious and enlightened preceptors, be passed under your own eyes. Let not your children be educated in the street, where they will be in constant danger of learning impure and profane language, and of becoming rude, mischievous, and quarrelsome. In fine, bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ;* make them pious christians and good men. Re-

* Ephes. vi. 4.

member that you are entrusted with an important charge ; and that the welfare of your country, and the prosperity of the church depend on your domestick discipline ; for the best and wisest laws, and the most rational and instructive preaching avail little in a country, where family government is generally neglected.

I exhort you, children, to love, obey, and honour your parents. Let your mother in particular, who, in your tender years, has the more immediate charge of you, be, on earth, the most sacred object of your affections. Let her be your first friend and chief confidant. Conceal nothing from her : but make her acquainted with the company which you keep, the books which you read, and even the faults which you commit. Happy is the son, and particularly happy is the daughter, who is not afraid to communicate to her mother her most secret thoughts. Whilst she remains thus artless and undisguised, she is in little danger of losing her innocence. Children, obey your parents in your youth ; but when you are no longer under their care, let not your reverence abate. If by the providence of God you should rise above them in the world, grow not ashamed of them. When

they are bending under the infirmities of old age, still continue to treat them with respect, as well as affection.

I exhort you, brothers and sisters, to love each other. Live in peace ; and let not jealousy and contention embitter the sources of domestic happiness.

I exhort you, masters, to treat your servants with kindness. Whilst, on the one hand, you are careful to maintain your authority, on the other hand, be still more on your guard against contempt and haughtiness. Exact not more of them than their strength permits. Allow them hours for recreation and for the public worship of their Maker. Pay them their wages punctually. Remember that there is no difference between you and them, except what arises from the accidental circumstances of fortune ; and that though they are your inferiours in situation, yet that they are your equals as immortal beings, and as the children of God.

I exhort you, servants, to be subject to your masters. Be sober, diligent, and faithful. Defraud them not of their property ; defraud them not of their time. Be not eye-servants ;* but conduct yourselves as the

disciples of Christ; and forget not, that though your masters may be absent, yet that you are always in the presence of your Maker.

I exhort you, rulers, to be just men, and to rule in the fear of God.

I exhort you, citizens, to pray for the peace and prosperity of your native country. Respect your rulers, and obey the laws of the government. Consider the taxes, which are assessed by legal authority, as a debt which you justly owe. Attend the publick meetings of your fellow citizens on all important occasions; give your vote, whenever you have a right to do it; and exert your influence in favour of wise and good men. If you are called to exercise a publick office, for which you are qualified, let not the love of ease, false modesty, or the fear of the ingratitude of a capricious multitude prevent you from accepting it; but serve your country to the best of your abilities, despising censure, and overlooking every personal inconvenience, whilst you are conscious that you are doing your duty.

I EXHORT you, men, to take heed to yourselves. Be temperate and chaste. Go not to the houses of riot and drunkenness; fre-

quent not the company of the impure and debauched. Let not your corruptible bodies press down your souls ;* but subject all your appetites and passions to the dominion of reason.

As a branch of temperance, and as promoting your own comfort and the comfort of others, I would recommend to you to be neat in your persons, your dress, and your houses. Cleanliness has been styled a half virtue ; and by the power of association, it naturally produces purity of mind.

As another branch of temperance, and as in particular conducing to health and usefulness, I would advise you to retire to rest long before midnight, and to accustom yourselves to breathe the salutary air of the morning. This practice will furnish you with many bright hours in which you can make the most valuable acquisitions of knowledge, virtue, and piety.

Be industrious in performing the duties of your stations, industrious in obtaining manual skill, industrious in enriching your understandings with useful knowledge. Whilst you live, you must work ; or suffer the

* *Wisd.* ix. 15.

consequence, of becoming torpid in body, and discontented in mind.

Walk circumspectly ;* live by rule ; divide the day into regular portions, and assign to each its proper employment.

Be honest in all your dealings ; true in your words ; faithful to your engagements. If you have raised expectations, even by your looks and general course of behaviour, though you have not promised in words, be careful to fulfil them.

Whatever your income may be, endeavour to live within it ; not because you may provide against the infirmities of old age, though this is much to be wished for ; and not because you may have something to leave to your children, though this is also desirable ; but that you may keep your mind unembarrassed, that you may have power to perform all your engagements, that you may acquire the reputation, and enjoy the happiness, of being punctual. Settle your accounts regularly, and never suffer them to get into confusion. Think nothing your own, until you have paid for it. Do not fall into the mean habit of borrowing small sums of your friends

*Ephes. v. 15.

and neighbours, and of never returning them. Wear your old garments, if you are not able to buy new ones. The necessaries of life you must have, though to obtain them you are compelled to anticipate your earnings; but never run in debt for its pleasures, or even its comforts.

If you are rich, be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.* Appropriate a certain part of your income to the poor; and let your charities be governed by method and discretion. Be not satisfied with giving to those, who ask you; but seek out objects of distress. Be active and liberal in works which may promote the comfort and welfare of your fellow citizens.

If you are poor, be not dispirited. Increase your diligence and sobriety, and rely on divine Providence, who will take care of you. Fret not yourselves at the sight of the rich and great; but content yourselves with the moderate pleasures, which you can certainly obtain, if you are industrious.

If you have seen better days, and are by misfortune, or by extravagance and imprudence, reduced to indigence, manfully reject

* 1 Tim. vi. 18.

every temptation to indulgence. Curtail your expenses within the bounds of simple necessities. If you have received a reluctant discharge from your creditors, and are able afterwards, without distressing your families, to pay them their full demands, remember, if you do not, that you are discharged, neither in the court of honour, the court of conscience, nor the court of heaven.

But if you are a creditor, be merciful. Make due allowance for former habits, and for the frailty of human nature.

Envy none their superiour endowments, whether bodily or mental. If you build your happiness on the good opinion of others, if you love praise, envy, unless you are constantly on your guard, will enter your bosoms. Wherever you see beauty, talents, or popularity, you will be grieved that they are not your own. But courageously contend against the beginnings of so foul a vice. Whatever you think, let not your thoughts be audible. Whisper not a word of evil against those who excel you ; but compel your hearts to rejoice at their success. Accustom yourselves to a generous manner of speaking of those, who outshine you ; and with whatever reluctance you do this at first,

you will in time bring over your feelings to the side of your reason.

Whilst you do not calumniate any one, who possesses more merit than yourselves, have too much dignity of sentiment to slander those, who, you suppose, have foibles and vices, from which you believe yourselves exempt.

Avoid pride, as an odious ; and vanity as a contemptible vice. Be humble ; but talk not of your humility, nor affect it in your external deportment ; for, like certain volatile spirits, the virtue entirely evaporates, when exposed to the air. Let your humility appear chiefly to your heavenly Father, who is acquainted with every motion of your hearts.

Let there be no affectation in any part of your character ; but let sincerity govern all your actions. Be simple and undisguised, without any secrets and mysteries.

Be artless and unreserved in conversation, but at the same time discreet. Talk not too much ; for you may repent of your rash speeches ; but will seldom have cause to repent of your silence.

Cover all your good qualities with the veil of modesty. Leave them to be discover-

ed by others, and never ostentatiously display them.

Whilst you boast not of your good qualities, be constantly on your guard against your prevailing passion. Among all the sins, there is in particular one, which most easily besets you. There is a weak part in your mind, which you must endeavour to strengthen by all the means of reason and religion. Whether it is idleness, intemperance, irascibility, envy, pride, or covetousness, fortify yourselves against the attack of the enemy. Leave not the place a moment exposed, but defend it night and day. You may yet stand; but take heed, lest you fall.* Be not high-minded, but fear.†

Let moderation preside over all your conduct. Avoid extremes; and balance one virtue by another. There is scarcely any action, however good it may be in itself, which, if carried too far, does not degenerate into a vice.

Be moderate in particular to your expectations of earthly felicity; for this world is a scene of trial, and contains sorrow as well as joy.

* 1 Cor. x. 12.

† Rom. xi. 20

But give not way to a discontented spirit. Happiness does not universally prevail, but it predominates even on earth. God is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.* There are many pleasures of the senses, of which you may innocently partake ; and they are daily and hourly renewed. You have the pleasures of the imagination and understanding, of conversation and friendship, of sympathy and devotion. If you are young, you have indulgent parents to provide for your wants ; if in middle life, you have children to delight you ; if advanced to old age, you have still your children for your companions, and in addition, grandchildren to call out your fondest affections.

Perhaps however, few of you are quite so happy, as you might be, because your hearts are not entirely free from the root of bitterness. Let me therefore exhort you to shun contention, and to live peaceably with all men.† If you have had enemies, and they repent, forgive them ;‡ and even if they do not repent, do not cherish resentment in your heart.§ You are not obliged to take them to your bosom

* Ps. cxlv. 9.

† Rom. xii. 18.

‡ Luke xvii. 3.

§ Matth. v. 44.

but you are not allowed to hate them ; and if you are true christians, you will return good for evil.*

One powerful sentiment, that will check the anger which might otherwise arise in you, is this, that you are mortal. It is vain to feel resentment against a man, who in a few years or months will be consigned with you to the same common dust. In truth the serious reflection on death is a preservative against almost every vice. You will therefore frequently have it in your minds. It will guard you against the snares of prosperity, and console you under adversity. Though you are rich, and great, and healthy, and popular, and eloquent, and wise, when you remember that there will soon be an end of all your prosperity in the dark and silent grave, you will not be puffed up with conceit. On the other hand, if you are poor, and mean, and sick, and despised, and friendless, and destitute, you will reflect that death is the cure of every evil. It restores your health and youth ; it relieves you from every embarrassment ; it removes every mortification. It brings you again into the presence of the beloved friends

* Rom. xii. 21.

whom you have lost. It seats you in a place of safety, where temptation cannot assault, where care cannot vex you ; where there will not be either disease, or pain, or sin, or misery. Be mindful then that you must die. But reflect at the same time, that the virtuous and pious only can have hope in death. When Jesus has restored to you life, you will be called before the bar of your judge ; where you will have to give an account for every idle* and vain word, which you have uttered, for every impious and malignant deed, which you have committed ; and if you are found guilty, you will be consigned to a place of wretchedness, from which you cannot expect to be released, till the uttermost farthing is paid,† till the infinitely wise and gracious purposes, which God designs in your punishment, are fully accomplished.

In fine, be ever mindful of the end for which you are created, which is—the unbounded love of God, and disinterested benevolence to all his rational creatures. The christian religion has this great object in view ; and our Saviour has forcibly expressed it in the following words : Thou shalt love the Lord thy

* Matt. xii. 36.

† Matth. v. 36.

God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength : and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* This is the perfection and happiness of your nature, a perfection to which few have yet attained. But do you, my brethren, heroically resolve to aim at this height. As you have received of your instructors, how you ought to walk and please God, abound more and more.† Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.‡ Strive continually to excel yourselves ; and then will that animated happiness, which dwells in aspiring minds, still accompany you, and reward your progress.

THIS, my brethren, is the sum of what I have spoken to you during the past six months. I confess that it is nothing more than an imperfect sketch of your duty. But happily you have in your hands a discourse, which is able to supply all my deficiencies. This admirable discourse you have often read ; but I would request you to read

* Mark xii. 30, 31. † 1 Thess. iv. 1.

‡ Philip. iii. 13, 14.

it once more, and to impress its precepts deeply on your hearts. The discourse, to which I refer, is Christ's sermon on the mount. Never man spake like this man.* If you sincerely practice what he taught, you will stand like a house, which is built on a rock.† Though the rains descend, though the floods come, though the winds blow, it will not fall : Temptation will not shake you, affliction will not overwhelm you, death itself will not alarm you ; but after this short life is ended, you will be found heirs of glory, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ ;‡ who will place you with him on his throne,§ where you will reign with him for ever and ever.

* John vii. 46.

† Matth. vii. 24.

‡ Rom. viii. 17.

§ Rev. iii. 21.

SERMON VI.

PREACHED ON CHRISTMAS-DAY.

ISAIAH ix. 6.

*Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given;—
and his name shall be called—the Prince of
Peace.*

THE verse, of which the text is a part, is generally viewed by christians as a prophecy of our Saviour. Though the whole deserves attention, yet the consideration of it would lead me into a long, and what would be to many of my auditors uninteresting, discussion respecting the true reading of the passage, as well as its meaning. The words, which I have selected, are acknowledged by all to be a genuine part of the sacred text, for they are found in all the copies, and in all the versions; and they appear to me to afford ample matter for more than one discourse.—Jesus Christ is the prince of peace in two senses: the first is, that God by him has

reconciled us to himself :* and the second is, that the Saviour is the author of inward peace, or tranquility of heart. It is to this last sense, that I purpose to confine myself.

When the child was born, when the son was given, peace on earth was proclaimed by the angels ;† and our saviour himself declared, that by him we obtain rest to our souls.‡ Now the blessed effect is produced by the practice of all the virtues, which christianity enjoins ; but principally by its peculiar virtues, humility, piety, and benevolence. That the christian religion commands these virtues, is what I need not undertake to prove at large. It will be sufficient to cite two texts. In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves.*—Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.† The author of our religion taught the same precepts by his example. He practised humility, for he was meek and lowly in heart ;‡ piety, for he always did those things which pleased his Father ;§ benevolence, for he went about doing good.¶

* 2 Cor. v. 18. † Luke ii. 14. ‡ Matth. xi. 29.

* Philip. ii. 2. † Matth. xxii. 37, 39.

‡ Matth. xi. 29. § John viii. 29. ¶ Aets x. 38.

The religions, which existed in the world before the birth of Jesus, either did not teach, or misunderstood, or did not lay sufficient stress on these virtues. The morals of the heathens were in a deplorable state. I would not here, in imitation of certain controversial writers, exaggerate the faults of the ancients ; for by doing this I should contradict many records, which still exist, and should obtain no credit with the candid and impartial. We ought not to take the character of the heathens from satirical poems, from the descriptions given of a Roman emperor, or a Roman emperor's wife ; because the poets have always claimed the privilege of feigning, for the sake of producing an interesting effect : But we ought to take their character from grave historians and moral writers, and from the publick sentiment, in whatever way we come to its knowledge. Thus if an act of fraud or cruelty was inveighed against by an orator, we have reason to think, that it excited the indignation of his hearers, as well as our indignation in the present age. If an act of civility, or a humane sentiment, was applauded by the spectators at a theatre, there is ground for believing that they understood civility and humanity, and that they some-

times put them in practice. The heathens were acquainted with several of the duties of man ; and without doubt they were faithfully observed by many. But that they had little knowledge of the peculiar virtues of the gospel, is certain. For humility they had scarcely a name ; of benevolence they had so imperfect an idea, that their best moral writers inculcate only a dignified kind of selfishness ; and there could have been no true piety among them, as they were ignorant of the God who is its object. Being then in a great measure destitute of these three virtues, humility, piety, and benevolence, they could not have enjoyed true tranquillity.

1. For, first, there is no peace without humility. As the proud man despises almost every person whom he meets, he consequently does not delight in him ; that is, from another man he derives no pleasure. He is filled with envy and jealousy, and is perpetually afraid that others will outshine him, and be more honoured than himself. If he has talents and knowledge, he displays them, not to benefit the world, but to procure fame. If he performs an action, which is good in its effects, his motive is the love of praise. He may obtain praise ; but he will not obtain

sufficient to satisfy him. For the love of praise is like the love of the intoxicating draught ; it is never quite strong enough ; a little more ardent spirit, and a little more pungent spice must every day be added, or it will appear as cold and insipid as water. Of fame however, it is probable, he will seldom receive a large portion. Even the humble and candid will overlook a part of his merit ; for they cannot enter into all his feelings, or be acquainted with all his labours ; they have other objects to attend to beside him, and cannot with justice look at him only. The ignorant will not understand him ; the critical eye will pry into his defects ; his rivals will thwart him. Those, who are as proud and envious as himself, will depreciate his talents ; and those, whom he has treated with contempt, will repay him with hatred and calumny.

Is such a man happy ? Is his heart tranquil ? Has he peace within, when his bosom is swelling with turbulent desires ; when his wishes and enjoyments do not coincide ? Such however was the character of the heathens. Their systems of morals inculcated self-esteem, and held out the love of fame as a motive. Their best men appear to have

been proud men ; who did what they called good in order to be talked of, or to display a false dignity ; who denied themselves the pleasures, which other men relish, for the sake of receiving the pleasure of applause ; who affected to despise pain, that they might rise above the vulgar ; who hardened their hearts against the charities of life, that they might not appear to possess the weakness of tenderness ; who could see the death of a wife without emotion, and plunge a dagger into the bosom of a sister for the sake of hearing the shouts of the populace ; who could adjudge a son to death, though that painful office might better have been performed by another person ; and who could be the first to murder a friend, that their countrymen might extol the heroism of the deed.

Others of the heathens, who had no virtue, except that which they called virtue, that is, bravery, sought for and obtained the applause of their contemporaries by the most detestable actions, and are in the present age praised by those, who think and feel like heathens. With souls swelling with pride, they eagerly coveted the fame of warlike achievements. Contemptuously trampling on those, who had nerves like themselves, they slaughtered, and

laid waste, and made millions wretched, from no other motive than that they might appear great. They were great, I confess : the historian and orator have immortalized their names : but were they happy ? Was there peace in their hearts ? They were as happy as the hero, whom Milton, by the magick of verse, has rendered as sublime as he is hateful ; and who, whilst he is suffering the most exquisite torments, is the object of admiration and shuddering delight.

The child, whose birth we this day celebrate, was sent to teach us a different system of morality. There is no happiness in pride ; and he came to give us the peace, which flows from humility. The true christian, who imbibes his spirit, who submits to the dominion of the prince of peace, may be despised and rejected by men ; but he cannot be very miserable ; for he has in his heart a peace, which the world cannot take from him.* As he desires not fame, he is not disappointed, if it is not bestowed. As he has a low and just opinion of himself, and knows that he is only one atom among the infinite number, which compose the works

* John xvi, 22.

of God, he does not presume that he shall become the object of general attention. He is not proud, and consequently endures none of the pangs of envy. He endeavours to acquire all the knowledge, which is necessary to enable him to act well the part assigned by his Maker ; but he knows that God has not imparted to him all his gifts ; he does not therefore expect, and hardly hopes to shine. He is willing however that others should be brilliant. He rejoices in the talents, which his brothers possess, provided they are the means of moral or even physical advantage, as much as if they were his own. Beauty, of whatever kind it may be, whether of person, understanding, or character, affords him the pleasure, which it is naturally adapted to excite, and which it always does excite, when the heart is free from pride and envy. With true lowliness of mind, he esteems those of whom he speaks as more excellent than himself ; and in honour he prefers* those, with whom he converses, and with whom he is connected. He strives to do all the moral good in his power ; but with his limited capacity, he is sensible that he cannot do much ; he is willing therefore that

* Rom. xii. 10.

it should be effected by others. Silently and modestly he assists them in promoting their pious and benevolent plans, without being ambitious of the honour of originating every thing which is laudable ; and he consents that the whole of the merit should be ascribed to them, whilst he has performed a part of the labour. As he has a just sense of the imperfection of his own understanding and heart, he makes a candid allowance for the follies and faults of other men. He desires only to be good himself, and not to rise above them ; and he does not wish that they should sink below him by their weaknesses and crimes. He rejoices not in the iniquities* of his enemies ; he rejoices not in the iniquities of his friends.—The prince of peace came to form the heart of such a man ; and does not his heart enjoy tranquillity ? No bitter fountain of envy flows into his bosom ; no storm of pride agitates his affections ; but humility diffuses a holy calm over his breast ; and as a smooth lake reflects every beautiful flower and tree which grows on its borders, and all the magnificence of the supernal heavens ; so his heart is the joyful reflection of the virtues of other men, whilst its centre is occupied

* 1 Cor. xiii. 6.

with an expanded and vivid image of the goodness of God.

2. For there cannot be genuine humility, where there is not a knowledge and love of the Supreme Being ; which leads me to observe, secondly, that there is no peace without piety. It will hardly be pretended, that the heathens were pious ; for they could not love a Being with whom they were unacquainted. One or two distinguished individuals only appear to have discovered the unity of God. The popular belief was, that there are as many divinities as there are elements and stars. All of them were finite beings, that is, they had a beginning, and consequently might have an end. They were imperfect in their moral qualities ; for they reviled, deceived, and opposed each other. Some of them were tyrannical, others capricious, and others licentious ; and all of them delighted, not so much in the devotion of a humble and grateful heart, as in the fragrance of incense and the blood of innocent animals. Some of them tempted human beings to vice ; and others even sported with their miseries. In fine, they were like men, but not much like good men ; for they bore a greater resem-

blance to Alcibiades and Alexander, than to Socrates and Aurelius.

The heathens of a more refined class held the doctrine of fate ; which controlled, not only human actions, but the gods themselves. But this fate did not proceed by any rules of right and reason ; good intentions were not a defence against its inexorable vengeance, as it involved equally the guilty and innocent in irretrievable misery. It was not an animated being, and consequently not an object of any of the affections. It was both deaf and blind ; it could hear no prayers ; it could see no suffering. Like the waves of the ocean, which plunges a ship in the deep, it rolled a flood of wo over the frail bark of human life ; but, like the ocean, it was insensible ; it felt no pity ; it was even unconscious of the terrifick sound of its own billows. For fate was not God ; it possessed no moral qualities ; it was dreaded, but could not be adored and loved.

Whilst the heathens supposed themselves under the government of such divinities as I have described, and such an omnipotent fate, they could not have derived any tranquillity from their religion ; for the heart must believe itself secure, before it can be at peace,

In such a wild anarchy of deities, or such a blind and irresistible motion, there could not be safety. The sun might not rise tomorrow, though it rose today ; the world might burst asunder ; and the gods themselves be hurled from their thrones. There was then no superiour being for man to love ; none, who was worthy of his adoration ; and none, in whom he could confide. He had not much cause to be grateful for any favours, which the gods might bestow ; because they were not the rewards of an innocent life, but were fairly purchased with the victims, which he slaughtered. He could not with reason hope for relief from any miseries, which he might endure, because the gods were impotent, and could not themselves resist the current of fate.

The son, who was born this day, was sent to correct these errors. He came to demolish the idols of the heathens ; and to reveal, to the whole of the human race, the most important of all truths, which was before known to one favoured nation only—that there is one God, who has always existed, and always will exist ; whose power is unlimited, and who is every where present ; who is not blind and insensible like fate, but who possesses moral

attributes, and can be adored, and feared, and loved; who is wise, just, and good; who created the heavens, the earth, every thing which we behold, and which we can even conceive; who gives us every blessing which we enjoy; who never sports with the miseries of his creatures, but who delights in making us happy, and whenever he afflicts us, has a wise and gracious design; who is not only our maker and governour, but our friend; who has compassion on our infirmities, is ready to pardon our sins, as soon as we repent, and pities us as a father pities his own children; and who in particular so loved the world, as to send his son to reveal these consolatory truths.

We need hear no more. If there is such a being, our hearts are at rest. The prince of peace has expelled every doubt and terrour. Whatever a God of so much power, wisdom, and mercy ordains, must be right. We look up to him with faith; we pray to him with confidence, persuaded that he will grant all our reasonable requests. Our souls swell with sublime delight, whilst we contemplate the majesty of his perfections. This is a being, whom we can love with all our heart; whom we adore for his holiness, and to whom,

whilst we exist, we shall be grateful for his unbounded goodness.

Such is the peace, such is the joy, which is derived from genuine piety. The man, who possesses this spirit, is not cast down by the force of calamity ; for he stands firm on an everlasting rock.* Whilst the storm rages without, within him there is a calm. He fears nothing ; for what injury can he suffer ? He knows that an almighty arm supports him, and will not permit him to fall. In the darkest scenes there is light in the presence of God ; and he believes that he is always in his presence. He trusts that the eye of his eternal friend constantly beholds him ; that not a tear of contrition is shed, but it is observed ; that not the faintest sigh of devotion proceeds from his lips, but it is heard ; that not a good thought is conceived in his heart, but it is instantly known. Whilst the love of God thus fills his mind, he not only enjoys the consolation of inward peace, but he also improves in every moral grace, which can adorn the character of a christian. He is continually striving to render himself more and more a fit habitation for the holy spirit.

*Isa. xxvi. 4.

He endeavours to become perfect, as his Father in heaven is perfect ;* and in imitation of the infinite kindness of God, to do good to every finite being within his reach. Thus benevolence takes deep root in his heart ; and he is not more distinguished for love to his Maker, than for love to his fellow creatures.

III. WHICH leads me, thirdly, to observe, that there is no peace without benevolence. It must be confessed, that the heathens were not entirely unacquainted with this virtue. They were taught, and many of them practised, the duties of courtesy and hospitality, of parental affection and filial obedience, of friendship and patriotism ; all which are branches of benevolence. They were besides acquainted with the obligations of truth and justice. There were among them great and noble characters, who in a good cause displayed a magnanimity which did honour to human nature. These virtues unquestionably contributed to their happiness as individuals, and promoted the prosperity of the society of which they were members. Notwithstanding their absurd opinions, gross vices, and abominable idolatries, they still retained virtue

* *Matth. v. 48.*

enough to keep nations together. The light of heaven was not entirely withdrawn; and though they saw not the luminary from which it proceeded, yet its feeble rays served in some measure to direct their steps.

But as they were ignorant of the true God, their benevolence had no solid foundation. They could not consider themselves as bound together by the tie of a common origin, as children of the same family. They saluted their brethren, they loved their friends, they loved their country; but in this, as our Saviour teaches,* there was little merit; for they called the rest of mankind barbarians, and regarded them as enemies. They seldom felt the emotions of pity; they appear not to have known what is meant by charity; there was no relief for the poor; the helpless were left to perish; their publick diversions consisted in the torments of men and the inferiour animals; their slaves and captives in war were treated with insult and cruelty; and many of the rites of their religion were bloody and inhuman. But what more than any other cause rendered their benevolence defective was, that they thought it not criminal, that

* Matth. v. 46, 47.

it was even laudable, to foster revenge and hatred in their breasts. Their most virtuous authors relate without censure the direful effects of these malignant passions ; and they appear to have considered it as no fault in the men, whom they have chosen for their heroes, that they plundered the innocent ; that they made war on their weaker neighbours, who had done them no wrong ; that they never forgave a foe, but pursued him with unrelenting vengeance ; and that they circumvented an enemy by treachery ;—provided they were faithful to their engagements, and abstained from injuring those, from whom they had received benefits. In such souls there could not be peace ; for peace dwells not with the malicious and revengeful. Man is made to love his fellow man ; and whenever he hates him, his constitution is in disorder, the fibres of his heart are preternaturally stretched, his nerves no longer vibrate with harmony.

The child, who was born this day, came to restore our hearts to the state, in which only happiness can be found. He came to give them peace, by filling them with love. He placed benevolence on piety, its only true basis ; and he taught us to love all men, because they are all the children of God. He

commanded us to do to others, as we would they should do to us ; and consequently never to insult, oppress, or hate any one, because this is not what we should choose ; to love our neighbours as ourselves ; and to do them good, without the expectation of receiving a return. He taught us, not only to be hospitable to the civilized stranger, but to give meat and drink to the famished barbarian ; not only to love and bless our friends ; but to love and bless our enemies. He taught us, not, in imitation of the heathens, to expose the sickly infant to perish with cold, or to be torn in pieces by wild beasts ; but to water the tender plant, and to cherish it with the warmth of kindness, if haply it might live, and grow up, and flourish. He commanded us, not only to honour our parents, whilst we are dependent on their bounty, but to reverence, comfort, and protect them, even to the last moment of decrepit old age. He taught us, not only to salute those who return our salutations, but to be courteous to the rude ; not only to respect the wise, but to be indulgent to the erroneous ; not only to pay homage to the powerful, but to give honour to the weak. He commanded us, above all, to have pity on the poor ; to relieve distress, from whatever

cause it might proceed ; to be merciful to the unthankful, as well as the grateful ; and to have compassion even on the vitious. In a word, it is the design of his religion to render us universally benevolent and disinterested ; so that all our thoughts are engaged in contriving, and all our actions in promoting, the felicity of others.

That a man, who is able to rise to this height of benevolence, enjoys tranquillity, requires no proof. He is like God, who is constantly diffusing bliss throughout the creation ; and there dwells in his mind a portion of that happiness, which blesses the immortal King of heaven. Many persons perhaps may deem that this height is inaccessible to a feeble mortal ; but that it is, cannot be true ; because it is the natural state of the perfect man, and to which his moral powers, when rightly improved, must at last bring him. It is essential to the human mind, that it should make perpetual progress ; that it should rise from matter to spirit, from self-love to benevolence ; and still it attains this state, it cannot find rest. We have tried pride, envy, revenge, and malice, and our souls have been filled with tortures. We have tried mere selfishness ; we have thought,

not of injuring others, but only of benefiting ourselves; and still have not had peace. For man has in himself few sources of pleasure, but many of pain. If he will not love others, he must necessarily love himself only; and when he loves none but himself, he then perceives that he has selfish sensibilities, which are rudely shaken by the common accidents of life. When he shuts himself up in his own bosom, he is like a person, who is confined in a dungeon, who beholds neither the light of heaven, nor the cheerful face of a fellow creature; and who, in this dark and melancholy solitude, has no other employment than to brood over his own woes. But when he goes out of himself, he no longer attends to his own sufferings. The sorrow of others excites his sympathy; but sympathy is a pleasant sensation; for though a small degree of pain is mixed with it, yet it is almost entirely lost in the exquisite pleasure, which he tastes in doing good. The tears, which he has shed for his own misfortunes, have been scalding tears, which have burned his cheek, and filled his mouth with bitterness; but the tears, which he sheds for the miseries of other men, are like the soft rains that descend in spring; they refresh his heart, and cause new

virtues there to spring up, blossom, and bring forth fruit.

Such is the peace, which the prince of peace was sent to communicate. He has come to save us from the miseries of pride, ungodliness, and selfishness ; and to give rest to our souls, by filling them with humility, piety, and benevolence. That his religion has produced this effect in the hearts of many, there can be no doubt. The history of the church in all ages, and our own observation, may convince us, that there are christians, who, humble and devout, have employed every faculty of their minds in promoting the glory of God, and in diffusing happiness among their fellow creatures. Pleasant have been their walks through life ; and “soft are their dying beds.” They leave a world, where they have enjoyed so much tranquillity, a tranquillity, which nevertheless has been sometimes disturbed by the tempests that blow in this state of imperfection, to go to a world, where there will be a perpetual calm, and where the people of God will enter into everlasting peace.

But though there undoubtedly have been, and still are, many such christians ; yet of others who call themselves christians, it may

be said with truth, that their characters bear a greater resemblance to those of the heathens, than of the followers of Jesus. For their souls are charged with envy, pride, impiety, and malice ; and wretched themselves, they appear to have no other object than to inflict as much misery as possible on the rest of mankind. That the gospel has not been able to cure the disease of their hearts, will not be thought strange, when it is remembered that it is offered to free beings, who are not irresistibly impelled to embrace it, but who have power to reject its heavenly maxims. There is no remedy for them, till they choose to reform, but they must continue to be agitated with the passions, which torment their souls.

A great part of mankind, though they have not attained the summit of goodness, have not however sunk into this abyss of depravity. They have a mixed character, in which selfishness and benevolence alternately predominate. Such probably are some who are present. Their hearts are not entirely at ease ; for they are not perfectly humble, devout, and kind.

But, my christian friends, if you would obtain the peace, which the prince of peace

came to offer you, you must submit to the rules that he has given, and imitate his example.

1. You must first learn the lesson of humility. What do any of you possess, of which you have reason to be proud?

You are vain of your beauty; you frequently contemplate your image with self-complacence; and you hope to become the object of general admiration: But you never receive as much homage, as your heart demands; and when you look at yourself more attentively, you secretly confess and lament, that you exact more than is justly your due; for you can perceive some things in your face and person, which you would be glad to mend. The eye of envy can discern your defects still more plainly; and even candour must allow, that your form is not faultless; that you have not that ideal beauty, which the painter and statuary can express, but which probably was never yet bestowed on any human being. Although then you sometimes delight in yourself, yet you are not always satisfied with your personal charms; and still less with the effect, which they produce on others.

You boast of your riches : But you know that you are not as affluent, as you wish to appear ; that you have not sufficient wealth to satisfy the demands of avarice or the love of pleasure ; that you are obliged to deny yourself many gratifications, because you are unable to purchase them ; that you are still compelled to toil ; that there are other men richer than you ; that you have not yet attained the summit of gold, on which you expect to find rest and peace ; and that though some persons fall down before you, yet that their worship is mercenary and mean, and consequently cannot confer any honour, because no man pays respect to mere wealth, unless he expects to derive some advantage from his homage.

You are proud of your talents and learning : But how little do you know, in comparison of what there is to be known ? You excel in one or two points ; but how deficient are you in others. Of this you are conscious ; and whilst you carefully conceal your imperfections from the world, you are perpetually afraid that it will discover the secret. The envious, it is true, depreciate you below what you deserve ; but at the same time, you are sensible, that you pass among your friends

for more than you are worth ; that you are not acquainted with as many languages, arts, and sciences, as they suppose ; that in many branches of knowledge you are quite superficial ; that you have acquired only a few of the terms ; and though when you deal them out with fluency, you make the ignorant stare, yet you feel all the while, that you ought not to derive any pleasure from their applause, or be proud of such a vain display. Even when you endeavour to exhibit the talents, which you really possess, talents, which a long and laborious education, and the agony of thought, have in some measure moulded and polished into an harmonious form, though you sometimes succeed, yet you find by experience that you more frequently fail. You can seldom originate what is new, perspicuous, or interesting. After the most industrious efforts, you cannot produce any thing which pleases yourself, or which ought to please others. Your thoughts and expressions for the most part are cold, trite, and obscure. When the rare moment of inspiration at last arrives, it so frequently comes without any act of your own, that you have no more reason to be proud of it, than of any natural advantage, which is indepen-

dent of yourself: for it descends unbidden, like the lightning of heaven; it flashes suddenly on your mind, and soon leaves it in darkness and gloom. Your partial friends, who behold the reflection of the light in the next publick exhibition of yourself, fondly hope that you can always be as brilliant, if you please; but you know that their expectations are vain, and that the flame of genius is not subject to your command. During a long life, spent in painful study, and anxious watchings for the sacred fire, you may be able once or twice to compose a work, which will effect, delight, or astonish the world; but the rest of your productions, you will confess, ought to be consigned to everlasting oblivion, as there is nothing in them to charm or enlighten mankind. Besides, what ought to humble you is, that your genius is frequently accompanied with the most pitiful weaknesses, with such a palpable departure from the rules of common sense and common prudence, with such caprices and prejudices, that even vulgar men deride you. You are commonly so little acquainted with the ordinary course of human affairs, that a fool may deceive you, and a knave, by flattering your vanity, render you the prey of the grossest imposi-

tions. Of this in time you will become sensible ; and on the whole you will learn from experience, that talents and learning without humility can never fill your heart with peace.

The addresses, which I have made, apply not to many. ; for few have either beauty, wealth, or genius. The greatest part of mankind are placed in such a station of mediocrity, that pride in them provokes nothing but scorn. Let them do what they will, they are not able to excite much attention, or to extort any homage from the world. If therefore they are not humble, they must of necessity be wretched. Of many it may be said, that they are not endowed with external charms ; and of others, that though they once possessed them, yet that they have passed away, and that the flowers of spring have long since faded. The crowd of admirers, who formerly attended them, has disappeared ; and they feel that the world is made, not for them, but the young. Of many it may be said, that all their endeavours to acquire wealth have been unsuccessful ; that they have found it even difficult to secure the common comforts of life ; and that they now look up with despair to that fortune, which

they cannot expect to reach. And of many it is true, that though before they made trial of their powers, they had a secret hope, that their knowledge and genius might illuminate the earth ; yet now they are convinced, that it is not given to them to shine ; but that they are doomed, however reluctantly, to tread the same dull road of life, through which others have passed, and at last to sink into oblivion, with the great multitude of mankind. The ardent expectations of youth have with many been found to be mere dreams. After a few years of experience, man has learned, that he is a much weaker, more ignorant, and more insignificant creature, than he could possibly have once conceived ; that he is of little of importance to any one but himself ; and that, though he may swell and endeavour to appear great, yet that he does not excite the attention of his fellow men ; or if they sometimes look at him, it is with no other purpose than to mock at his vanity. Is it not strange that such a being should be proud, when he has on no occasion derived any pleasure or honour from his pride ?

2. **THERE** is no remedy for this vice, and no consolation for the mortification, which

any man feels under the sense of his unimportance, except the love of God. Piety, my brother, will render you humble, and at the same time ennoble your mind. It will convince you, that though you are of no consequence in the eyes of men ; yet that the eye of God regards you with complacence ; that in his sight you are an immortal being, whom he designs for everlasting felicity. With him it is of no moment, whether or not your actions are great in themselves, provided your intentions are pure. The smallest deed of virtue is accepted by him, if your motives are good. Men may not applaud you, may not even observe you ; but what need that avail, if you can secure the approbation of your Maker ? Regardless therefore of fame, which so few can procure, and which, when it is obtained, is always given sparingly and reluctantly, look upwards to heaven. In that sacred court there is no difference of rank, except what is constituted by superiority in goodness. Act your part well, and you will not only find peace on earth, but a crown of glory in the kingdom of God.

Think not however, my brethren, that piety belongs only to the many, and that the privileged few are exempted from its obligations.

It cures the pride of the high, as well as of the low. It sanctifies a state of wealth ; and converts the illuminated understanding into a holy temple to God. When riches and talents are with humility and devotion consecrated to the honour of the Supreme Being, they bless those who possess them ; they fill their hearts with peace ; and they diffuse light, happiness, and virtue through an extensive circle of mankind.

3. SUCH, my brethren, if you have received these gifts, should be your aim. With gratitude to heaven for the favours, which have been bestowed on you, you should piously resolve to do with them all the good you can, and to communicate as much felicity as possible to the children of your divine Parent, and to the disciples of your beneficent Lord. You devote this day to commemorate the birth of the prince of peace. You have cut down branches from the trees to decorate his temple ; you have sung hosannas to his name ; but there is no merit nor value in these actions, if your hearts are filled with pride, selfishness, and impiety. With the alteration of a single word, I may address you in the language of the prophet Isaiah : Will you call this a feast, and an acceptable day to the

Lord? Is not this the feast which I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to deal your bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor that are cast out to your house? When you see the naked, that you cover him, and that you hide not yourselves from your own flesh?*

This day is with many, not so much a day of devotion, as the commencement of a season of festivity, which is to be extended through the rigours of winter. You have already laid the plan of the entertainments, which you purpose to give each other in your houses; and you anticipate much delight, and perhaps a little praise, from the delicacy of taste, which you will display in the choice of your viands, from the splendour of your decorations, from the grace and ease, with which you will receive your guests, and from the brilliancy of your conversations. I would not be thought too rigid a censor. These pleasures are harmless, when they are not repeated too frequently, when they do not prevent you from discharging the important

* Is. lviii. 5, 6, 7.

duties of life, in fine, when they are not abused. It cannot be supposed, that the Being, who has enriched the earth with so many minerals and precious gems, and scattered over its surface so many fragrant and gorgeous flowers, has forbidden you to cultivate a taste for the elegant and ornamental. There is a satisfaction in looking at the face which is brightened with smiles ; and in conversation there is a charm, which dilates, and sometimes improves, the heart. But allowing these things to be innocent, there is a still better way, by which you will infallibly make yourselves happy, and which will soften all the horrors of the inclement season : Whilst you are contriving these entertainments, form a plan of making the winter pass as a period of cheerfulness and content to those, with whom, without your care, it will be a season of gloom and distress. Let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners, who are confined, some, it is true for their crimes, but some also, for their misfortunes, come into your ears. Let the poor, who are sick, receive from you medicine, and their families, food. Bring the children, who are cast out, to a house were they will find shelter and protection. Warm the withered limbs of the aged

widow, who, without your aid, will be stiffened with the increasing cold. If you faithfully execute this plan, your hearts, when spring returns, will be as serene as that mild season; and you will always look back with satisfaction on a winter, which has been passed in such charitable works. But from the execution of your other plan, it is not certain, that you will derive all that delight which you anticipate. The mere pleasures of sense make little impression. None but a gross epicure remembers, or wishes to remember, long, the taste of any dish; for as it is associated with no image of the fancy or understanding, it leaves scarcely any traces in the brain. But the mortifications, which you will suffer, as they exist in the mind, will not soon be forgotten. Notwithstanding all the pains which you take, the result will seldom correspond with the preparations that are made; several articles, deemed essential, will be forgotten; and many things will be out of place. At the houses of others you will not always receive the attention, which you think your due; some person will be preferred before you, though his claims are not superiour to your own. Conversation too will often be dull; and the day or the evening will pass

off languidly. You will utter several frigid jests, of which, when you recollect them on the succeeding day, you will be heartily ashamed ; and if the conversation with a select band, in a corner of the apartment, assumes what may be thought a more dignified style ; if you undertake to settle the interesting concerns of the nation, you will be frequently contradicted, and sometimes conquered in an argument. On the whole, though you may meet with the pleasure, which you are seeking for ; yet it is not impossible that the winter may be embittered with repeated mortifications. But if you devote yourselves to the service of the wretched, you will be exposed to none of this chagrin. With the expense of one sumptuous feast, you may afford substantial aid to a great number of poor families ; and in the mean time you will have more leisure to attend to your domestic affairs, more leisure to cultivate the minds of your children, more leisure to improve your own understandings. I do not suggest these things with the expectation of inducing you to give up the first of your plans ; but I would hope to prevail on you not entirely to neglect the other. If you think it wise and salutary, begin to execute it this day ; begin

with bestowing your bounty on your indigent brethren of this church, who now ask of you your alms. Whilst your hearts exult at the birth of the prince of peace, let their souls also be filled with joy. Then will the blessing of those, who are ready to perish, come upon you ;* and you will contribute in part to the promotion of the great design for which the Saviour was born ; which was—to manifest the glory of God, to bind up the broken-hearted, to comfort those who mourn, and to produce peace on earth, and good will to men.

* Job xxix. 13.

SERMON VII.

PREACHED ON THE LAST SUNDAY OF THE YEAR.

1 PETER iv. 7.

*The end of all things is at hand : Be ye therefore sober
and watch unto Prayer.*

THAT we are accustomed to regard this season as the end of the year, is not owing to any divine command, or to any particular position of the heavenly bodies : It is entirely a human ordinance, to which, it is proper to conform for no other reason, than because it is used by other men. But notwithstanding one day is as fit to end the year as another, yet as the point is settled by universal consent we are inclined to consider this termination as completing one of the divisions of life ; and certain reflections are apt to enter the minds of the sober and thoughtful. In these reflections, which are of a serious, and somewhat of a melancholly cast, it is best to in-

dulge ; because it is always of use to be serious, and not unprofitable sometimes to be melancholly. When we have attained the middle of life—and many of us, my brethren, have reached beyond it—we have seen the termination of so many sublunary pleasures, we have lost so many things which render life valuable, that a contemplation of the end forces itself on our minds. I naturally therefore at this time turn my attention to the subject. My purpose is, first, to recall to your recollection a few of the reflections, which a contemplation of the end of the year suggests ; and, secondly to remind you, in a brief exhortation, of the actions and habits, which are connected with them.

1. A REFLECTION on the end of the year leads us to fix our thoughts on many other things, which end. When we view the last rays of the setting sun, on the last day of its annual course, we cannot forbear to say, how transitory are all earthly objects ! A few days ago, as it seems, the year commenced. and now it is gone, and in a moment it will be sunk forever in the ocean of eternity. Though it has carried away with it a great portion of my life ; yet its progress has been so rapid, that it has left me little time for en-

joyment, and less for improvement.—Other periods of life, though of a somewhat longer duration, are of the same transient nature.

Childhood thus passes away, and soon comes to an end. It is generally esteemed by those, who enjoy it no more, as the most happy season of life ; but those, who are in it, are impatient for its termination. They ardently wish to experience what it is to be their own masters, to go and come when they please, and to be free from the restraints, which the authority of elders and superiours imposes on them. Childhood is gone, and with it a great part of the pleasures of existence. There is an end of the heart-thrilling sport, of the innocent laugh, which is not excited by the malignity of wit, and which bursts on the ear like the wild notes of a bird. There is an end too of no small portion of the importance of life ; for, strange as it might be thought without experience, the trifling amusements and employments of childhood appear more momentous, whilst we are engaged in them, than the more serious occupations of riper years.

Youth however is a period, in which the business of life still appears of some importance. It is an age, which we would, if it

was possible, chain down to a rock of adamant. But time bears it on with his quickest wing; whilst we are thinking that it has just commenced, we find it at an end. This portion of our existence is frequently supposed to abound with the most exquisite delights. It is certainly more interesting, but, I believe, not quite so happy as the middle of life. There are in it too many mortifications, too much disappointed love, too many broken hearts. We are too much exposed in it to tumultuous passions and raging appetites. It is a tempestuous sea, over which the winds blow with the violence of a hurricane, and where we are in constant danger, either of beating against the rocks, or of foundering in the deep. When we have passed over it with an unshattered bark, instead of lamenting that this sea is so narrow, we ought rather to rejoice that youth is at an end; and that we have now arrived at manhood, a smoother sea, where we can sail with less hazard.

As not many persons are willing to think themselves old, though they are obliged to confess that they are no longer young, manhood appears the longest portion of human life. It does not terminate, like youth, in ten or twelve annual revolutions of the earth; but

it is protracted to twenty or thirty years. How short a period is thirty years! They are gone; manhood has passed away as well as youth. We stand on the verge of the year, and on the verge of age. When we have taken one step more, we become old men.

You, my brother, whose head is not yet entirely covered with the "blossoms of the grave," will not apply what I have now said to yourself. A few persons, however, who are present, may not hesitate to acknowledge that they are old. If they have seen sixty winters, they ought to confess it, melancholy as the confession may be. The termination of the year, the chillness of the air, and the length of the nights at this season, must necessarily remind them of the close of life, of the cold grave, and of the long, dark night of death, into which they will soon be plunged.

It is a melancholy thought, that we shall soon see the end of the passing year; and when we look at any sublunary object, there is something sad in the reflection, that we see it for the last time. Whether it is a river or a hill, a tree, or even a stone, if when we cast our eyes upon it, we are compelled to say, I

shall behold thee no more, the heart is depressed with instant gloom.

Something similar to what I shall now describe many of you, my brethren, have felt.—When you were sailing down one of our rivers into the ocean, and taking leave forever of that part of the country, in which you had passed the first years of life, you contemplated the distant mountains, on the summits of which rested the silver fringed clouds: Near the shore was a well known valley, in which the trees were disposed in all the various forms of beauty, and at the extremity of which you could faintly discern the village, in which you were born. As the ship was borne rapidly along by the ebbing tide, how did your spirits sink within you, whilst you silently said, Farewell, ye sublime mountains, and thou beautiful valley, farewell: I shall see you no more.

Your heart was filled with a more tender melancholy, when, just before your departure, you visited for the last time the spot, where lie buried the friends of your youth. You there fondly recollected past scenes of endearment. One grave in particular attracted your attention; it was that of your father. Whilst you walked round it with a throbbing bosom,

a gentle breeze from the south west blew over the grave. For a moment you almost thought, that you heard the spirit of the good man speaking in the wind ; and an ejaculation burst from you, May I live like him ; and may the end of my life be like his !

But without visiting the repositories of the dead to learn the truth, that life is coming to an end, the situation of a minister of the gospel, in particular, is adapted to fix it in the mind. His employment, which is pleasant enough in other respects, is peculiarly sad in this circumstance, that in a few years he sees the end of many of his flock. The friends, to whose kindness and partiality he owes the strongest obligations of gratitude descend to the grave. The pillars of the church are thrown down ; and there is a necessity of replacing them with others of more youth and firmness. He sees an end too of many tender infants, of many young women as innocent as they were lovely, of many pious matrons, of many honest and industrious men and valuable members of society, of many intelligent and devout christians. Soon there will be an end of the rest of the flock ; and soon, an end of the pastor himself.

II. IF all things thus come to an end, what practical use, my brethren, should you make of this contemplation? Of the actions and habits, which are connected with it, I now proceed to remind you in a brief exhortation.

1. I WOULD exhort you to direct your thoughts, at this season of the year, to the state of your worldly affairs. I urge you to do this, not from worldly motives;—they are sufficiently obvious, and it is not my business to lay them before you;—but that you may prove yourselves to be honest men. If you find, on examination, that your expenses exceed your income, it is your duty to curtail them as much as possible; for otherwise you are in danger of injuring your creditors, and eventually of involving your families in great distress. If also, on an accurate scrutiny, you perceive that your power of doing good is not equal to the benevolence of your hearts, you should inquire what superfluities you can abridge, what savings you can make from your own pleasures, that you may add to the enjoyments of other men.

2. AT this season of the year, I would recommend to you to look into the state of your understandings. Are there no branches

of knowledge, which would render you useful to yourselves, your friends, your country, and the church ; and which you might acquire, if you would devote sufficient time and pains to their acquisition ? Can you not make yourselves more complete masters of the sciences, which you have in part obtained ; but which you comprehend in so imperfect a manner, that you are not able to avail yourselves of all the advantages, which might be derived from them ; and which, unless you stamp them deeper in your minds, will soon be erased from your memory ? In looking back on the past year, you perhaps have cause to reproach yourselves with negligence. You have wasted many precious hours in foolish talking and jesting, in unprofitable amusements, or, what is as bad, in mere sloth. You ought now, at the close of the year, to form a resolution to alter your conduct ; and not to persevere in sacrificing to present ease and fancied pleasures the hopes and enjoyments of future periods. If you have not advanced beyond the middle of life, it may not yet be too late to retrieve, in some measure, the time, which you have lost ; but you must increase your diligence ; and not be satisfied with yourselves, till you have reached the state, to which you

would have attained, if your industry had never known any relaxation.

3. I WOULD exhort you to examine your hearts. Do you possess all the virtues, which reason and religion prescribe? Are there not duties, which your rank in society, and the relations in which you stand with respect to other men, impose, and which you have not yet performed? Is it sufficient that you do no harm; that you injure no one; that you are mere negative characters? God did not for this purpose confer on you such noble powers. You are capable of exalted virtue, and of being actively good. If in the passing year there are no monuments of your liberality, you ought now, at the close of it, to resolve to excite your minds, to fill them with zeal, and to inquire what you can do to promote good morals and piety among men, and to increase the happiness of those by whom you are surrounded.

4. I WOULD exhort you to look, at this season of the year, into your consciences, and to probe them to the quick. This is a painful duty; but it is essential to the health of your souls. Have you committed no sins, the guilt of which has not yet been washed away by repentance? Are there no bad

habits, which are gradually riveting themselves in your character, and which, unless you attend to them immediately, will soon become so firmly fixed, that it will be impossible to remove them? At present, if you exert all your strength, you may be able to save yourselves from destruction; but if you neglect yourselves another year, your situation will be hopeless, and your ruin inevitable.

5. I WOULD exhort you to turn your thoughts, at this season, to the disputes in which you may be involved, and the enmities which you nourish in your breasts. If in violation of the precept of St. Paul,* you have let more than one sun go down upon your wrath, you ought not to suffer the year to expire, till you have forgiven, and, if possible, are reconciled to your enemies. Now is the time to take off the burden from those, who have so long groaned under the weight of your oppression. Now is the time to discharge from prison the debtor, with whom you have been so greatly exasperated, and who, whatever his will may be, is unable to pay you. Now is the time to pardon those,

* Eph. iv. 26.

who have contradicted your opinions ; whose religious or political creeds are different from yours ; whom you have treated with contempt and haughtiness ; or who you think must hate you, because you know that you hate them. Let the last day of the year see an end of all your feuds ; and when, on the first day of the new year, a day which ought to be devoted to friendly affections, you meet your enemy, salute him kindly. He probably will return your salutation ; and there will be immediately removed from your bosoms a sting of hatred, from which you have felt nothing but torment.

6. As the end of the year reminds you, that life is drawing toward a close, I would exhort you to reflect on the rapidity of time, and the instability of human things. Youth is flying away ; and with many of you old age is fast approaching. You already touch the borders of infirmity ; and have little space left to finish the task, which your Maker has assigned. Before another year terminates, several of you will be numbered among the dead ; and your state of probation in this world will be completed. As the victims of death are unknown, you ought all of you to apprehend, that he will aim at you individually,

and you ought to stand prepared to meet his dart. You ought to put on the whole armour of God,* that is, every christian virtue, which will render your souls invulnerable. When you die, there will to you be an end of the world itself. Whether the heavens and the earth, which now are, are still to last many thousand years, or whether, according to the expectation of some, they are soon to be involved in a general conflagration, is the same thing to you ; you will have no share in the events, which take place after your decease ; but when you are once covered with dust, you will be lost to all earthly concerns ; and you will sleep in the grave until the resurrection. The day of judgment will seem to you to be at the distance of a moment ; you will lie down, and suddenly awake, and be summoned to appear before the bar of your judge, where you must give a true account of all that you have done on earth. Happy will it be for you, if you can lift up your heads with conscious innocence, when you stand before his tribunal, if your transitory life has not been stained with guilt, if your hearts have been free from malice and impiety.

* Eph. iii. 11.

7. **MANY** of your friends have already departed, and have left in your bosoms a tender regret. I exhort you to cherish these melancholy and affectionate sentiments. Recall the image of your venerable father, to whom you are indebted for the education, which you have received; who taught you to love the truth, to be an honest man, to be active and useful. Think of the fond partiality, with which, after a short absence, he always welcomed your return; of his solicitude to guard you against temptation; of the anxious hope, which he so often expressed, that you would do honour to his name. Let the image of your mother rise up at the same time, encompassed with that mild light, which shines round the female character. Reflect on the care, with which she watched over your early years; on her sorrow, when you were sick; on her alarms, when you were in danger; and on the joy, which she manifested, when you were safe and happy. Recollect the attention, which she paid to your health, your wants, your manners, and your morals; and whilst you give thanks to God for having bestowed on you so excellent a parent, offer up a humble prayer, that he will grant you strength to imitate her virtues—her discretion, her

meeekness, her love of order, her purity, her soft compassion, her fervid devotion. At this season also revive the remembrance of the friend of your youth, whom you loved as your own soul.* Let the heart felt scenes, through which you passed, return to your imagination ;—the walk in the silent grove ; the lively conversation, which began, as soon as you had quitted its awful shades ; the active sports, which were rendered still more charming, because they were enjoyed in company with him ; the studies, in which you assisted each other ; his ardour, his generosity, his inexhaustible kindness. He now sleeps in the dust ; but let him not be forgotten. His form will return to your memory, not such as it once presented itself to your view, when the morning of your days was gilded with the beams of hope ; but the contemplation of it will soften and improve your heart. Let the season also be consecrated to the memory of the children, whom you have lost ; of the son, who you fondly hoped would be the support of your declining years ; of the tender infants, whose sweet smiles and playful innocence must be still fresh in

* Sam. xviii. 1.

your remembrance. Though they are dead, yet they are not annihilated. Their names are preserved in your family records; read them over, when you return home; and mix with your sighs a prayer, that God would permit you to see them once more in that celestial region, where little children dwell, and where their angels do always behold the face of their heavenly Father.*

8. THE remembrance of your friends will introduce the recollection of your ancestors, who first landed on your shores at this season of the year. This pious duty is productive of many virtues. I would exhort you to reflect on their toils and sufferings, and on the pains that they took to secure to you the pleasant land, which you inhabit. Whilst you avoid their faults, which were not peculiar to them, but which may be justly charged on the age in which they lived—their enthusiasm, their bigotry, their intolerance—endeavour to imitate their virtues—their industry, their prudence, their sobriety, their peaceable submission to the laws, their respect to their magistrates, their love of truth, and their sacred regard to the institutions of religion.

* Matth. xviii. 10.

You in the present day enjoy more light than was given to them, who had hardly escaped from the darkness of the middle ages. Instead therefore of resting at the point, to which they attained, you ought, in imitation of their spirit, to go on ; not to believe what they believed, but to believe what men of such inquiring minds would have believed, if they had lived in the nineteenth century.

9. YOUR benefactors also of a later period should not be forgotten. You should gratefully recollect the statesmen, the patriots, the soldiers, the heroes who defended your rights, and who finally established your freedom and independence. Some of them are still left to receive your thanks ; but ere long every potent arm among them will be chained in death. One of the best and bravest* of them has died in the present year ; and the hoary heads of those, who survive, warn you that you cannot retain any of them but a few days.— You should in particular remember the extraordinary man who led your armies, and during several years presided in your councils, and who died at this season. Though, whilst he lived, his prudence was censured by the

* General Lincoln, who died May 9, 1810.

rash, and his moderation was condemned by the envious, who coveted the high honours to which he had risen ; yet now that the grave has closed on him forever, the voice of calumny is dumb, and no trace is left in your minds, except that of his virtues. The remembrance of the independence, which he achieved for you, and of the unexampled prosperity, which your country enjoyed during his administration, can never be effaced ; but it will last in your annals as long as your nation exists. Many of you have seen his majestick form ; but to your children, who have been denied this advantage, you should present his image for their contemplation. Whilst they view it with delight, say to them, This is the man, whose character you should imitate. Be prudent, firm, intrepid, and honourable, like him ; love your country, and like him, devote your whole lives to its service. This counsel you ought to give, because on the youth of our nation depend almost all our hopes. They are not yet corrupted with the malignity of party spirit ; nor have they grown hardened in the ways of political iniquity. With the ardour and noble feelings, which are natural to their age, they admire what is excellent and sublime in

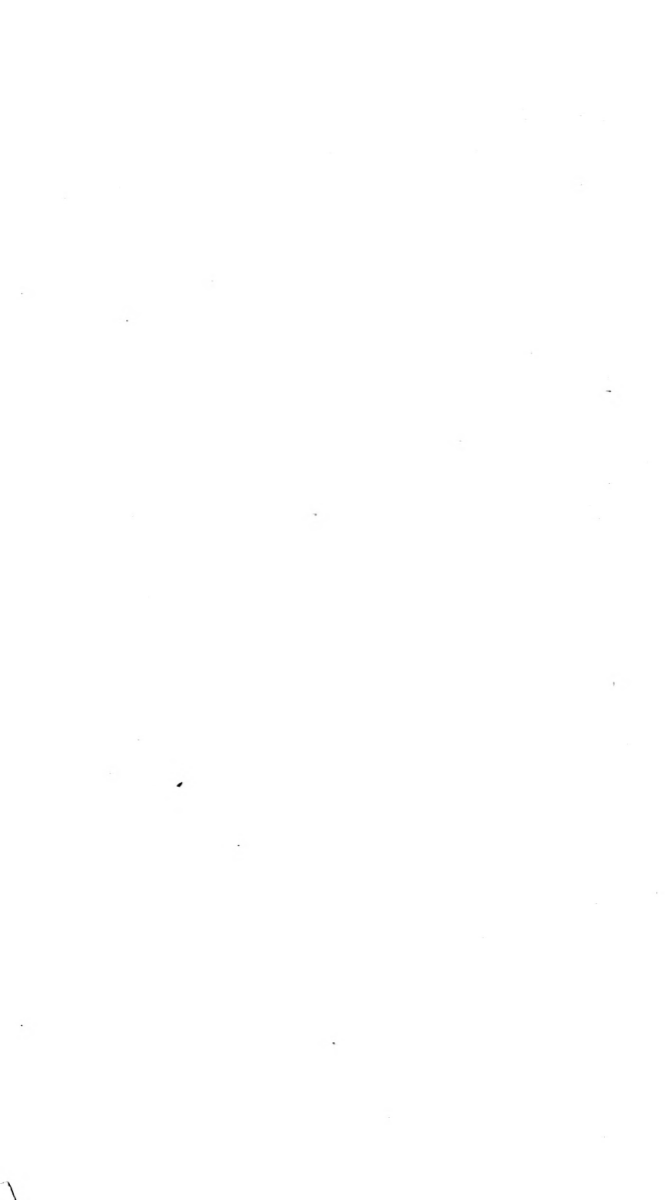
moral character. If they can be preserved from the false opinions and selfish depravity, with which a large commerce with the world is too apt to infect the mind; and in particular, if they can be induced to venerate and imitate the most perfect models, there will still be a chance, that our country may be saved from the overwhelming destruction, in which other nations are involved.

10. FINALLY, my brethren, I exhort you in a word; obey the command of St. Peter in the text: The end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer: That is, be temperate, vigilant, and devout. Do not immoderately indulge yourselves in any of the pleasures of this transitory life. Let not your affections be placed on the world; but let your hearts be in heaven, where your treasure is.* Watch, and be constantly on your guard against the allurements of sin, that they may not draw you aside from the path of your duty. Above all be pious; pray with earnestness and without ceasing† for strength to perform your good resolutions; let God be the supreme object of your love; let his will be the rule

* Matth. vi. 21.

† 1 Thess. v. 17.

of all your actions. These principles, deeply fixed in your minds, will enable you to live in a state of constant preparation for death ; so that when it arrives, it will not be an evil. If you regard this life in the just light, in which it ought to be viewed, as a preparation for a better, you will not be filled with despondency, because it is soon to come to an end ; but like a traveller, who is returning, through a strange country, to his own home, you will look forward with eagerness and hope to the termination of your journey, and suffer no enticement to divert you from your straight course. The year ends ; and it ends with serious and gloomy reflections ; but it is followed immediately by a new year, in which you renew your cheerfulness and joy : In like manner, when this life ends, it is succeeded by another ; and if it is not your own fault, by a life of exquisite and everlasting felicity.



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