

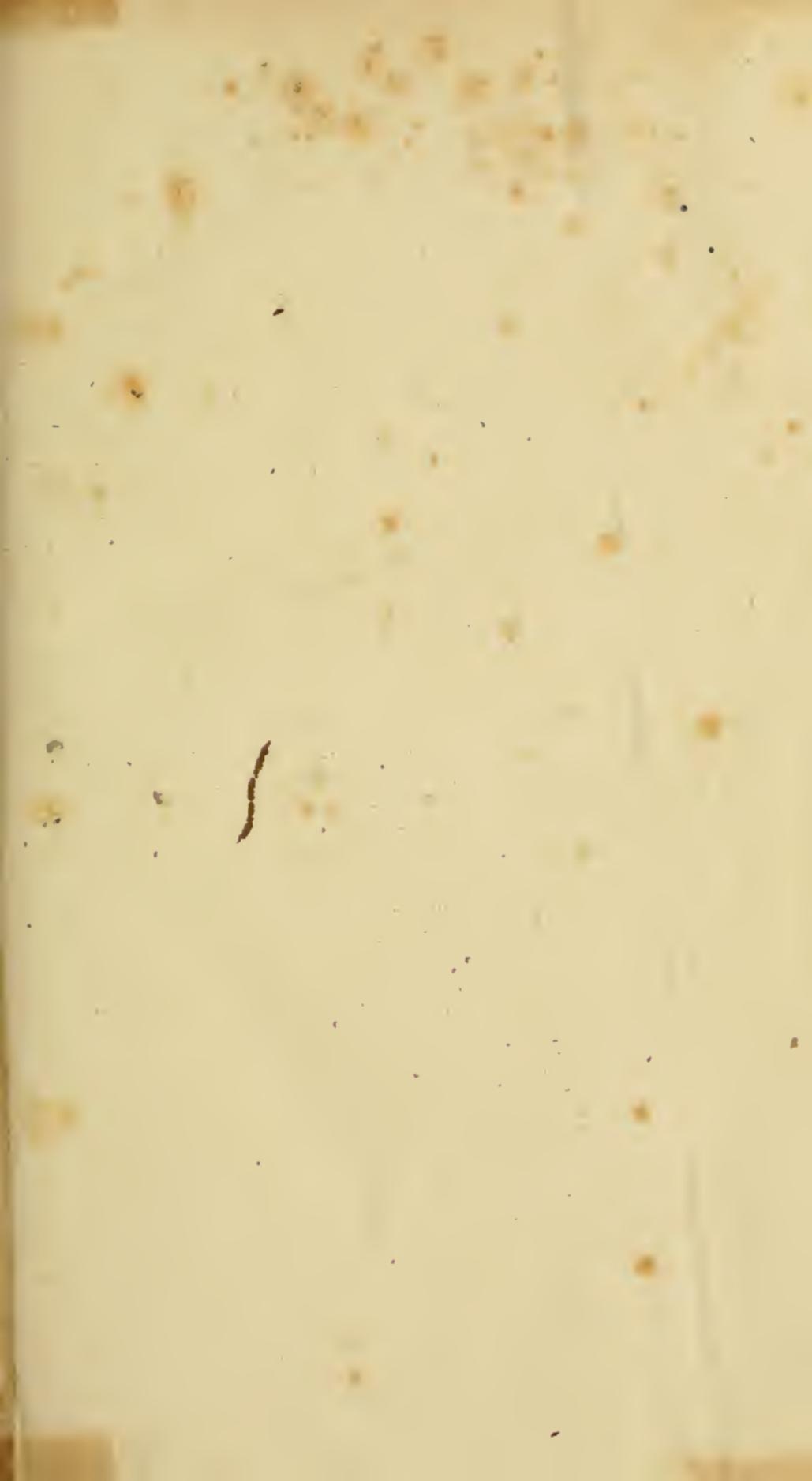


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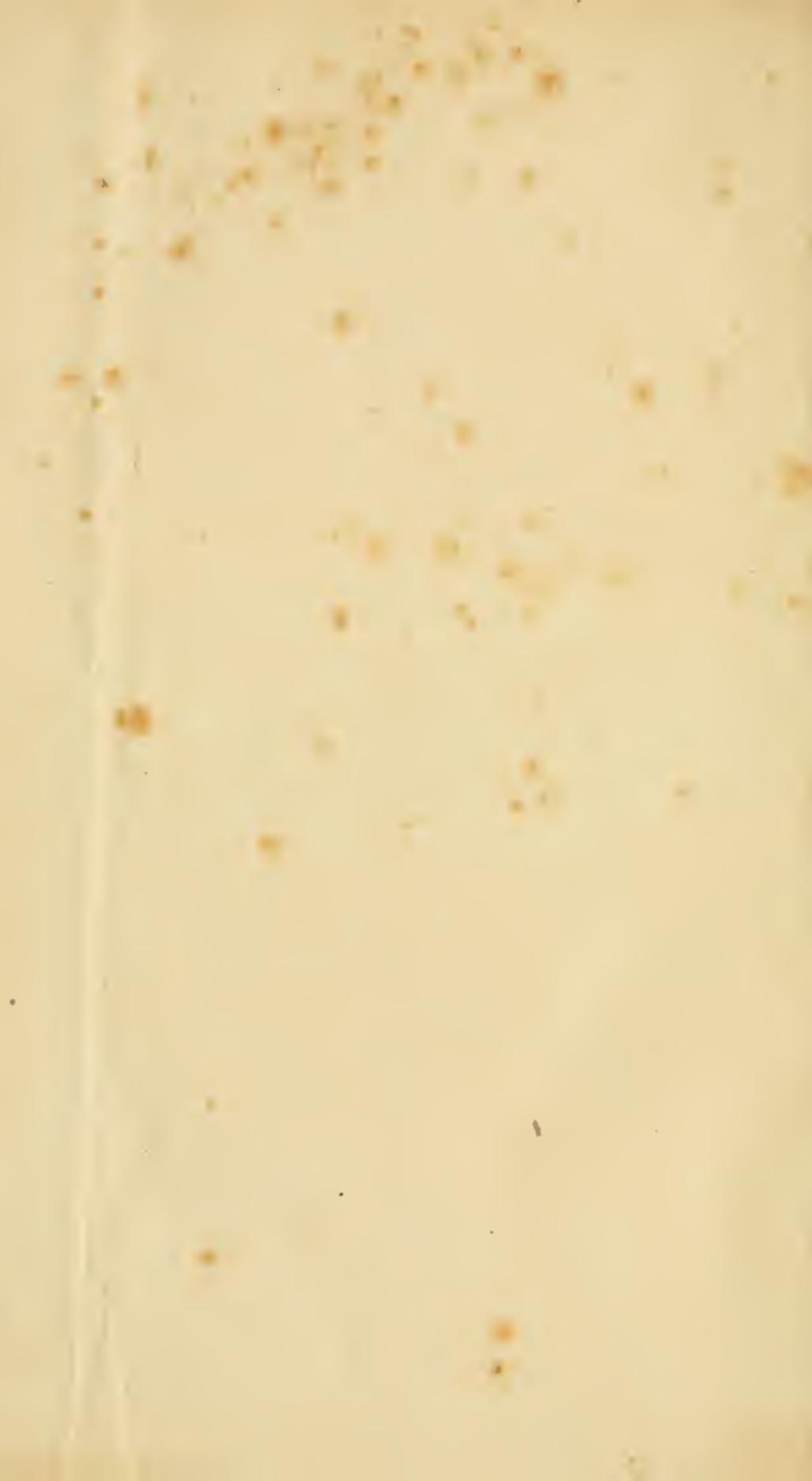
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SERMONS
ON
PRACTICAL SUBJECTS,

BY THE LATE

W. ENFIELD, LL.D.

PREPARED FOR THE PRESS BY HIMSELF.

To which are prefixed

MEMOIRS OF THE AUTHOR,

By J. AIKIN, M.D.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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When the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

IN young persons a desire of knowledge is always a promising disposition. Even when this desire is directed towards objects of abstract science, or of ordinary utility, it indicates an active mind, and a propensity towards improvement, from which pleasing expectations may be drawn.

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But

But when young people discover an earnest desire to be informed and instructed in those points in which their happiness is immediately concerned, and especially when the object of their solicitude is the knowledge of their duty, and the attainment of those moral qualities which are necessary to prepare them for happiness in a future state, their character becomes peculiarly amiable. Such a disposition, at the same time that it shews a sound understanding, and a thoughtful turn of mind, is a sure token of a good heart.

It is to a youth of this character that the text refers—a youth so well disposed, and endued with such engaging qualities, that he won the affection of our Saviour himself. “Jesus beholding him, loved him.” If we proceed to examine more particularly into the grounds of an esteem which was so highly honourable to this young man, though we shall meet with some things in his conduct to be regretted, we shall find, as we might, indeed, beforehand

forehand be assured, that he was, on the whole, worthy of the kind regard which Jesus shewed him.

The young man, as appears from the circumstances of the narrative, was a Jew of considerable property, and of no mean rank. All the historians agree that he had large possessions; and St. Luke calls him a ruler. Notwithstanding his youth, his consequence and merit had placed him in some honourable station of civil magistracy. But neither the importunity of youthful passions, nor the snares of wealth, nor the avocations of his office, could divert his attention from the first great concern of every rational being, the providing for his welfare through the whole course of his existence. Though not a disciple of Christ, and though a professor of a religion, the sanctions of which were chiefly of a temporal nature, he had believed—doubtless upon those obvious principles which appear to have produced this belief in all ages and coun-

tries—that the present life was not to be the whole period of his existence, but that he was to expect another, and an eternal life beyond the grave. Whilst a numerous body of his countrymen, the entire sect of the Sadducees, in the pride of human wisdom, rejected this comfortable doctrine, he was happy in the belief and expectation of a future state. And it appeared to his sedate and thoughtful mind an object of such unspeakable moment to provide for his well-being in that state, that he was earnestly desirous of receiving all possible information upon this important subject. Having probably long heard of the fame of Jesus, he concluded, from the wonderful things which were related concerning him, and from the wisdom and authority with which he every where taught the doctrines and precepts of religion, that he must be some eminent prophet, who was capable of giving him that instruction which appeared to him above all others most interesting.

He

He therefore gladly seized the opportunity, which the present visit of Jesus to his neighbourhood afforded him, of consulting so able a teacher on this subject. Approaching him in the most respectful manner, as he was passing by, he requested to be informed what were the necessary qualifications for future happiness. "Coming in haste to Jesus he kneeled at his feet, and said, Good master, what good things shall I do that I may have eternal life?"

Before we proceed to take notice of our Saviour's reply, allow me, for a moment, to fix your attention upon this first incident of the narrative, and to call upon you seriously to recollect your own interest in the inquiry. If any regard be due to that divine monitor within the human breast which warns you—which has warned mankind in all ages, to expect a future state of retribution, in which vice will be punished, and virtue rewarded; if any regard be due to a message

from heaven, delivered by a man whose divine mission is attested by a cloud of faithful witnesses; you must consider yourselves, not as mere children of the earth, who, after amusing or harassing yourselves for a few years in this sublunary scene, must sink into forgetfulness, and be as though you had never been; but as destined by an Almighty Creator for some other state of existence, in which, if the fault be not your own, you may live and be happy, not for the short space of threescore years and ten, but through a never ending succession of ages: you must look upon the present life as only the first stage of an immortal existence. How much soever, then, you may be disposed, in the hours of dissipation and folly, to treat life as a jest, and to banish the idea of an hereafter as a troublesome intruder, with which, for the present at least, you have no concern; in the moments of more sedate reflection you must be convinced that it is prudent—that it

is wise—that it is absolutely necessary, to inquire what course of life you must follow, in order, since it is appointed to all men once to die, and after that the judgment, that ye may die with a well-founded hope of being happy after death: you must feel the importance of the inquiry, “What good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?”

To answer this interesting inquiry was one important part of the commission which the Saviour of the world was appointed to execute. What was said of the apostles is more eminently true of their master: “These men are servants of the most high God, who do shew unto us the way of salvation.” It was therefore to be expected that to this young ruler’s question, evidently dictated by the most becoming solicitude on a point of infinite moment, Jesus would give an explicit and satisfactory answer. Accordingly, without making use of those indirect methods by which he often wisely

defeated the designs of those who proposed to him ensnaring questions; and without calling in the aid of that allegorical language with which he sometimes chose to clothe his meaning even in his addresses to his disciples, Jesus plainly instructed him by what means he might qualify himself for future happiness.

But before he replied to the young man's inquiry, our Saviour thought it necessary to correct an impropriety in his salutation. This amiable youth, whose rank and education had, doubtless, instructed him to attend to the customary forms of politeness, and whose reverence of the character of Christ made him desirous of accosting him on the present occasion with the utmost respect, had introduced himself with more than usual ceremony to this instructor, from whom he expected so important a favour as that of valuable information on a doubtful point; and had given him the appellation of Good Master. Perhaps Jesus had observed

served among the higher classes of the Jews a propensity to accost each other with flattering titles, which he thought inconsistent with sincerity, and chose in this manner to intimate his disapprobation of such practices: or, perhaps, the correction was not so much a rebuke of the young man, as a natural expression of that modest and humble temper so conspicuous in our Saviour's character, which would not permit him to receive as a mark of distinction a title, to which, in the common acceptation of the term, he had an unquestionable right. However this was, Jesus, in fact, declined the appellation *good*, as in the strictest and highest sense belonging only to that great Being who is the first fountain of all goodness, and the first author of all happiness. "Why callest thou me good? none is good but one, that is God." A declaration in which it may deserve particular remark, that our Saviour expressly disclaims the attribute of underived and immutable

mutable goodness, as inherent in God alone, and hereby clearly shews, that he himself had no idea of claiming that equality or unity with God which many of his followers have, contrary to the first principle of true religion, ascribed to him.

But let us proceed to the principal part of our Saviour's reply to the young inquirer. His solution of the question, "What shall I do that I may have eternal life?" is expressed in these plain and simple terms, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." The reply needs no comment. Every one who reads it, with a bare knowledge of the meaning of the words, provided his ideas on this subject have not been confused by systematic subtleties, will immediately conclude that, in the judgment of our Saviour, the only qualification necessary to entitle a man to eternal life, is obedience to the will of God, or the observance of those eternal laws of righteousness which
are

are written upon the heart of man by the hand of his Maker. By the light of reason all men see the propriety and necessity of observing the rules of sobriety and prudence in the regulation of themselves, and of justice and humanity in their treatment of each other. By the principle of conscience every man feels the authority of these rules, as immutable laws of his being, established by the great author of nature, and is sensible that in violating this law, he offends his Maker, and exposes himself to punishment. Even they who do not enjoy the benefit of any written law, are by the moral principles of their nature a law to themselves; so that there is no human being, who possesses the common gift of reason, to whom it may not be truly said, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good." This universal law, whether read in the book of nature, in the mosaic institutions, or in the precepts of the gospel, is at all times immutably the same; and he who

obeys

obeys it, keeps the commandments of God. Obedience to this law is our indispensable duty, and the appointed condition upon which alone we can obtain the favour of our Maker, and become entitled to eternal life, because without this obedience, that is, without the practice of virtue, it is in the nature of things impossible that we should be happy; and no other condition than this is prescribed, because the good Father of all will not impose unnecessary burdens upon his creatures. In every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him.

What then can be more astonishing than that almost the whole christian world, whilst they have professed to acknowledge no other master than Christ, should have presumed, in defiance of his express and repeated declaration, to prescribe terms of salvation which he never prescribed, and which can serve no other purpose than to divert men's attention
from

from their first and most important duties, and either soothe them with false hopes, whilst they continue in their vices, or alarm them with unnecessary apprehensions, whilst they honestly endeavour to do that which is right and good? Surely to an intelligent inquirer, who is inclined to follow the plain dictates of unsophisticated reason and common sense, and to understand the words of Christ in their obvious meaning, it must appear exceedingly strange to find that, in order to obtain eternal life, besides keeping the commands of God, it is in one church required that men should acknowledge another infallible head, either in an individual, or a collected body, and implicitly believe whatever it teaches, and religiously practise whatever it enjoins; and that in others, which have appealed from the authority of popes and councils to that of Christ, the belief of certain creeds, the observance of certain rites, a mystical reliance upon the merits of Christ, a peculiar

cular kind of fervour or tenderness in devotion, or an internal experience of supernatural impressions, should be declared qualifications absolutely necessary to salvation; nay, that these supernumerary conditions are considered as far superior, in dignity and value, to the practice of the simple and humble duties of morality.

To those who may be inclined to justify any of these unwarranted appendages to the terms of salvation, by pleading that they are included in the phrase, keeping the commands of God, the conversation before us affords a complete reply. As if on purpose to guard the christian world against the ingenious sophistry by which the meaning of the plainest words has been confounded, our Saviour goes on to inform the young ruler that by keeping the commands of God he meant the practice of the moral duties, of justice, humanity, gratitude, charity, and the like. The young man, being a Jew, upon hearing the phrase, the commandments

ments of God, naturally turned his thoughts to the mosaic *code*, and asked which of its numerous precepts it was indispensably necessary to observe in order to obtain everlasting life. In reply, Jesus directs the young man's attention wholly to those moral laws which, independently of the authority of Moses, are of immutable and eternal obligation. "He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, honour thy father and thy mother; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This is not, indeed, a complete enumeration of the commands of God, but is a specimen sufficiently large and particular, were it duly considered, to prevent all misapprehension of our Saviour's meaning; especially if this passage be compared with his account of the different characters upon which the different sentences of approbation and of condemnation will be pronounced

nounced in the day of final judgment. We need not, then, hesitate to admit it as a point clearly decided by the authority of Christ himself, that the only necessary qualification for future happiness is a good life. He that doth righteousness, as the apostle John, who was well acquainted with his master's doctrine and spirit, hath said, is righteous.

It was, doubtless, a great satisfaction to the young ruler, as it must be to every thoughtful and well disposed mind, to be able, upon comparing the general tenor of his conduct with the rule given him by our Saviour, to declare, that from his childhood to the present hour he had faithfully obeyed the will of God. The young man saith unto him, "All these have I kept from my youth up." Desirous, however, of going on to perfection, and, as appears from the sequel, of becoming the disciple of a master who was so able to instruct him in the things which belonged to his eternal peace, he said to
Jesus,

Jesus, What lack I yet? Jesus, highly pleased with the dispositions and character of this young man, wished to enlist him among his followers; but, knowing that his wealth would occasion him innumerable temptations and difficulties in the capacity of a christian teacher; probably, too, desirous of trying the strength of his virtue, he called upon him, if he was ambitious to advance beyond the necessary foundations of a virtuous character to the summit of perfection, to distribute his possessions among the poor, and become one of his followers. “Jesus saith unto him, if thou wilt be perfect, do this one thing: go thy way, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me.”

Well disposed as this young man appears to have been, his zeal and fortitude were not sufficiently strong to enable him to make a sacrifice of his fortune, and to resign every worldly expectation, in or-

der to qualify himself to become a teacher of christianity. He respected the character of Christ; he approved of his doctrine; upon easier terms he would gladly have entered himself in the train of his followers; nay, he exceedingly regretted that it was not possible, in the present state of things, to become a preacher of the gospel, and at the same time retain his wealth: but, after all, he could not persuade himself to comply with the injunction. "When the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

There is no reason to apprehend, as many writers have done, that this ruler, though possessed of some pleasing qualities, was not a good man; or to lament over him, as a hopeful youth falling short of heaven. He himself assures our Saviour, not with the arrogant air of ostentation, but with the modest confidence of conscious innocence, that he had complied with the condition of eternal life which

Christ

Christ had laid down. "All these have I kept from my youth up." Jesus was so far from calling in question the truth of the account he had given of himself, that he was highly pleased with the proofs which his whole behaviour, on this occasion, afforded, of an ingenuous temper and a good heart. Jesus beholding him, loved him, which he surely would not have done had he not been a good man.

When he calls upon the youth to part with his possessions, he does not say, If thou wilt *enter into life*, but if thou wilt be *perfect*, sell that thou hast, and thou shalt be repaid in heaven. And afterwards, when he warns his disciples from this incident, of the ensnaring nature of wealth, he speaks of it as an obstacle in the way of men's becoming his disciples, which is, in the language of the New Testament, entering into the kingdom of heaven, or being saved.

But, though this young man may reasonably, as well as charitably, be ranked

among those good men, whether christians, Jews, or heathens, who, having kept the commandments of God, are entitled, through the favour of God, to the hope of eternal life:—it is to be regretted that his virtue was still defective; that the love of riches had still such a hold upon his mind, as to prevent him from taking his station among those worthies who forsook all and followed Christ, and hereby attaining the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus. The reflection which our Saviour makes upon this incident, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God? It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God,” though it primarily refers to the peculiar difficulties attending the profession of christianity at its first establishment, merits the serious attention of the rich in all ages, and in every state of the christian church.

At the first establishment of christianity,
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nity, indeed, when it was to be propagated through distant countries, with the certain prospect of violent opposition, and severe persecutions, the rich would have peculiar sacrifices to make, and be exposed to peculiar hardships, in becoming followers of Christ; so that scarcely any thing could be imagined more difficult, or more to require the immediate assistance and support of that Divine Power, to which all things are possible, than for a rich man to relinquish all his worldly interests and prospects, in order to undertake the profession and propagation of the christian faith. But there is no situation in which the love of riches is not a dangerous snare. In how many instances is it daily seen, that the desire of wealth entices men into acts of fraud, extortion, and inhumanity, wholly inconsistent with a virtuous character; and that the possession of it seduces them into criminal indulgencies, destructive of their own happiness and that of others? And where

riches do not lead men into such violations of the commands of God, as to deprive them of all reasonable hope of everlasting life, how frequently are they the means of diverting their attention from the higher pursuits of a rational and immortal being; of alienating their hearts from those objects which are entitled to their best affections; and of retarding their progress towards christian perfection. Instead of excelling, as they whom Providence hath blessed with abundance ought unquestionably to do, in pious gratitude towards the giver of all good, and in active beneficence towards their fellow-creatures; how often do men, as they increase in riches, become more unmindful of their almighty benefactor, more confined and selfish in their dispositions, and more disinclined to make any exertions, or run any hazards, for the benefit of the public, or in support of the cause of virtue and religion? From these facts, it is but too evident, that there is
in

in riches a fascinating power, against which every one, who is exposed to its influence, ought to be upon his guard; and that it at all times much concerns those who are blest with wealth, to take heed lest they forget the Lord, and to bear in mind the apostolic warning, Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

The poor Widow's Mite.

MARK xii. 43, 44.

Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance, but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

THE first end of public instruction, doubtless, is, to recommend and enforce the practice of virtue. If it be one branch of a preacher's office to establish the truth, and to explain the theory of religion, it is because just conceptions and solid principles are the best foundation

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tion of right conduct. If it be necessary that he sometimes step aside into the thorny paths of controversy, in order to overturn ancient prejudices, or to refute new errors, it is only because error and prejudice, at the same time that they blind the understanding, tend to corrupt the heart, and to mislead men in the conduct of life. Whatever occasional excursions he may find it expedient to make into the regions of speculation, the preacher who, in the true spirit of christian charity, "seeks the profit of many that may be saved," will dwell in the fruitful field of practical religion and morality as his proper home, and will "affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God ought to maintain good works."

In this particular, as in all others, the christian preacher finds his best model in that great teacher of righteousness, his master Jesus Christ. No one who is conversant with the New Testament can
doubt,

doubt, that the general strain of his discourses, parables, and conversations, is moral and practical, and that the leading design of his ministry was, “to bless mankind by turning them from their iniquities.” His meat was to do the will of him that sent him, and to finish his work, by warning his disciples, and the multitude, against the prevalent vices of the age; and by inculcating the sincere and steady practice of every virtue. And whenever the ignorance and misapprehension of his followers, or the artifice and malice of his enemies, obliged him to interrupt, for a while, the great business of his ministry, in order to correct pernicious mistakes, or refute injurious cavils, he still kept his main object in full view, and, as soon as the irksome task of disputation was over, seized the first occasion of returning to his delightful employment of moral instruction.

When, in the midst of the useful discourses which Jesus, during his last residence

dence

dence in Jerufalem, was delivering to the multitude in the temple, he was accosted by a body of Pharifees and Sadducees, who came thither, probably under the sanction of the national council, by artful questions to draw from him, if possible, some ground of accusation, it became necessary, for his own security, and for the credit of his cause, that his ordinary labours should suffer a short interruption. But having, in his replies to these cavillers, given such proofs of superior wisdom as astonished and silenced them, he immediately resumed his address to the people, and repeated his earnest exhortations to them, to refrain from the vices of those who professed to be their guides in religion. “ All therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works, for they say and do not.”

After this monitory discourse was finished, as Jesus, upon leaving the temple, was sitting in the outer court, op-

posite to that part of the building which was called the treasury, where stood the chest, into which the *voluntary contributions* of the people, for pious and charitable uses, were put, he observed the people casting in their gifts, and remarked that several rich persons made large offerings. Among the rest he saw a poor widow casting into the chest two pieces of money of the smallest value. This incident Jesus, who was always watchful for every occasion of teaching his disciples a lesson of morality, immediately perceived to be too instructive to be passed by: he therefore called upon such of them as stood near, to attend to the singular merit of this poor woman; and observed to them, that she had done a greater act of piety and charity than any of those rich men who had made much larger offerings; for, while they had given only a small portion of their wealth, she, in the midst of her poverty, had made an offering of the whole of that little stock
which

which she had provided for her subsistence. “ And Jesus sat down over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury, and many rich persons cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing; and he called his disciples to him, and said, In truth I say to you, that this poor widow has cast in more than all they who have thrown into the treasury; for all these did cast in of their abundance, but she, of her penury, did cast in all that she had, even all her subsistence.”

The example of our Saviour, in paying so much attention to the merit of a poor widow, and bestowing upon her so large a portion of deserved praise, should teach us not to overlook real worth even in the lowest condition.

Amidst the crowd of candidates for applause, who, probably with that ostentatious display of piety and charity which
was

was at this time so common among the Jews, were publicly presenting their gifts after the daily service of the temple was ended, there was one poor woman, who made an offering, in itself scarcely worthy of acceptance, or even of notice: she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. She had not the vanity to think that so mean a gift, from so obscure a hand, would attract any degree of attention: but generosity, and a sense of duty, prompted her to present her little mite to Heaven; small as it was, she trusted that as it was *all* she had, it would not be rejected; and if Heaven accepted the tribute, though overlooked, or only beheld with proud disdain by those who were casting their gold and silver into the treasury, she was contented and thankful. It was impossible that such unostentatious goodness, and humble piety, should pass unnoticed by that benevolent Saviour who was, on all occasions, the patron of modest virtue, and the friend of the poor.

Jesus

Jesus beheld this poor widow with complacency; and in holding up her merit as an example to his disciples, laid the foundation of a monument to her memory, more honourable and durable than was ever erected in brass or marble, to perpetuate the names of saints or heroes. Let this instance of condescension put to shame that pride of wealth which so often inclines men who have, alas! few personal pretensions to superiority, to turn away with supercilious neglect—perhaps to trample under foot, with insolent disdain, that un aspiring merit which blossoms and dies in the vale of obscurity. It is to be lamented, as one among the many evils arising from the unlimited value which is put upon wealth, that, whilst homage, almost idolatrous, is paid to the merit, real or imaginary, of the rich and great, the poor man's wisdom, and even his virtues, are despised. The discouragement of virtuous exertions among the inferior classes of mankind,

mankind, which arises from this kind of partiality, is much greater than is commonly imagined; for it is only a few superior minds, who are capable of contemning "the proud man's contumely," and pursuing a steady course of unobserved or despised virtue, with no other consolation than the consciousness of good desert, and the assurance that, though forgotten or slighted by men, his witness is in heaven, and his reward with that gracious Being, who "regardeth not the rich more than the poor."

But the principal lesson of instruction which the incident before us suggests is, that the merit of a benefaction is not to be determined merely by its value, but by the condition, and the intention of the donor. This poor widow, though the sum she cast into the receptacle of public charity was only two mites, made a more meritorious offering than any of those rich men who had presented the largest contributions. Not that

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we are to suppose all the opulent contributors influenced merely by motives of ostentation, the greater part of them we conceive, (as perhaps commonly happens in these cases) to have been governed, in different degrees, both by the selfish principle of vanity, and by the more disinterested and exalted principles of humanity and piety. But the probability of being prompted to this offering by a pure sense of duty was, perhaps, in favour of this obscure widow, who could not hope, in the midst of so many rich offerings from people in higher stations, to attract notice by her humble gift; and who can scarcely be imagined to have found sufficient inducement to make an offering of all her present subsistence, except in the pleasure of gratifying her benevolent and pious feelings, and in the hope that her offering would be acceptable to God. At least, it may be clearly inferred from the circumstances of the story, that this widow, whose donation

so far exceeded, in comparative value, the splendid gifts of her richer neighbours, was inferior to none of them in charity and piety. The liberality of those who gave only an inconsiderable portion of a large store, from which they might spare much without suffering material inconvenience, was not to be brought into competition with that of the poor woman who parted with all her little stock of money, and trusted to the good providence of God, and her own industry, to supply the wants of the morrow. This excellent woman, though in condition a *poor* widow, was possessed of the inestimable treasure of a generous mind, and was, at least, equally with the wealthiest of her countrymen, "rich in good works."

How delightful the encouragement which this incident affords to those whose rank and situation in life may seem least favourable to acts of charity, to be liberal according to their ability. Ex-

cepting those whom sickness, the infirmities of age, or the unavoidable want of employment, has placed in a state of temporary or permanent dependence upon private or public charity, few persons are in such a state of absolute penury as not to be able sometimes to spare a small mite from the produce of their industry for the purposes of charity. Where this is not done, even by those who occupy the inferior ranks of life, it is commonly more owing to a want of inclination than ability. Even these ranks are not without their superfluities and luxuries, which, without any diminution of real happiness, might be occasionally abridged for the sake of furnishing the means of doing good. I must add, too, that the lower, as well as the higher orders of society, have their *expensive vices*, for which the best atonement they can possibly make is to sacrifice them upon the altar of humanity. It may seem unreasonable to expect that those who depend upon their

daily industry for their subsistence, should labour beyond what is absolutely necessary for their own support, in order to enable themselves to afford occasional relief to others. And yet I cannot doubt that those who possess any portion of the generous spirit of the *poor* widow, would find themselves amply repaid for any extraordinary fatigue they might undergo in providing a small fund, from which they might occasionally assist a relation in trouble, a neighbour or friend in affliction, or a fellow-creature in want. Such laudable exertions, for the benefit of others, even among those who are not blessed with affluence, are beyond all question required by that law of love which teaches us to be ready to every good work. It was the advice of St. Paul to his brethren at Corinth, to prepare themselves for the charitable contributions which were to be raised among them, by making it a practice, on the first day of the week, to lay by in store

as God has prospered him : an excellent rule, which resolutely followed by those whose chief dependence is upon their labour, would be attended with innumerable advantages ; among which, it would not be one of the least considerable, that it would enable them to enjoy the divine pleasure of beneficence. It is in the true spirit of christianity that the same apostle recommends industry to his Ephesian brethren, as the means of increasing their ability of doing good. He exhorts them to labour, working with their hands the thing which is good, that they may have to give to him that needeth.

Those whose sphere of usefulness, through the narrowness of their circumstances, is very small, are sometimes apt to complain that their condition in life deprives them of many gratifications which are enjoyed by the rich, and particularly that they are denied the divine luxury of doing good. And it must be

owned to be one of the principal advantages attending wealth, that it furnishes a benevolent man with many opportunities of serving mankind which none but the affluent can enjoy. But it ought to silence every murmur arising from this inequality in the condition of men, that whatever other enviable distinctions the rich possess, they do not enjoy the exclusive privilege of doing good. The poor man enjoys as much satisfaction in contributing his *mite* towards the relief of misery, and has as good reason to assure himself that it is acceptable to God, as he whose wealth enables him to offer a talent. He has many ways of rendering kindness and service to those about him besides affording them *pecuniary* assistance; and in these respects his low station, and his habits of labour, may often give him an advantage over the rich. In such cases he may say, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I unto thee:" and of whatever kind

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be the offering that is presented from a good heart, we are assured by our blessed Saviour that it will not be rejected. "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward."

Nay, even in those cases in which poverty wholly excludes a capacity of actual service; in which, for want of the instruments of beneficence, the benevolent heart is compelled to content itself with bestowing upon the objects of its sympathy the barren tribute of kind wishes alone, there is a secret satisfaction attending the consciousness of generous and compassionate feelings; which abundantly compensates the pain which they occasion. And it cannot be doubted, that the great Father of mercies, to whom the inmost recesses of the heart are open, observes with approbation every secret emotion of pity, though never expressed

in actions, or even in words. The tear of compassion is a precious offering, which from the man who has nothing else to give, will not be rejected. Where no kind offices can be performed, even “the *desire* of a man, in the judgment both of God and all good men, is his kindness*.” “Where there is a willing mind it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.”

Whilst the incident before us affords encouragement to the poor to be charitable and kind according to their ability, it warns the rich that they do not too hastily presume that, with respect to acts of charity, they discharge their *whole duty*. It is probable that the rich men, who cast much into the treasury, were very well satisfied with what they had done, and would have disdained the thought of having their valuable offerings

* Prov. xix. 22

of gold and silver brought into comparison with the poor widow's *two mites*. Yet it was the opinion of a judge, the wisdom and equity of whose decisions cannot be questioned, that "this poor widow cast more in than all they who had cast into the treasury." With respect to the intrinsic value of the offerings, or their utility for the purposes of the public treasury, they would bear no comparison; but with respect to the moral merit of the offerers, the balance turned on that side which probably the parties themselves, either through pride on the one side, or humility on the other, little expected. As far as the public is interested in charitable contributions, they are doubtless to be estimated by the effect which they will produce; that is, by the ordinary measure of pecuniary value. But if they are to be considered in a moral light, as affecting the characters of the persons by whom they are bestowed, they must be measured by a very
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different standard. He who is desirous of determining fairly what degree of moral worth his charitable actions possess, must first inquire diligently into the motives and principles from which they are performed. Before he pronounces himself in a moral sense a charitable man, and assures himself that his offerings are of that kind with which God will be well pleased, he must be fully satisfied that he gives alms, not solely or principally to obtain admiration and applause among men, but from a sincere desire to alleviate the miseries, and promote the happiness, of his brethren, and from a pious regard to the authority of God. His next inquiry must be, whether his liberality is, all circumstances considered, as *extensive* as can reasonably be expected. It cannot be the duty of the *rich* to give all that they have to the poor, for this would be overturning and inverting the order of human affairs, without any imaginable advantage. It appears to be absolutely necessary,

fary, in order to produce the greatest sum of social happiness, that there should be different ranks in society. Every man, in the station which he occupies, has certain claims for himself, and certain debts of justice and propriety to the community to which he belongs, which, in ordinary cases, precede the demands of charity. But in attending to the former a good man will not overlook the latter. When every reasonable provision is made for personal enjoyment, domestic comfort, and public appearance, a surplus will remain which ought to be consecrated to piety and humanity. The particular extent of this fund must, of necessity, be fixed by every individual for himself. But let no one, who is possessed of property, and is in a situation which enables him to enjoy the conveniences and luxuries of life, think himself, on the plea of the uncertainty of trade, an increasing family, or the like, at liberty to decline, or postpone, the design of setting apart
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some fixed portion of his annual income for charitable uses. If the poorest man, not dependent upon charity, is bound to make occasional offerings to humanity, it may surely be considered as an indispensable duty of persons in every rank of life superior to that which depends for subsistence upon manual labour, to make some regular provision for the exercise of liberality. No reasonable objection against such a measure can arise from the national establishment for the support of the poor; for the sums which are raised by means of poor laws ought to be considered in no other light than as a debt paid by the higher ranks of society to the lowest, in compensation for the unequal share which the former possess of the common gifts of nature. Every individual who has not, by misconduct, forfeited his life or liberty to public justice, has a natural right to subsistence, and I will add, *comfortable* subsistence, of which no civil institutions can deprive him. Leaving all
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legal payments for the maintenance of the poor out of the present question, as belonging rather to the head of public justice than personal charity, let those who are in any degree blessed with affluence, consider themselves as bound by the laws of benevolence and piety to make a religious appropriation of some stated portion of their wealth to the god-like design of doing good. And in making this important appointment, let them be careful to pay, at least, an equal regard to the warm suggestions of generosity, as to the cool dictates of prudence. In proportion as they are raised by divine Providence above their brethren let them enlarge their conceptions, and expand their benevolence, that their hearts may be open to every call of humanity and utility, and that they may, on all occasions, be ready to distribute, willing to communicate, never forgetting that from him to whom much is given much will be required; and that a talent
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from a rich man was a less offering than *two mites* from a poor widow.

To conclude, if thou hast abundance, give alms accordingly; and if thou hast but a little, be not afraid to give according to that little; for alms is a good gift unto all that give it, in the sight of the Most High. Bountifulness is a most fruitful garden, and mercifulness endureth for ever.

The Folly of rash Confidence.

MATTHEW xiv. 28.

Peter answered him, and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come to thee on the water.

THE real cast of a man's temper is, perhaps, best discovered by casual and unexpected occurrences. For the ordinary course of incidents which, without any uncommon share of sagacity, may be foreseen, men are usually careful to prepare themselves; putting a studied restraint upon their feelings, and cautiously regulating their behaviour, wherever they apprehend themselves in danger of making any discovery to their disadvantage.

tage. But in the unguarded moment of surprise, when their prudence, or their virtue, is assaulted in the most vulnerable part, the vices or infirmities of their nature appear without disguise. A more perfect insight into a character may be obtained from a single action, or word, thus prompted by the immediate occasion, without art or concealment, than from a long course of life which has been industriously accommodated to pre-established rules.

The apostle Peter, in the incident referred to in the text, made a sudden and undesigned discovery of his natural propensity to rash confidence in himself, and herein furnished an example of human infirmity, which it may be instructive and useful to contemplate, in connexion with the extraordinary event which occasioned it.

We are informed in St. John's gospel, that the miracle of feeding five thousand persons from five loaves and two fishes had

had convinced the multitude that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and that, in consequence of the idea at that time entertained concerning the nature of his kingdom, they began to enter into measures for proclaiming his title to the kingdom of Israel, and fixing him on the throne of David his father. Nothing could be more foreign to the real nature of our Saviour's office, or more contrary to his inclinations, than such a design. His kingdom was not of this world, and he was too intent upon executing his spiritual commission, to be capable of listening to any proposal for establishing himself as an earthly prince. "When Jesus therefore perceived that the people were ready to come and seize him by force, to make him king," he determined immediately to withdraw from them. Accordingly, having constrained his apostles and other disciples, who were probably rather disposed to favour the design of the populace, to go back in the ship

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which had brought them over the lake, to the coast which lay *opposite to Bethsaida**, and having dismissed the multitude, he retired for the purpose of devotion into a solitary place among the hills, which lay not far from the shore. "When he had sent them away, he went up into a mountain privately to pray."

It happened during the passage that the vessel was driven by contrary winds out of the intended direction, so that when they had rowed for several hours, they were only about five and twenty, or thirty furlongs, from the shore, on which Jesus still remained. Jesus, observing their situation, by the aid of that divine power which accompanied him, in the fourth watch of the night (or about three in the morning) came towards the vessel, walking on the sea, and seemed as if he would have passed by them.

* Mark vi. 45 and 53.

Among the Egyptians, who were accustomed to express their conceptions by hieroglyphics, or symbolical representations, the idea of *impossibility* was expressed by feet walking upon water. An action of this kind, which any one would immediately pronounce impracticable to a human being, would doubtless greatly surprize the already terrified and distressed passengers. Their fears, strengthened by superstition, immediately suggested to them the idea, that the appearance was a ghost or phantom. “When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit, and they cried out for fear.” Immediately, however, Jesus relieved their terror, by speaking to them, and saying, “Take courage; it is I; be not afraid.” It was at this instant that Peter exhibited a striking example of presumption. Whilst the rest of the disciples were full of silent joy and wonder, at the unexpected appearance, and astonishing situation,

of their master, this forward apostle cried out, "Master, if it *be* indeed thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." Jesus, in order to afford him an opportunity of exercising his faith, and at the same time to convince him of his rashness, said to him, Come. Upon this, "Peter descended from the ship, and walked on the water towards Jesus:" but when he perceived the wind boisterous, he was terrified; his faith and courage failed him, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Master, save me." Immediately Jesus put forth his hand, and caught him, and said to him, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Then they went together into the vessel, where they were received with great joy. Upon this the storm ceased, and the vessel was without delay conveyed to the coast of Gennesaret, near Capernaum, where Jesus continued his benevolent miracles.

Whilst we admire the majesty and the condescension which our Saviour displayed

displayed through this whole transaction, we cannot but observe, in the conduct of Peter, a striking proof of the folly of casting ourselves in the way of unnecessary dangers, through a daring confidence in our own strength. We are taught by this incident, that to seek for hazardous enterprizes, without just occasion, is not faith, but presumption, and more discovers an impetuous temper, than a prudent and steady resolution. They who are content to confine themselves within the limits which Providence has assigned them, will be in a condition of much greater comfort and safety than they who venture unnecessarily into scenes of trial and difficulty. In the tempestuous sea of human life we may find sufficient exercise for our constancy without courting danger; and if we steadily persevere in the task of duty, we may assure ourselves that we shall enjoy the protection of the great Lord of nature during our

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passage, and that we shall at length arrive at the haven of everlasting rest.

Examples of presumptuous confidence similar to that of Peter in the text, in the present state of the world, can seldom occur. To attempt to walk upon the sea, or to throw one's self from a precipice, without making use of some natural means of preservation, would now be universally deemed rather a proof of insanity than of courage. The regular modes both of public and personal defence which are at present established, leave few opportunities for those adventures in which valour is displayed by the voluntary defiance of danger. But the same temper which led Peter to request his master's permission to come to him upon the water, still appears in various forms of rashness and presumption, and still continues to produce mortification and disgrace.

We have sometimes seen men, through
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a presumptuous confidence in their own abilities, engaging in employments, or assuming offices, to which they are wholly unequal. The unavoidable consequence has been, that, after some unsuccessful efforts, they have been obliged to abandon an undertaking from which they had promised themselves credit and advantage, and have purchased a small portion of self-knowledge at the price of much disappointment and vexation. Such foolish and fruitless attempts as these can only proceed from ignorance and vanity. They may, therefore, easily be prevented by diligent and impartial self-examination, and by an attentive observation of the causes of failure, or of success, in similar situations.

It is chiefly with respect to moral conduct that men are in danger of suffering by rash confidence and presumption. In the unsuspecting period of youth, before men are taught circumspection by experience, nothing is more common than to

presume upon the strength of their resolution, and to expose their innocence to the severest trials, without any apprehension of danger. The good principles which have been from infancy impressed upon their minds by precept and example, and the habits of regularity and sobriety which many years of steady discipline have confirmed, they regard as armour of defence, sufficient to repel the most powerful assaults of temptation. Hence they venture, without apprehension, into scenes the most hazardous to their virtue, and form connexions with persons of licentious principles, and profligate characters, in full confidence of enjoying the pleasure or benefit of their society, without suffering the smallest injury from the infection of their example. As well might they expect to visit with security the abodes of pestilential disease, or to take fire into their bosom and remain unhurt.

If, indeed, the truth and importance of
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religious principles were, in all situations, equally present to the mind; if there were no danger, in any circumstances, of forgetting that we are under the authority, and actually in the presence, of that Great Being who will not suffer the wicked to go unpunished, or losing sight of the solemn account which every man must hereafter render of himself unto God; it might then be of little consequence what scenes we frequent, or what examples are exhibited before us, for we should be able, without hesitation, to reject every inticement to criminal indulgence, by saying, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" But the more perfectly we are acquainted with ourselves, and the longer we converse with the world, the more shall we be convinced that man is a weak, variable, and passive being, perpetually under the controul of external circumstances, and liable to be driven about by every breath of temptation. Those truths which,
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in the moments of retirement and serious recollection, appear unquestionably certain, and infinitely important, amidst the tumult of passion are overlooked, or, for a season, vanish before the fascinating charm of profane ridicule. That character which our deliberate judgment pronounces most respectable and meritorious, held up before the imagination by the artful hand of ridicule, in a point of view in which its features are distorted, no longer attracts our admiration, and perhaps excites a momentary feeling of contempt. Those actions which the wisdom of our preceptors and friends hath always taught us to regard with aversion and abhorrence, in the hour of dissipation and folly assume a less formidable, perhaps a pleasing aspect; we see them committed by others without disgust—we begin to apprehend that the severity of wisdom has exaggerated the deformity of vice—we suffer ourselves to be imposed upon by her deceitful blandishments, and at
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last fall into the snare which she has laid for our destruction.

It may, perhaps, serve to put those upon their guard who are most in danger of seduction, the young and unexperienced, if we enumerate distinctly the principal circumstances which render it hazardous to place ourselves in the way of temptation. These are the strength of natural appetites and passions; the powerful influence of example; and the fear of singularity.

In representing to you the hazards to which your virtue is exposed from the natural appetites and passions, I would by no means be understood to inculcate those rigid lessons of abstinence which would render human life a state of perpetual hostility against nature. Every sense with which our wise and benevolent Creator hath endued us, was doubtless intended by him as a source of enjoyment. But since universal experience has proved, that infelicities of various kinds necessarily

necessarily arise from irregularity, and that Pleasure then only deserves the name when she submits to be directed by Reason, since examples are continually occurring of the destructive effects of intemperance and licentiousness, with respect to health, fortune, reputation, and peace of mind; it must be acknowledged to be of infinite importance to be secured against the influence of irregular passions, and unlawful desires. And how shall this security be obtained but by cautiously avoiding every inticement to criminal indulgence? Whilst the mind possesses the full command of itself, in the tranquil region of wisdom, it is easy to resist the first assaults of temptation, because it is easy to call in the aid of religious principle, and virtuous resolution: but when the storm is once raised, it becomes exceedingly difficult to receive the pure rays of truth through the increasing mist of passion. Amidst the turbulence of appetite, it is scarcely to be expected that the “still
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small voice" of reason will be heard. The only certain way, then, to preserve your innocence, is to be continually upon your guard against the first approach of temptation.

Another circumstance which ought to prevent your exposing your innocence to unnecessary hazards, is the influence of example. So natural, so powerful, is the principle of imitation in the human mind, that it requires great circumspection, as well as resolution, not to "follow a multitude to do evil." Whatever may be your determination before you mix with bad company, whatever degree of confidence you may have in your self-command, if you once suffer yourself to become an associate with men of corrupt principles, and licentious manners, I shall tremble for the consequence; for it would be giving too much credit to your own report concerning yourself to believe that you are able to attach yourself to the persons of bad men, without becoming a
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partaker of their sins. When you have incorporated yourself into their society, vice will assume a new form, and will call in to her aid new auxiliaries, of which you are now little aware. Not merely inclination and appetite, but friendship, cheerful good-humour, generosity, and honour, will each provide a snare for your ruin. Finding the vices of your companions blended with many amiable accomplishments, you will be in great danger of suffering an affection for the former to steal into your hearts, under the disguise of respect for the latter. You will not easily persuade yourself that there can be any thing greatly criminal in so amiable a character, and you will soon be willing to hazard the credit, or inconvenience, which may attend a participation of his follies, for the sake of sharing his merits, and enjoying his friendship. With such companions mirth and gaiety will almost inevitably be the prelude to guilt. Innocence is never in greater danger than
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when it associates itself with libertinism at the board of festivity. “The boundaries between harmless gaiety and criminal excess are so faintly marked, that it will be no wonder if, at a season when you are more agreeably employed than in taking heed to your ways, you should pass over from the one to the other before you are aware.”

In such connexions you will be in danger of being seduced into vicious practices by false shame, an ambition of rivalling your associates in freedom and spirit, or a fear of incurring their ridicule. And it is here, perhaps, that your greatest danger will lie. The mere idea of indulgence and pleasure you might, perhaps, resist: for your heart would revolt at the prospect of enjoyment to be purchased at the expence of innocence. But the laugh of contempt you could not support: to escape reproach from your companions you would incur the reproach of your own heart: to be applauded by
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those whom you ought to despise, you would expose yourself to the censure of him whom, above all, you ought to fear. If such be the hazards to which virtue is exposed from a voluntary association with men of licentious characters, it must surely be the dictate of prudence to refrain from their society. The advice of Solomon on this head cannot be too frequently repeated. “ My son, walk not thou in the way of evil men ; enter not into the path of the wicked : avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.”

Besides the allurements of criminal pleasures, vice hath other snares which they who are desirous of preserving their innocence must studiously avoid ; I mean those which arise from the prospect of gain. In the midst of the numerous opportunities of oppression and iniquity which the present state of society furnishes, it requires much caution and resolution to avoid those connexions and
engagements

engagements which would enable a man, at the expence of that honesty which the world is too much inclined to despise, to purchase affluence and distinction. The best security, in such a corrupt state of society, is to preserve yourselves, as much as possible, independent of those who appear, from their places of gain, determined at all events to be rich, and, above all, to cultivate that independence of spirit, and love of integrity, which will enable you to despise the honours and rewards of unrighteousness.

It is in the power of few persons, consistently with their duty to society, wholly to withdraw themselves from those scenes which will expose their virtue to some hazard. The present life is intended by divine Providence as a state of trial; and, provided we retain our innocence, it is more honourable to keep, than to desert, the post of action. Our virtues, as well as our abilities, are to be improved by daily exercise. All that is

necessary, in order to our safety, is, that we do not indulge the rash and presumptuous temper which Peter discovered in the incident we have been considering, and heedlessly rush into dangers and temptations which we may, consistently with our respective characters and situations, decline. If to habitual diffidence and circumspection we add persevering industry in the discharge of our duty; if we make use of every expedient to establish in our minds the principles of religion, and to impress upon our hearts a deep sense of its obligations; if we cultivate that acquaintance with ourselves which will lead us to a just apprehension of our constitutional frailties; if we be ever ready to hearken to the lessons of wisdom, and the counsels of friendship, in obedience to the maxim of Solomon, "The ear that heareth the reproof of life, abideth among the wise;" if we be cautious and prudent in the choice of our intimate companions and friends, admitting

ting no man to a place in our hearts whose integrity and virtue have not been tried and approved ; if, lastly, we accustom ourselves to retire at proper seasons from the world, to review our past ways, to deliberate concerning our future conduct, and to supplicate direction and assistance from the eternal fountain of wisdom, we may be assured of preserving our virtue uncorrupted amidst all the snares of vice ; and, at the close of life, we shall be able to review the difficulties we have overcome, and the dangers we have escaped, with a degree of satisfaction and joy which will enable us to adopt the language of the apostle Paul, “ I have fought a good fight ; I have finished my course : henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me at that day.”

The Characters of the Hypocrite and the Penitent compared.

MATT. xxi. 28—31.

What think ye? A certain man had two sons: and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard: he answered, and said, I will not; but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise; and he answered, and said, I go, Sir, and went not. Which of these two did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first.

IN order to produce a plentiful harvest it is not only necessary that the seed be
good,

good, but that it be sown in good ground. Even the divine doctrine of our Saviour only proved efficacious when it was received into good and honest hearts. Upon those whom pride, avarice, or other corrupt passions, had rendered incapable of listening with candour and honesty to the voice of truth, the only effect of repeated instructions and admonitions was to confirm their prejudices, and increase their enmity.

The public entry which Jesus had made into Jerusalem at the head of an applauding multitude, whose cry was, "Hosannah to him that cometh in the name of the Lord;" the authoritative exertion of his prophetic power, in driving the traders out of the court of the Gentiles, and the numerous crowds, which, at this public festival of the Passover, attended upon his discourses, alarmed the Jewish rulers, who could not be persuaded to consider his ministry in any other light than as an attempt to

supplant their power, and effect a revolution in the state. Determined, at all events, to destroy Jesus, yet not daring to apprehend him by force in the presence of the people, without some plausible pretence, (for "all the people were very attentive to hear him") they resolved, after much deliberation, to endeavour, by captious and ensnaring questions, to draw him into some declaration which would furnish matter of accusation against him. Accordingly, on the third day of the week in which he suffered, whilst he was teaching in the temple, a company of persons, consisting of chief priests, scribes, and elders of the people—that is, people of eminence in the order of the priesthood, among the interpreters of the law, and in the *Sanhedrim*, or national council, came upon him in a body, if possible to confound or ensnare him. They demanded of him, with an authoritative tone, whence he derived the power which he had assumed, of turning out of the

the temple those who, by their permission, transacted affairs of merchandise in the temple; who appointed him to enter the city in public procession, like some royal personage, and under whose commission he took upon him the office of a public teacher? “When he was teaching the people in the temple, and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes came upon him, with the elders, and spake unto him, saying, “Tell us by what authority doest thou these things, and who is he that gave thee this authority?”

The design of the rulers in this question, doubtless, was, to provoke Jesus to give some answer which might afford them a plea for charging him either with blasphemy, or sedition. Jesus, therefore, well knowing that it would be in vain to give them a direct answer, chose rather to silence them by retorting upon them a similar question: he called upon them to declare explicitly, before he answered their inquiry, what they themselves

thought concerning the divine mission of John the Baptist. "He answered, and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I also will inform you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? Answer me." To this question they immediately perceived that it would be unsafe to give a direct reply, either in the negative or the affirmative: for if they acknowledged the divine authority of John, they were aware that they should furnish Jesus with sufficient ground for charging them with injustice and impiety in rejecting the testimony which John bore concerning him. On the other hand, if they pronounced John an impostor, the indignation of the people now assembled, by whom he was revered as a divine teacher, would probably be so inflamed as to endanger their lives. They therefore chose rather to withdraw their own demand than to give an explicit answer to that of Jesus.

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“ They reasoned among themselves, saying, If we shall say, from heaven, he will say unto us, Why then believed ye him not? But if we say, of men, the populace will stone us; for they are all persuaded that John was a prophet.” And they answered, and said to Jesus, “ We cannot tell.” And Jesus replied, “ Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

Having thus silenced his adversaries, he gave them a severe reproof in a parable which he addressed to them in the presence of the people, before whom the preceding conversation had passed. The fable was briefly this: “ That a certain man had two sons whom he ordered to go and work in his vineyard, and that the one said he would not go, but afterwards repented, and went; and the other said he would go, but went not.” The tale was short, but full of reprehensory meaning. If it was evident that a father who should be treated in the manner our Saviour

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viour describes, would prefer the youth, who after some hesitation, delay, and refractoriness, obeys his commands, to him who, after many smooth speeches, and fair promises, is disobedient, it was not less evident that the pharisaical Jews, who after all their zeal in the profession of religion, and strictness in the observance of its ceremonies, rejected a divine instructor, were far inferior in merit to those Jews who, without any such professions, and even after a course of iniquity or licentiousness which might seem to have rendered their conversion exceedingly improbable, became disciples of Christ. This is the application which Jesus himself makes of the parable to the case of those Jews who (after all the proofs which he had given of his divine commission) despised his doctrine, and sought to take away his life. “Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you: for

John

John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not, but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterwards that ye might believe." That part of the Jewish nation whose scrupulous adherence to every supposed intimation of the divine will, traditional as well as written, might seem to promise a ready and cheerful reception of any further relation from heaven; but, notwithstanding, refused to obey the gospel, were in the condition of the fair spoken youth who, when his father said to him, Go work to-day in my vineyard, said, I go, sir, and went not. Those whose disgraceful profession, or guilty character, might appear to discourage all expectation of their becoming sincere disciples of a master whose laws enjoined the strictest purity and integrity, but who, after all, abandoned their vices, and submitted themselves to the authority of Christ, might justly be compared to the
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rude but well meaning and dutiful young man, who, upon receiving the same command with his brother, said, I will not go, but afterwards repented, and went.

Few persons will, I apprehend, hesitate in pronouncing this latter the preferable character; but it may be of use to consider more particularly the grounds of this preference.

When men fail to execute the fair promise which, either in express words, or in their actions, they have given of future excellence, it must always be either owing to a want of resolution, or a want of principle; because they have not a degree of integrity and constancy sufficient to render them proof against temptation; or because they do not sincerely wish to *be* good, but merely to be *thought* so, for the sake of serving some selfish purpose. In the former case, though there be some room for respect, on account of the good dispositions which subsist in the mind, there is still more for
blame,

blame, that for want of diligent culture and steady perseverance, they are suffered to languish and die. In the latter, the only feelings which the contemplation of the character can excite are those of contempt and aversion. For the more excellent the qualities are to which any man pretends, the greater is the disappointment, and consequently the more violent the disgust, when we discover that it is nothing more than pretence.

On the other side, when a man whose words, or external appearance, promises nothing, or less than nothing, upon a more intimate acquaintance presents before us a character which strikes us with admiration, we have the fullest assurance that his virtues are sincere, and that his merit is substantial: we soon learn to overlook, or forget, defects of temper, or peculiarities of manner, which are so amply compensated by sterling goodness: we even contemplate his excellencies with the higher pleasure, at least when
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we first become acquainted with them, from the surprize of discovering so much to admire where we had met with many things to censure. Suppose a character of inferior merit—suppose a young man whose pliable irresolute temper, or whose impetuous passions, seem at his first entrance upon life to afford much more ground for painful apprehension, than for pleasing expectation, concerning his future character; if, upon the actual encounter with temptations, we find that he assumes a degree of firmness and courage which he at first scarcely seemed to possess; if we observe him calling into action the virtuous and pious principles which education had implanted in his mind, and find him rising to that manliness and excellence of character of which he once scarcely seemed capable, the pleasure we experience in contemplating his growing merit is heightened by surprize. We value the ripening fruit the more because it exceeds the promise of the spring. Let

us make a still lower supposition. Conceive a young man who has not only seemed for a while inattentive to the voice of wisdom, but has wantonly rejected her solicitations, and, rejecting to walk in her ways, has turned aside into the paths of vice: Suppose him, after a short experience of youthful follies, convinced of the deceitful nature, and destructive consequences, of vicious pleasure, recollecting the lessons of prudence and virtue which were taught him in his early years, recovering the tone of his moral and religious principles, and, with sincere penitence, and determined resolution, forsaking the vices, and returning to the path of his duty; we contemplate the happy change with a degree of delight proportioned to the regret and sorrow which his degeneracy had occasioned; we candidly overlook and forgive his wanderings, and welcome him back to the paths of peace and happiness. The pleasure, in this instance, resembles that
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with which we see leaves, and flowers, and fruits, springing from a stock which we had given up for dead.

In short, in every case of moral conduct which resembles that of the son in the parable, who said to his father, I will not go, but afterwards repented, and went, we find traces of latent virtues, which render the character far preferable to that of the irresolute or dishonest promiser, who is like the other plausible, but disobedient youth, who, in reply to his father's command, said, Sir, I go, but, after all, went not.

How much preferable the former character is to the latter every one will be convinced who will attend to the manner in which he himself judges of men, in all cases in which his more important interests are concerned. With respect to the mere forms of ceremony, or civility, we give ourselves little trouble to estimate the exact value of men's declarations and promises: for it is of little consequence

quence whether the current coin of complaisance be sterling or counterfeit, as long as it continues to pass. But in every connexion of a more serious nature we look for something more substantial than mere words. For the friend of your bosom would you not much rather make choice of a man, who, though he might sometimes offend you with bluntness or rudeness of speech, would be ever ready to serve you by kind actions, than of one who would only feed your expectations with fair promises? In any civil or commercial concern would you not much sooner submit to the inconvenience of uncouth language, an ungracious air, or even occasionally of perverse humours, for the sake of being assured of the faithful and punctual performance of every necessary office, than relinquish the substantial benefit of honest and useful services, for the sake of having your ears tickled with smooth words? In affairs

rested we all perceive the difference between saying and doing. We all attend to this difference in the judgments we form of others; let us not overlook it when we pass judgment upon ourselves.

We may be assured that the great distinction between words and deeds will not be overlooked by the Almighty in his final judgment of mankind. Good intentions, it is true, where circumstances are such that they cannot be carried into execution, will not be rejected. Where there is a willing mind it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. But before the tribunal of Omniscience mere words will be of no value. "Not every one," saith our Saviour, "who saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven." The homage we pay our Maker in acts of religious worship, if it be not accompanied with the heart, is an empty sound, nei-
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ther profitable to ourselves, nor acceptable to him. It was a severe censure which the prophet Isaiah passed upon the ancient Israelites, which our Saviour applied to the Pharisees, and which is applicable to all hypocritical worshippers: "This people draw nigh unto me with their mouth, and honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." In like manner all professions of zeal for religion, and all declarations of a purpose and resolution to obey the will of God, which are not followed by a correspondent course of action, are wholly ineffectual to obtain the favour of God. Without a life truly devoted to the service of God, and the benefit of mankind, in the practice of all personal and social virtues, the most humble confessions of sin, the most solemn vows of obedience, profit nothing. It is meet, indeed, to be said unto God, "We have done iniquity, we will do so no more;" but the great Ruler of the world is too wise to be im-

posed upon by false pretences, and too much the friend and patron of virtue to accept of insincere professions and promises instead of actual obedience. The true penitent, who, though he has formerly refused to yield obedience to the authority of God, and lived in the violation of his commands, has, at length, changed his views and inclinations, and turned from all his transgressions, is certainly more acceptable to the righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness, than the mere pretender to piety, who contradicts all his fair professions, and good resolutions, in his daily conduct. Nothing short of actual obedience can obtain the favour of God. “If thou *doest*—not if thou *promisest*—well—thou shalt be accepted.”

What encouragement does this doctrine afford to those who have forsaken the right way, to return to the path of their duty! Our merciful Father in heaven is not like some rigorous parents,
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who resent, with inexorable severity, every act or expression of disobedience, and leave their offending children no room for repentance, though they seek it earnestly with tears. The language of that long-suffering and forbearance with which he treats his frail and erring creatures, is, Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.

How erroneously do we judge of the characters of men when we despise the humble penitent, and pay respect to the proud and self-righteous hypocrite? The penitent, notwithstanding all the blame which he has justly incurred by his offences, is certainly much more deserving of regard on account of the good dispositions his repentance discovers, and the virtuous resolution which has produced his reformation, than the hypocrite, on

account of an idle parade of piety and sanctity to which his heart is a stranger, and unmeaning professions and promises, which neither are, nor were ever, intended to be accomplished. Yet the assuming pretender to religion, even when the veil of hypocrisy is too thin to conceal his real character, shall obtain a degree of respect for the mere form of godliness, which shall be haughtily refused to the man who, with humble contrition, forsakes his vices, and enters upon a new course of life. This is surely judging according to the appearance, and not according to truth.

Lastly, how forcibly does the parable under consideration teach us not to rely upon mere verbal professions without correspondent actions, in the judgment we form of ourselves and our own condition. If we be conscious of living in the habitual practice of any vice, let us not flatter ourselves that occasional acknowledgments of our sins, or resolutions
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of amendment, expressed in public forms of devotion, will be accepted by our Maker in the room of actual reformation. Let us remember that the son, who did the will of his father, was not he who said, I go, sir, and went not, but he who said I will not go, but afterwards repented, and went.

I must not conclude without remarking that, though the character of a sincere penitent is preferable to that of an hypocritical pretender to religion, there is a third character more excellent than either—that of the man who, through the whole course of his life, pursues a uniform and steady course of obedience to the will of God. Although the design with which our Saviour delivered the parable of the text did not lead him to extend it beyond the two cases of the son who promised to go into his father's vineyard, but went not, and of him who at first refused to go, but afterwards went, a third case may be supposed,

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which will imply more merit than either of the former, namely, that of a son who said, I go, sir, and immediately went as he had promised.

In the common intercourse of society, though we prefer a man who is rude of speech, but honest in heart, to one who has nothing to recommend him but a smooth tongue and a hollow complaisance, yet we most of all admire and value the man who unites every external expression of civility and politeness with the higher and more substantial merit of integrity and benevolence. So, in the moral conduct of life, as it respects the Supreme Judge, to whom we are accountable for our actions, though repentance be better than hypocrisy, innocence is still better than repentance. When any one has been unfortunately led astray by temptation into the path of wickedness, the best course he can possibly take is to repent and amend. Blessed, saith our Saviour, are they that mourn, for
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they shall be comforted. But if the man be happy whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, still happier is he who, by a steady course of obedience to the divine laws, escapes the pangs of remorse, and the numerous evils which are necessarily attendant upon vice, and from which even reformation itself cannot wholly exempt those who have been her votaries. Blessed are the undefiled in the way who walk in the law of the Lord: blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with their whole heart; they also do no iniquity; they walk in his ways.

Take heed, then, that there be such an heart in you, that ye may fear the Lord, and keep his commandments always, that it may be well with you for ever.

Christ's

Christ's Conversation with the Woman of Samaria.

JOHN IV. 10.

Jesus answered, and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

IN trying and hazardous situations a wise man will preserve the due medium between cowardly timidity and presumptuous rashness. Whilst he flies from no difficulties which unavoidably attend the discharge of his duty, he will not expose himself to any dangers which circum-
spection

spection and prudence might enable him to avoid. In the execution of great undertakings discretion is no less necessary than firmness.

On this ground the conduct of our Saviour, in retiring from Judea into Galilee, after his first visit to Jerusalem, may be fully justified. The general attention which his miracles and preaching had excited among the people, appears to have raised, in the rulers of the Jewish nation, an apprehension lest this new teacher should become the occasion of public disorder. The Pharisees in particular, who were much interested in preventing innovations, kept a watchful eye upon his progress. And when they were informed that he continued to make converts, and that the number of those who, through the ministration of his disciples, received his baptism, was greater than that of the followers of John, who had before given them some alarm, they began to think of employing the public authority

authority to suppress these proceedings. Jesus, following the natural dictates of self-preservation in such a situation, rather than expose himself to the hazard of being cut off in the beginning of his labours, chose again to withdraw into the remote regions of Galilee.

In the course of his journey an incident occurred, the particulars of which, as related by St. John, are exceedingly interesting, both on account of the light which they cast upon the character of our Saviour, and the weighty lessons of instruction which they convey.

The road from Jerusalem into Galilee lay through Samaria. This country, formerly inhabited by Israelites, was, after the Assyrian captivity, repopled by a colony from a country beyond the river Euphrates, who brought with them their idolatrous rites. After their settlement, imagining from some calamities which had befallen them, that they had neglected the God of the country, they
requested

requested the king of Assyria to send them some person to instruct them in the worship of the God of Israel. This request the king complied with, and a Jewish priest came among them, and resided at Bethel*. This circumstance, together with the situation of the country, afterwards brought many Jews to settle in Samaria. Nevertheless, this mixed people still retained their idolatrous rites, worshipping their false gods in conjunction with Jehovah. This continued to be the case for several generations; “Their children and their children’s children, fearing the Lord, and serving graven images.” The aversion which this circumstance had excited in the Jews against the Samaritans was afterwards confirmed by other causes, when idolatry no longer subsisted among them. When the Jews, returning from captivity, determined upon rebuilding the city and

* 2 Kings xxvii. 24.

temple of Jerufalem, the Samaritans violently opposed the defign. And afterwards Manaffes, a brother of the high priest who had offended the Jewish fanhedrim by marrying the daughter of the Affyrian governor of Samaria, was prevailed upon by his father-in-law, Sanballat, with no inconfiderable party of Jews who had joined him, to build a temple on Mount Gerizim, in Samaria, in opposition to the temple at Jerufalem.

These historical facts may ferve to explain to you the grounds of that inveterate enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans referred to in this narrative, and to illustrate feveral parts of the conversation.

As Jefus was paffing through Samaria, and approached the town of Sychar, fituated near a piece of ground which the patriarch Jacob had formerly given to his fon Jofeph, whilst the difciples, who accompanied him, were gone into the town to purchafe provifions, being fatigued

tigued with his journey, he sat down to rest himself upon the side of Jacob's well. At this instant a woman from Sychar came to the well to draw water. Jesus, ever watchful for opportunities of doing good, immediately began a conversation with her, in which it was his purpose to give her much useful instruction.

Our Saviour was probably the more desirous of entering into discourse with this woman, because she was a Samaritan, that he might in this action express his disapprobation of the enmity which subsisted between the two nations, and give his disciples an intimation of the liberal spirit, and comprehensive nature, of the religious system which he was about to establish. His design in conversing with a Samaritan was, doubtless, to instruct his followers, that, as he himself was superior to the prejudices and partialities of his countrymen, so they should divest themselves of all unreasonable

able aversion or attachment to particular bodies of men, and, regarding all mankind as brethren, should be ready to every good work.

Jesus began this conversation, not with an immediate declaration of his character and design, but with the natural request that she would draw him some water from the well to drink. Such a request might seem a very unlikely means of introducing a conversation so interesting as that which followed. But our Saviour knew how to make the best use of every incident that occurred; and he easily foresaw that a request of this nature, addressed to a Samaritan woman, would recall to her mind the animosity which had long subsisted between the Jews and Samaritans, and thus afford him an occasion of giving her seasonable instructions. Accordingly it is related by the Evangelist, that the woman was much surprised to be thus accosted by one who, from his habit and dialect, she knew to be an inhabitant

habitant of Judea. Recollecting the mutual disaffection of the two nations, and presuming (as is too often done) that the bigotry and the prejudices of a party must necessarily be found in every individual that belongs to it, she little expected to have met with a Jew who would condescend to ask, or accept of, a civility from a Samaritan; and she expressed her astonishment by saying, "How is it, that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me who am a woman of Samaria?" for, adds the historian, according to our translation, "the Jews *have no dealings* with the Samaritans." The original words should have been rendered, agreeably to their literal meaning, The Jews do not use any thing in common with the Samaritans, that is, probably, do not eat or drink out of the same vessels with them. That they had some dealings with each other appears from the circumstances of this story; for the disciples were, at this time, gone into the

town to buy food: and, as the people of Galilee were frequently obliged to pass through Samaria in their way to Jerusalem, this kind of intercourse could not be avoided. The sense in which I understand this passage is free from the difficulty arising from these circumstances upon the common interpretation. It is at the same time supported by facts recorded in the history of this people. An ancient Jewish rabbi relates, that the Jews looked upon the Samaritans as having no part in the resurrection; that they excommunicated and cursed them, and that they held it unlawful to eat with them*. As a farther confirmation of the antipathy of the Jews to the Samaritans, may be mentioned the terms on which, on a certain occasion, the Jewish populace insulted our Saviour. On the other side, the Samaritans were equally inveterate in their enmity against

* Lightfoot in loc.

the Jews, as appears, amongst other circumstances, from an incident related by St. Luke, that when our Saviour was going up to Jerusalem, and would have called at a Samaritan village to take refreshment, the inhabitants refused to receive him, "because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem."

These facts, and innumerable others, which it were easy to adduce from almost every period of ecclesiastical history, leave us no room to doubt that there is nothing more destructive of the peace and happiness of mankind than religious bigotry. The dissensions and persecutions which immoderate zeal, in the support of particular articles of faith or forms of worship, has produced through the several ages of the world, would fill up a tale of horror disgraceful to human nature. And, although the general increase of knowledge, and of liberal intercourse, has, in some degree, subdued this spirit, and taught men that probity and piety

are not necessarily connected with any particular creed, yet so much of the old leaven still remains that people of different religious sects find some difficulty in holding the same friendly society, and entertaining the same friendly regard for each other, as if no such difference in religious opinions and practices subsisted. Yet, till they are able to do this, they have not perfectly imbibed the spirit of their Master; for he was so entirely free from national partiality, that he could converse with a Samaritan with the same candour and kindness as with a Jew; and, when he wanted a supply of water to relieve his thirst, he saw no reason why he should not readily ask; and thankfully accept it, from a woman of Samaria; a most instructive example of that liberality of sentiment which we ought to exercise towards those who hold different religious principles, or belong to a different church, from our own; especially when we find the party with
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which we are connected inclined to moroseness or uncharitableness.

To the question by which the woman expressed her surprise at our Saviour's request, he gave no direct reply. He was aware that this might lead him into the controversy between the two nations farther than was consistent with his present purpose. He knew that religious, as well as other animosities, are often best healed by waving all farther discussion of the questions which occasioned them. He was conscious of higher and more benevolent views than those of deciding the questions in dispute between the Jews and the Samaritans. In order to give this woman some idea of his character and office, he said unto her, in his usual figurative manner, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water;" hereby intimating, that the doctrine which he was appoint-

ed to teach, and which he was ready to communicate to her, was adapted to give refreshment and life to the mind, as the water, flowing from a wholesome spring, to the body.

The woman, understanding our Saviour's words (as Nicodemus, on a similar occasion, had done) in their literal sense, said, "Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: whence then hast thou this living water? Art thou greater, or wiser, than our father Jacob, who himself, with his children, servants, and cattle, drank of this water, and left the well for the use of his posterity?" Jesus, still farther to unfold his meaning, replied, "Whosoever drinketh of this water will thirst again; but he that drinketh of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; but the water that I shall give him will be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life." It is as if he had said, "I do not speak of this, or any other common water, which can only relieve a present thirst that will
shortly

shortly return, and require a fresh supply; but I make use of this term by way of allusion, to denote the powerful efficacy of my doctrine, which will yield perpetual satisfaction to those who receive it in this world, and will preserve and nourish them for eternal life in the world to come."

From this declaration the woman might easily have concluded that this stranger was some great prophet, who was able to teach her spiritual doctrine. Still, however, she understood him literally, and requested that he would give her of the water of which he spake, that she might no longer have occasion to come to the well. Upon this, Jesus determined to give her a convincing proof of his prophetic power, by shewing her, that, though apparently an entire stranger, he was not unacquainted with the particulars of her life and character. For this purpose he desired her to go home, and call her husband, and come again to him.

The woman said, "Sir, I have no husband." Jesus answered, "In saying you have no husband you have spoken true, for you have had five husbands: but he with whom you now live is not your husband."

The woman, astonished at thus being circumstantially informed of what concerned herself by a Jew and a stranger, was immediately convinced that he must be endued with extraordinary powers from heaven, and said, "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet." And, whether it was that she was desirous of evading any farther discourse on a topic which touched her conscience, or that she was sincerely desirous of information upon the great question in dispute between the Samaritans and the Jews, she intimated a wish that he would teach her the truth concerning the place in which the public sacrifices and national worship ought to be performed. "Our fathers worship on this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem

Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

The occasion of the building of the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim has been already explained. This temple had, before the time of this conversation, been destroyed by the Romans, but the Samaritans had doubtless rebuilt it, as they still continued to perform their public offices of religion there. The Samaritans, who received only the five books of Moses, deduced their authority for fixing the national temple upon this mountain from the example of the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob, who had erected altars upon it. The Jews, relying upon the authority of the later history of their nation, had maintained that Jerusalem was the proper seat of the public national worship.

Our blessed Saviour brought this dispute to a brief and decisive issue by declaring, in the name and under the authority of God, that all distinctions respecting

specting the place and other incidental circumstances of public worship, were now to be abolished, and that the time was come in which men were to learn that sincerity is the only thing necessary to render religious worship acceptable to God. “ Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither on this mountain, nor yet at Jerufalem, worship the Father : ye worship what ye know not ; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews : but the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

Our Saviour's meaning, in this most interesting declaration of his doctrine concerning the nature and obligations of religious worship, is too clearly expressed to be easily misunderstood : it is plainly

this: Concerning your nation it is indeed true, that, although you are now free from idolatry, you have not such just conceptions of God and his worship as the Jews, to whom God hath sent his prophets, and amongst whom the Messiah is to appear. But, notwithstanding that you Samaritans have been mistaken in this matter, the mistake is no longer of consequence: for the season is arrived in which is to be introduced a dispensation of religion, so pure and spiritual, that there shall no longer be any ground for the preference of one place to another in the worship of God. The time is come in which religious worship is to be presented without the external symbols of sacrifices and ceremonies; in which God will require nothing more from men than that they worship him with sincere devotion. The homage of the mind is that which was always most acceptable to God, and which alone he now expects and demands. This is the kind of worship

ship which is most suitable to his nature; for he is himself a spiritual being, possessed of all the properties and powers of the most perfect mind, and therefore cannot be pleased with any external expressions of devotion which are not accompanied with the genuine sentiments of piety.

Such were the pure and sublime ideas of religion which our Lord communicated to the Samaritan woman, and not to her alone, but to his disciples in all succeeding ages. One of the most important ends of his mission was to settle religion upon the eternal foundation of truth and reason. He found it every where loaded with ornaments, debased by superstition, and corrupted by hypocrisy. His first object, therefore, was to separate the pure gold from all the base mixtures with which it had been alloyed, and to restore it to the world in its native purity. He taught mankind that the acceptableness of religious worship depends upon no external circumstances whatever,

ever, but entirely upon the habit and temper of mind with which it is presented. According to his doctrine religious worship can receive no additional value from the magnificence, or the supposed sanctity, of the temple in which it is offered. The sincerity of the worshipper, which has no necessary dependence upon the incidental circumstances of time, place, or posture, is the quality which alone can obtain the favour of that Great Being, who dwelleth not in temples made with hands. Whosoever presents to his Maker the offering of an honest heart, a pious mind, and a good life, pays him a more acceptable tribute than if he brought before him all the fowls of heaven, or slaughtered at his altar the cattle upon a thousand hills.

It is infinitely to be regretted that this divine doctrine has been so little regarded by christians in the several ages of the church. Had they fully conceived the idea, and truly imbibed the spirit of their
Master

Master on this head, all contests about places, ceremonies, and forms of religion, would have been buried in the ruins of the Jewish, Samaritan, and heathen temples. These circumstances would have been considered as of no consequence farther than they might be found to contribute to the decency and regularity of public worship, and would, consequently, have remained in the same state of freedom in which our christian directory has left them. All men would either have united in one general simple form of public worship, expressive of the universal principles and sentiments of religion, after the model of that excellent prayer which our Lord has left us; or, at least, would have agreed in making use of different methods of devotion, with the same spirit of piety and charity, making it in this affair the *first* object of their attention, and the *only* object of their zeal, to pay sincere homage to the one eternal mind.

Warned

Warned by the examples of folly and inconsistency which the history of the christian church affords us, let us return to the simple doctrine of our divine Master, and leaving it to others to dispute concerning the forms of religion, make it our chief concern to preserve the reality, by performing all our devotions with fixed attention, with genuine sentiments of piety, and with sincere intentions to obey the God whom we worship; for God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

The Folly of rejecting Instruction.

MATT. viii. 34.

*And when they saw him, they besought him
to depart out of their coasts.*

IT has been an opinion, ably, and I think I may add, satisfactorily, maintained by several learned and ingenious writers, that the persons so frequently spoken of in the gospels as possessed with devils, were, in reality, lunatics or madmen; and that our Saviour, in treating their diseases as the effect of the immediate agency of evil spirits, conformed to the common notions and customary language
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of the Jews on a point concerning which it did not lie within the limits of his commission to correct their judgment.

Without entering at present into the detail of argument by which this opinion is supported, I shall take it for granted that the persons on whom the miraculous cure related in the context was performed, were labouring under the disease which we call madness: and, on this supposition, I shall endeavour to explain the narration.

Soon after Jesus and his disciples had passed over the lake of Tiberias, and were arrived in the country of Gadara, he was met by two demoniacs, who were possessed with such frantic madness that they wandered naked in the fields and among the tombs, and were a terror to the neighbourhood, and whose disorder gave them so much preternatural strength that even chains were not sufficient to bind them. “ There met him two demoniacs coming from among the

tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass along that way, and no man could bind them, no not with chains, neither could any man tame them; and they were always, night and day, in the mountains, and among the tombs, crying, and cutting themselves with stones."

As it was a current opinion among the Jews that madness was owing to possession with an evil spirit, the madmen themselves, who were once in their senses, must, of course, have had the same notion. These madmen, as is not uncommon, knew themselves to be so, and therefore thought themselves to be possessed, and spoke in that character*. Conversing as madmen often do, reasonably, but upon a false notion, one of them, in the character of the supposed demons who possessed them, said to Jesus, who had commanded the unclean spirits to come out of them (that is, the

* Priestley in loc.

disease of madness to leave them), “What hast *thou* to do with us, (so the original should be rendered) Jesus, thou son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? And Jesus asked him, saying, what is thy name? and he said, Legion, because many demons were entered into him.” And the demons (that is, the madmen speaking in their character) besought him that they might go into a herd of swine, about two thousand in number, that was feeding at a distance from them, near the shore. The disease which possessed the demoniacs was, by our Saviour’s power, transferred from them to the swine, who, immediately becoming mad, ran headlong down a precipice into the lake, and were drowned. “And Jesus said unto the demons, Go: and when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine, and behold the whole herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.” Mark adds that one

of the recovered demoniacs intreated permission to accompany Jesus, but that Jesus suffered him not, but ordered him to go home to his friends, and tell them what great things the Lord had done for him, and had compassion on him, which he did accordingly.

This miracle, which has been made the subject of much unnecessary ridicule, though very different from the general character of our Saviour's miracles, which, except in this and one other instance, were all of the benevolent kind, nevertheless admits of an easy vindication. The loss of the herd of swine might have been intended (as several judicious critics suppose) for a punishment of the owners, who had been induced by avarice to violate the Jewish ceremonial law respecting these animals; or (which I think more probable) the whole transaction might be designed, after the manner of the ancient Jewish prophets, as an emblematical representation of the danger
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of refusing and disobeying a messenger from heaven; instructing the inhabitants of Gadara that, if through the prevalence of any criminal passion they rejected the doctrine which he came to deliver, they would subject themselves to destruction as certain and terrible as that which had now befallen the herd of swine.

There is the more reason to apprehend that Jesus had already discovered in this people a disposition unfavourable to the progress of his doctrine, and seen occasion for treating them with unusual severity, as we find that the miracle which he wrought had no other effect upon them than to terrify and offend them. "When the keepers of the herd went into the city, and told what had happened, the people came out, and seeing the man out of whom the demons were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, they were afraid." "Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round

about besought him to depart out of their coasts." Whether the disinclination to any farther acquaintance with Jesus, which these people expressed, was owing to a criminal aversion to his doctrine; or whether it was merely the effect of a superstitious apprehension of some dreadful punishment which this holy prophet might inflict upon them, the fact of their "beseeching him to depart out of their coasts" affords an example of a kind of folly against which, as it is not uncommon among mankind, it may be of use to you to be cautioned.

There are two cases especially in which men are very much inclined to act like these Gadarenes: the first is, when any one attempts to *correct their errors* and *enlighten their understandings*; the second is, when any one undertakes to *reprove their vices* and *reform their manners*.

Examples of the former case we frequently meet with in the history of the world. It was a disinclination to profit
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by instruction which prevented the inhabitants of Galilee and Judea from giving a welcome reception to the messenger of heavenly wisdom. It was the same spirit which, in a more remote period, obstructed the progress of truth among the Greeks, when some of their wise men attempted to teach them the simple truths of religion, undisguised by fable, and unencumbered by superstition. And, in modern times, the same cause has operated from the beginning of the reformation from popery to the present day, to discourage every attempt which men of enlarged views and liberal principles have made to enlighten the world. The same weakness and bigotry which banished our Saviour from Gadara, and afterwards condemned him to crucifixion at Jerusalem, mingled the cup of poison for Socrates at Athens, forged the chains for Paul at Cefarea, and kindled the flames for Cranmer in Britain. And, although the continual increase of general know-

ledge during the last and the present century has encouraged free inquiry in religion, and has produced an almost universal conviction of the absurdity of persecution, there is still so much of the old leaven of bigotry remaining, that multitudes are disposed to look upon the character of a reformer with contempt or aversion, and would rejoice if some expedient could be found to check the spirit of innovation. If you look back through the ecclesiastical history of this country since the reformation, you will find that there has always been a disposition prevailing among the vulgar, as well as among their rulers, to oppose the propagators of new opinions, as corrupters of the purity of the christian faith, and disturbers of the peace of the church. As soon as protestant churches were formed, they, inconsistently enough, endeavoured to obstruct the exercise of that freedom of speculation among themselves which had led them to separate from the
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church of Rome, by fixing a standard for the public belief in certain creeds and articles of faith ! The different sects of protestants, as each happened to prevail, discovered an intolerant spirit towards the rest, and endeavoured to fence the enclosure of the true church against the encroachments of heresy, if not with temporal severities, at least with spiritual censures. If any individual, wiser or bolder than his brethren, ventured out of the beaten track of opinions, and especially if his arguments engaged any degree of public attention, and gained him any considerable number of followers, he was sure to bring upon himself a heavy load of obloquy. When, for example, the general cast of opinions, both among the episcopalians and nonconformists, was calvinistical, the man who boldly entered his protest against the doctrines of absolute election and reprobation, and maintained the freedom of the human will, and the unlimited extent of divine
mercy

mercy in the redemption of the world, was deemed a heretic of the first order, and the names of Arminian and Baxterian became equal terms of reproach. Afterwards, when the claims of ecclesiastical dominion ran high, the man who endeavoured to overturn these claims by showing that all attempts to prescribe to the judgments, and dictate to the consciences of men, in matters of religion, are inconsistent with the nature of the *kingdom of Christ*, which is *not of this world*, raised a general cry against him, and brought upon himself the censure of the ruling powers. About the same period, one of the most illustrious ornaments of the church gave no small offence by proposing an account of the doctrine of the Trinity, which he judged more consistent with scripture and reason than that which was commonly received; whilst several eminent men among the dissenters, adopting the same opinion concerning the person of Christ, as a being inferior

rior to, and dependent upon, the Eternal Father, fell under severe censure both from their brethren and the general body to which they belonged. Other distinguished friends to free inquiry have since appeared, who have brought upon themselves no small share of odium from the bigotted advocates for mystery, and of censure from the cautious and timid followers of truth, by boldly advancing whatever appeared to them to be a just explanation of the doctrine of scripture, without inquiring how far such explanations might suit the complexion of the times, or agree with the preconceptions of others.

Such men as these have always been looked upon by multitudes as troublesome innovators. Perhaps the general voice, at the several periods in which they flourished, would have been, if not for silencing and persecuting them, at least for persuading them to hold their peace, or quietly to withdraw, as the Gadarenes besought

fought our Saviour to depart out of their coasts. And yet to these men the church has been indebted for some of the most judicious and able apologies for the christian faith, and form many valuable illustrations of the holy scriptures. Many of the tenets which these men advanced, notwithstanding the alarm and offence which they at first occasioned, having since undergone a dispassionate review, are now commonly received as agreeable to divine revelation. And, which is perhaps still more important, the general consequence of their free inquiries and communications has been, to disseminate a spirit of liberality among people of all classes; so that men can now prosecute their researches with less restraint, and report the result with less hazard than formerly. These happy effects of such undisguised attempts to propagate religious truth, have been experienced, allow me to say it, in this place: they have been experienced in many christian societies

ties of various denominations; they have been experienced by the public at large, in the general prevalence of a disposition to inquire freely after truth, and to exercise candour towards those who differ from us in opinion.

There cannot, then, be any necessity, except it be such a necessity as arises from lucrative considerations, to wish for the suppression of any exertions for the purpose of informing and enlightening the world. There is no reason to apprehend that mankind will, upon the whole, be sufferers by the discovery of truth. Knowledge, merely abstract and speculative, can do no harm: knowledge, which admits of a practical application, must be useful. Experience proves this to be the case in all other sciences; why should it not be true in religion? On this important subject, then, be always ready to gather up instruction and information from every quarter. Instead of starting back with affright from all who advance opinions

nions different from those which you have already embraced, listen to their reasonings with attention ; give them a candid and impartial examination, and allow them all the weight they ought to have in determining your judgment. Instead of regarding the man who undertakes to correct your opinions in the light of an adversary, consider him as your friend, at least in intention, and rather invite his society, than, like the Gadarenes, beseech him to depart from you. Be assured that, unless the fault be your own, no inconvenience can arise from the intercourse. If the opinions he advances be without foundation, the detection of their weakness and fallacy will only serve to confirm you in the truth. If they be well supported, they ought, at all events, to be adopted. If, after all the information you can obtain upon the subject, it appears to be involved in uncertainty, you will remain in suspense, and wait for new light, and in the mean time you will

learn a practical lesson of moderation. On every supposition it is wiser and safer, more worthy of a man, and more becoming a christian, to “*hear and understand,*” than, either through bigotry, timidity, or indifference, to “*refuse instruction.*”

But it is time that I proceed to apply the example in the text to those who reject the counsels and admonitions of such as would *reprove their vices and reform their manners.*

To the man who is not disposed to reformation a faithful reprove commonly appears in the light of a troublesome intruder. As the *Gadarenes*, perhaps through an apprehension of being too strictly called to account for their crimes, “besought Jesus to depart out of their coasts;” so every one, who is devoted to his vices, will make use of every expedient to dismiss the faithful monitor, who would convince him of his folly, and warn him of his danger. Whether that monitor be some kind friend, affectionate parent,

parent, or religious instructor, or whether it be the principle of conscience, implanted in the breast of every man as his constant adviser and guide, he will say to him as Felix said to Paul, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a more convenient season I will send for thee." Whilst we are under the power of vicious habits and passions, we view the objects of our criminal attachment through a false medium, and regard the enjoyment they afford us in the light of a precious treasure, of which no man, who was not very much our enemy, would attempt to deprive us. We put ourselves upon our defence against the man who would persuade us to part with our vices, as we would against a robber. Hence it is, that, when any one, though from the purest motive of kindness, whispers in our ear a word of caution, or drops but the most distant hint of admonition, we instantly place ourselves upon our guard; search every where for
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some apology to our own hearts in excuse for the fault which occasions the reproof; or, if we cannot succeed in this, find out something in the circumstances, the motive, or the temper, of our reprover, which may serve to justify us in not hearkening to his rebuke; or lastly, when there is no other way of escaping, we devise some means of dismissing a guest whose impertinent intrusion we cannot support. With respect to public admonitions from religious instructors, bad men commonly adopt an easier method of proceeding. Instead of "beseeching the preacher to depart from *them*," they take care to keep themselves at a sufficient distance from *him*, if not by entirely absenting themselves from church, however, by "giving no heed to the words which are spoken," by taking no pains to apply the general truths which are delivered to themselves.

Allow me seriously to remonstrate with those who are capable of thus

wretchedly trifling with their own welfare. Is it possible, let me ask you, to render your character less criminal, or your situation less hazardous, by stopping your ears against the voice of reproof? If the vices you practise are, in their nature, ruinous to your health, your fortune, your reputation; if they are necessarily destructive of the purity of your hearts, or the integrity of your characters, or inconsistent with the exercise of benevolence and piety, affections without which it is impossible you should be happy; if they are violations of the laws of your Maker, which must inevitably expose you to his displeasure; will the wickedness and infamy you are bringing upon yourselves in this life, or the condemnation you are hastening in the life to come, be the less severely felt when they shall arrive, because you take pains to keep them out of sight at present? Are you not convinced that the only possible way to escape the evils which

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threaten you, is to abandon your vicious courses? In what light, then, can you consider the remonstrances of your reprovers but as acts of the purest friendship, dictated by the truest wisdom? Or what can you think of your own conduct in refusing to hearken to their admonitions, but that you are chargeable with the madness of one who, being warned of a dreadful precipice before him, shuts his eyes, and runs headlong to destruction? If you persist in your perverse rejection of wholesome advice till it is too late to profit by it; till confirmed habits of vice have rendered your recovery impracticable; till the decree of heaven has irrevocably fixed your doom; nothing will remain for you but to exclaim, in the bitterness of remorse, “How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof? I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ears to them that instructed me! He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall

suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”

To-day, therefore, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts ; whilst you are yet capable of other feelings than those of wretchedness and despair, lay open your bosoms to every impression of duty and interest ; let respect and affection for the friends who so generally interest themselves in your welfare ; let the dread of suffering all the miseries naturally attendant upon vice, and all the punishments which the righteous Judge of the world will hereafter inflict upon the wicked ; let gratitude to your merciful Father in heaven, who after all your perverse disobedience still waits to be gracious ; and finally, let a generous ambition to restore your rational nature to its original dignity, and to rise to the honours and felicities of children of God, and heirs of immortality, induce you, without delay, to hear and obey the voice of wisdom. Renouncing for ever
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the society of those fools who despise instruction, apply your ears and your heart to the words of knowledge. "Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not."

The Criminality of uncharitable
Judgment in imputing good
Actions to bad Motives.

MATT. xii. 24.

*But when the Pharisees heard it, they said,
This man doth not cast out devils but by
Beelzebub the prince of the devils.*

“IF the light that is *in thee*,” saith our Saviour, “be darkness, how great is *that* darkness!” Never was this observation more fully exemplified than in the fact to which the text refers. Jesus had given an illustrious display of the divine power with which he was endued, by healing a blind and dumb demoniac. The unprejudiced multitude, who were spec-
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tators of the miracle, were filled with astonishment, and acknowledged him to be the Messiah. But the Pharisees who accompanied him, blinded by jealousy, envy, and other malignant passions, could see nothing admirable, nothing divine, in what had happened. Rather than admit the fact which must have led them to acknowledge his divine authority, they framed a supposition as absurd as it was impious, imputing the cure which he had performed to the interposition of an evil spirit. "All the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But the Pharisees, when they heard this exclamation, said, This man doth not cast out demons but by Beelzebub, a ruler of the demons."

Jesus, who was no stranger to the malignant spirit which dictated this spiteful insinuation, turned his attention to these cavillers, and, without directly acknowledging, or denying, the truth of the common opinion concerning demons,

reasoned with them upon their own principles.

He first pleads the absurdity of supposing that Satan would employ his own power against himself, by lending his aid in support of a doctrine which was directly designed to overthrow his kingdom of idolatry and vice. “ Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Any kingdom divided against itself will be brought to desolation; and no city, or house, divided against itself, can be established. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself: how then shall his kingdom be established?”

Still proceeding to argue with them on the supposed truth of their opinions, and allowing it possible that some of their sect might cast out demons, he urges the unreasonableness of imputing *their* exorcisms to a divine energy, and at the same time ascribing *his* operations, which were of the same kind, to the agency of an evil demon. “ If I cast out demons by Beelzebub,

Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges: but if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then is the kingdom of God come unto you."

Still further to expose the inconsistency of the supposition, that the prince of the powers of darkness would assist him in casting out demons, he compares Satan to a man whose house is attacked by robbers, and remarks that nothing but superior force could ever bring a man in this situation to submit to the will of his invaders. He then leaves them to infer the absurdity of imagining that Satan, if he were able to withstand his power, would quietly endure the assaults which he was making upon his dominion, and the still greater absurdity of supposing that he would lend assistance to his avowed enemy. "How can any one enter the house of a strong man, and plunder his goods, unless he first bind the strong man? then he may plunder his house."

Jesus adds, "He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad:" that is, "He that is not my friend, in this case, is mine enemy. Since, therefore, the kingdom of Satan, and the ends of his government, are directly opposite to mine, it is impossible that he should be inclined to assist me; he must rather be disposed to exert all his power against me."

Having, in this manner, refuted the unjust and malicious insinuation of the Pharisees, our Saviour proceeds to denounce a general sentence of condemnation respecting the crime of which they had been guilty. "Therefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy may be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the son of man it may be forgiven him, but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall
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not be forgiven him, neither in this age nor in the age to come."

The offence of which the Pharisees had been guilty was of the most heinous nature. They had discovered great inconsistency and partiality in rejecting that testimony of divine authority in the case of Jesus, which they admitted in that of Moses. And it appears from the whole course of their behaviour towards Jesus, that this partial and unfair judgment was dictated by the most malignant passions. The resentment which they had long cherished against him, on account of his increasing popularity, was now settled into bitter rancour. They determined, at all events, to persist in their opposition to his doctrine, and if possible to bring him under the sentence of one of the laws of Moses, which required * that those who practised magical incantations, and held correspondence with evil spirits,

* Exod. xxii. 18.

should

should be put to death. They therefore impiously charged him with having an intercourse with some leader of evil spirits in those miracles which could only be performed by the aid of the Spirit and power of God. Such perverseness and malice implied the highest degree of depravity, and therefore justly exposed them to condemnation. "All manner of sin and blasphemy," says our Saviour, "shall be forgiven"—that is, all sins which come under the general notion of evil speaking—for that is the meaning of the term blasphemy—such as slander, and reviling among men, and even reproach and insult offered to the Son of God, may admit of repentance and obtain forgiveness: but the crime of reviling God himself, by ascribing those operations which are the effect of his immediate agency to the interposition of an evil spirit, must proceed from a mind so utterly depraved and incapable of repentance, as to leave no probability that it
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will ever obtain forgiveness. This explanation of the difficult passage under our consideration, which rests the unpardonable nature of the offence upon the invincible obstinacy and irrecoverable depravity of the offender, makes it perfectly consistent with the general doctrine of scripture concerning the unlimited clemency and mercy of God, and very well agrees with the tenor and spirit of our Saviour's address to the Pharisees. Or perhaps, after all, our Saviour may here only adopt a usual mode of speech in the Hebrew language, by which one thing is asserted and another denied, merely to denote comparison; and then the meaning will be, as several commentators have explained the passage, that the crime of reviling the power of God, as the Pharisees had done, is beyond every other kind of blasphemy, heinous, and unpardonable.

But, whatever interpretation be put upon these words of our Saviour, they
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can afford no ground for any one to alarm himself with an apprehension that he has sinned beyond the possibility of forgiveness; because whenever there is an inclination towards repentance, the state of mind is the reverse of that obduracy which chiefly aggravated the guilt, and the doom, of the Pharisees.

The narrative we have been considering should, however, be a serious warning to us, my brethren, not to indulge, in the slightest degree, that uncharitable spirit which, in these men, arose to so shocking a pitch of malignity, and particularly to refrain from all uncandid and censorious insinuations, tending to depreciate another's merit, and injure his reputation.

The progress of censoriousness, which we have had occasion to remark in the behaviour of the Pharisees to our Saviour, is a very natural, and a very common one. As *they* first endeavoured to fix upon Jesus a charge of impiety on
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account of an innocent, and even a meritorious action, accusing him of a breach of the sabbath because he exercised his healing power on that day, and afterwards presumed to ascribe his benevolent miracles to the instigation and assistance of an evil spirit: so we frequently hear the uncharitable and censorious first misrepresenting the *actions* of others, and industriously labouring to discover some circumstance of criminality where the candid and liberal would find much to admire and applaud; and then proceeding in cases where the action itself does not admit of censure, to call in question *the motive* from which it proceeded, imputing it to the influence of some unworthy principle, or some depraved inclination.

Of this latter kind of slander we cannot look around us in the world without meeting with frequent examples.

If any one distinguish himself by the regularity with which he performs religious

gious duties ; if, in an age in which private acts of devotion are commonly neglected, and it is almost become unfashionable to be constantly seen at church, any one is observed to be exact in his attendance upon public worship ; if his behaviour, during the seasons of devotion, be such as to indicate an uncommon degree of attention and seriousness, and especially if it be known that he keeps up the forms of religion in his family, or that he sometimes retires from the world for meditation and prayer ; there are not a few, who, being themselves wholly strangers to piety, will endeavour to account for so singular an appearance of religion, by supposing that it is the effect of wild enthusiasm or weak fanaticism, or that it is to be referred to a worse principle, hypocrisy. “ What end can all these professions of piety, they will say, answer, unless to obtain a reputation for extraordinary sanctity, that the hypocrite may the more effectually conceal some secret irregularity,

irregularity, or practise, without detection, some gainful fraud?" Thus do these *charitable* judges act over again the part of Satan with respect to Job, when he said, "Doth Job serve God for nought?"

Is any resolutely and invariably exact in his observance of the rules of sobriety, so that no enticement of what is commonly termed good-fellowship, nor any pretence of the necessity of sometimes making a sacrifice of regularity to politeness, can prevail upon him to trespass the limits which he has prescribed to himself? It is by no means improbable that he may suffer much raillery, and even contempt, from those who are incapable of entering into his views and principles; and that he may be most uncandidly and wantonly censured for the affectation of singularity, for an unsocial spirit, or for meanness and avarice, on account of conduct which has proceeded from a strong sense of duty, and

required the exertion of an uncommon share of resolution, and which, therefore, has merited the highest applause.

Does any one, through the influence of a temper naturally mild and gentle, and averse to contention, or from a settled conviction, the result of observation, that it is seldom worth while to hazard the loss of peace and charity for the sake of doubtful speculations, take the quiet path of moderation in the midst of private disputation or public controversy? Bigots on every side will rise up against him, and, with more zeal than knowledge or candour, will call his moderation indifference, and perversely, as well as unfairly, conclude, that, because he is not vehement in defending questionable opinions, he is destitute of all love of truth and goodness.

On the other side, does any one, of a more bold and confident spirit, undertake to enlighten his friends or the public on points on which he judges them to be labouring

labouring under injurious misconceptions? No professions or proofs of integrity shall exempt him from being censured and condemned for intentions the most hostile to truth and religion.

In the vehemence of civil and political disputes how frequently is it seen that the contending parties wholly lose sight of each others personal merit, and treat each other with a degree of rancour which seems to imply that they mutually look upon one another as capable of any base or iniquitous measures! The most inoffensive actions are, at such times, imputed to the worst motives, and each party supposes the other possessed and guided by some evil demon.

Independently of all party-prejudices there are in the world many base and depraved spirits, who being themselves incapable of forming any great conceptions, or noble-designs, or of looking beyond the narrow sphere of private interest, imagine that all minds are of the

same dimensions with their own, and impute every appearance of generosity and public spirit to vanity, affectation, or selfish policy. Disinterested patriotism, and even incorruptible honesty, they ridicule as chimerical ideas, which exist no where but in poetical fiction, or rhetorical declamation. When such men read or hear of heroic or generous deeds, which they are at a loss how to reconcile with their low conceptions and corrupt system, they look into their own depraved hearts to search for some base principle or motive by which they themselves might possibly have been led to a similar conduct. If they succeed in the inquiry, so far as to feel it probable, that, in certain situations, they might have been induced to assume the appearance of exalted virtues, they immediately conclude that the actions and characters which are held up to their view as examples of perfection, are destitute of real merit, and owe their existence to some sinister design,

sign, or some fordid passion. Ask these censors what they think of the patriot who is exerting every nerve to stem the torrent of corruption, to restrain the progress of tyranny, or to accomplish schemes of public reformation; they will tell you that he has, doubtless, his own private ends to answer by all this show of patriotism: he expects to establish his own consequence, as the head of a party, and in time, to obtain the direction of affairs, when he will not fail to repay himself for his service to the public: or he hopes to make it necessary to those who are in power, to purchase, at a high price, his stock of patriotism. Shew them a man who has had the generosity to overlook an affront, and to decline an opportunity of revenge, they will impute his forbearance to a pusillanimous spirit, and brand him with the appellation of a coward; for they suppose every one else to be, like themselves, incapable of forgiveness; and they can find no meaning in the maxim

of Solomon, "It is a glory to a man to pass by a transgression." Point out to them the man who is arrived at such sublimity of virtue as to be capable of devoting his life to the service of mankind, without the possibility of reward; when they have exhausted their astonishment at the sight of so singular and wonderful a character, instead of paying the tribute of respect, I should have said, veneration, which is due to such exalted merit, they will endeavour to account for his conduct upon some principle which lies within the narrow sphere of their conceptions, ascribing it, perhaps, to an affectation of singularity, or, an ambition of making himself known; or, finding these little causes wholly inadequate to the production of so great an effect, rather than dazzle their feeble sight with the steady contemplation of that noble philanthropy and sublime piety to which they are themselves strangers, even in idea, they will impute such eccentricity of character to some

disarrangement of intellect; and thus assign the man, whose actions place him among the benefactors of human kind, a station with enthusiasts or madmen. With the like contempt and indignity have such men treated the memory of those illustrious heroes and martyrs who have devoted their lives to the defence of liberty, or the support of truth and religion. Imputing those glorious deeds which have so justly obtained immortal fame to the weakness of vanity, or to the madness of enthusiasm, they have annihilated (as far as it was in the power of calumny to annihilate) the most exalted merit, and sunk to a level with the ignoble multitude characters “ of which the world was not worthy.” We have a striking example of the levelling power of malignant satire in the ungenerous insinuation of an ancient satirist respecting the motive which led the great instructor and reformer of the Athenians to meet death with an appearance of composure and

firmness which has been the admiration of all ages. “ Socrates (says Lucian) had not that contempt for death which he pretended to have; but, when he found it was not to be avoided, he assumed an air of indifference, and pretended to be courageous, that the spectators might admire him *.”

In this manner to depreciate the merit of actions in themselves laudable, without any reasonable ground of suspicion, is to be guilty of a most iniquitous invasion of that treasure which an honest man will value above every thing else, excepting only the approbation of his own mind as the prelude to his Maker’s favour, I mean the esteem of his fellow-creatures. It is a kind of blasphemy against virtue, which I will not say is unpardonable, but which certainly stands very much in need of pardon.

It is so natural to a good mind to think

* Dial. of the Dead. viii.

well of others, where no circumstances appear to enforce a contrary judgment, that, where we observe a man frequently guilty of that species of censoriousness which has been the subject of this discourse, we cannot help concluding that there is some degree of depravity in his disposition, as well as of misapprehension in his judgment; for “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” And it is commonly no difficult task to trace back reflections and insinuations of this kind to envy of rising merit, to jealousy of interfering reputation, to party-rancour, to mortified ambition, disappointed avarice, or to some other passion equally sordid and selfish. Under whatever specious disguises men may be inclined to view offences of this kind in their *own* conduct—for to censoriousness in *others* we allow no quarter—it cannot then be doubted that they are attended with a high degree of criminality.

To this we must add, that such reflec-

tions are as foolish as they are criminal; for they suppose, what is in the nature of things impossible, that one man can pry into the intentions, and read the heart, of another. The utmost that we can do in the judgment we form of one another's characters, is to infer merit or demerit from external appearances: and even here we are so liable to mistakes, that we ought to be very cautious in forming, and very reserved in communicating, our opinion. But beyond this we have no power to proceed. To try the heart is the prerogative of Omniscience. To pronounce decisively upon a man's motives, even contrary to appearances, is therefore the height of arrogance and presumption. "Who art thou that judgest another? To his own master he standeth or falleth."

If you be desirous, my brethren, to escape the guilt, as well as to avoid the vexations, of censoriousness, banish from your bosoms every base passion which
would

would prompt you to depreciate the virtues of others. Cultivate that exalted love of virtue, and that generous satisfaction in the prosperity of your brethren, which will enable you to contemplate their merit, even though it should happen to eclipse your own, with admiration and delight. In a word, live in the daily exercise of that christian charity which *envieth not*, which is not puffed up, which seeketh not its own, which hopeth all things, and believeth all things, which rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.

The Parable of the unjust
Steward.

LUKE xvi. 8.

The children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light.

IF we consider the peculiar character of christianity as a religious institution intended to prepare men for another world, we shall not think it surprising that our Saviour should have so frequently inculcated upon his followers the moderate pursuit, and innocent use, of the good things

things of this life ; especially, since these exhortations were addressed to persons who were peculiarly under the influence of worldly views, in consequence of the erroneous conceptions they had formed concerning the nature of the Messiah's kingdom ; and who were surrounded by examples of a covetous and ambitious spirit in those hypocritical pretenders to extraordinary piety, the Pharisees. It seems to have been for the immediate purpose of guarding his disciples against the contagion of their example, that, after delivering the beautiful parables in justification of his own conduct in conversing with sinners, he added two others, directly addressed to his disciples, though spoken, as it seems, in the presence of the Pharisees, ON THE RIGHT USE and the TRUE VALUE of riches.

In the first of these parables, of which the text is the application, our Saviour's leading design appears to be to instruct his followers that they ought to be at
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least as *prudent* and *industrious* in making such a use of their present possessions as will turn to a good account hereafter, as men who confine their views and pursuits wholly to this life are commonly found to be in prosecuting their worldly designs.

The principal character in the parable is a man who, having more cunning than honesty, when he was obliged to relinquish a profitable trust which he had abused, made use of an artful expedient to secure himself from poverty. He had been employed in the capacity of a steward to a certain rich man. In this office he did not, indeed, embezzle the property with which he was entrusted, for then he would not have been at a loss for resources; but he spent his master's substance in profusion and excess. "There was a certain rich man, who had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods."

The crime was nearly as heinous
(though

(though perhaps few servants are aware of this) as if he had plundered his master's coffers. For what is an immoderate waste and abuse of articles committed to the care and management of servants but a violation of a trust which they have voluntarily undertaken, and an encroachment upon property which is not their own? The steward might, perhaps, have for a long time carried on these practices, so injurious to his master, without being discovered, had not some kind friend informed him how much he was imposed upon by the servant in whom he confided. As soon as he was made acquainted with the fact he sent for the steward, and charged him with his offence: and, finding that he had nothing to alledge in his own behalf, he ordered him instantly to deliver up his accounts, and resign his office. "He called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou must be no longer steward."

steward." The natural issue of an unfaithful execution of an important trust, which ought to be a warning to all who have engaged in any kind of servitude, or have undertaken any important office, public or private, not to indulge themselves in unfaithfulness of any kind, from the presumption that they shall escape disgrace and punishment. For, whatever temporary benefits may arise from fraudulent practices, there can be no doubt that the account will at last be settled to the disadvantage of every dishonest man—commonly in this world, but certainly in another.

In some instances, indeed, an extraordinary share of shrewdness and good management may, for a long time, ward off, even from the vilest knaves, the natural consequences of their crimes. In some cases wealth may be preserved by the same dishonest arts by which it has been obtained. In others ingenuity and address may enable a man, whose negligence or
extravagance

extravagance has brought him to the verge of ruin, to repair his shattered fortune by making the humours, the passions, and even the vices of other men, subservient to his own interest.

This was the case with respect to the steward in the parable. When he first received notice from his master that he must no longer continue in his service, he was distressed how to provide for his future subsistence. "Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my Lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed." His situation, which was in itself sufficiently unpleasant, dismissed as he was from a service in which he had lived in ease and plenty, was rendered still more irksome, by the habits of pride and indolence which he had contracted. He had been too long accustomed to spend his days in sloth and luxury to be now capable of bringing himself to endure the fatigue of earning his daily bread by the la-

bour of his hands; and the *reflected consequence* which he had borrowed from his master, had, as he conceived, ranked him in a class of life which made it beneath him to think of relying upon charity for his support. "I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed."

The state of mind expressed in this soliloquy, which is by no means an uncommon one with impoverished spend-thrifts, has often led men to the commission of heinous crimes, or driven them to the last act of desperation. Too idle and proud to deliberate upon the alternative of working or begging, they have recourse to the more desperate alternative, whether they shall supply their exigencies by theft and robbery, or put an end to their cares by suicide.

In the narrative before us the steward took refuge in an expedient which, though sufficiently ingenious, was a fraudulent imposition upon his master; he exchanged the accounts which they had delivered
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in of their respective debts in articles of natural produce for others of an inferior amount ; and thus, in fact, made each of them a considerable present out of his master's property. " He called each of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, How much owest thou to my master ? and he said, A hundred measures of oil : and he said to him, Take thy account, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou ? and he said, A hundred measures of wheat : and he said to him, Take thy account, and write fourscore."

Knaveish as this transaction was, it must be acknowledged that it discovered no small degree of shrewdness. By conferring these substantial favours upon his master's debtors he bound them to his own interest by ties of generosity and gratitude. And, though it might be supposed in speculation that little dependence was to be placed upon these principles

with men who had not scrupled to violate the higher obligations of justice ; yet he had, doubtless, seen enough of the world to know that even the worst of men commonly discover some sense of honour in their transactions with one another. This subtle schemer did not, however, wholly rely upon principles so unsteady and precarious as honour and generosity must always be among bad men : he secured the favour of his new friends by another and more powerful bond, that of self-interest ; by engaging them to deliver in accounts in which they acknowledged themselves debtors for a less sum than the real amount of their debts, he caused them to become accessaries and confederates in the fraud, and thus made himself the keeper of their reputation ; so that, if they should hereafter cast him off, it would be at the hazard of their characters and fortunes. Thus artfully did this dishonest steward provide himself,

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in the friendship of his master's debtors, a fund for the supply of his future exigencies.

It was in this particular point of view that our Saviour meant his disciples to consider the parable, as affording them an example of prudence and forethought which, though exercised on an unworthy occasion, and in a criminal manner, was not in itself unworthy of their notice. "The master commended the unjust steward because he had acted prudently:" and our Saviour, applying the parable to its proper use, adds, "For the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." The children of this world, those who devote themselves entirely to the pursuit of worldly possessions, without any regard to religious obligations, or the hope of a future state, exercise a greater degree of caution, prudence, and steadiness, in prosecuting their designs, than the children of light, who embrace the doctrines of re-

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ligion,

ligion, and profess to live in obedience to its laws, in securing to themselves the rewards of immortality.

The observation was dictated by a perfect knowledge of human nature, and agrees with experience. We seldom see good men, who in their avowed principles and general character are friends to virtue, so attentive to their moral conduct, so assiduous in cultivating the habits of goodness, so skilful in devising expedients for their own improvement, or for the benefit of others, or so steady and resolute in the execution of their virtuous purposes, as men who are wholly devoted to this world are in *their* contrivances, projects, and pursuits.

Whatever be the particular object on which the children of this world fix their regard, whether it be pleasure, or riches, or honours, or power, we see that it employs their daily thoughts, and engages their unwearied attention. In order to compass their end, they exercise their utmost

most sagacity, and call in to their assistance the wisdom and experience of others. They are watchful to seize the most favourable occasions of accomplishing their designs; and are active, patient, and indefatigable, in carrying into execution the plans they have formed. To increase their fortunes, to advance their families, and provide for their posterity, they rise early, sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness. That they may the more effectually accomplish their lucrative ends, they not only make use of the ordinary expedients of industry and ingenuity, but devise numerous artifices to impose upon the ignorant, to overreach the honest, and defraud the unwary. In all this, though we must often condemn them for the violation of truth and probity, we must give them credit for activity and shrewdness.

On the contrary, observe the general conduct of those who profess to be, and perhaps are in the main, governed by religious and christian principles, how small

a portion of attention and circumspection do we see them exercising in their moral and religious concerns ! How little pains do they take to acquire just notions upon religious subjects, or to inform themselves accurately concerning the nature and obligations of moral conduct ! How negligent are they in settling for themselves a plan of living suitable to the station appointed them by divine Providence, in laying down rules and maxims of conduct adapted to their natural temper, their connexions, and their occupation in life ; and in devising expedients by which they may make the best advantage of their opportunities of improvement, and most successfully secure and establish their virtue ! How seldom do we see them forming and executing schemes of usefulness to their families, their neighbourhood, or the public, or exerting themselves with attention and zeal in support of the cause of religion and virtue ! In short, how commonly do we find those whom charity obliges

obliges us to rank, on the whole, among good men, in the state of the virgins concerning whom our Saviour, in another parable, saith, that whilst the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept!

For this lamentable indifference and negligence in the concerns of religion several causes may be assigned. It may, perhaps, not unfrequently be owing to the want of a rational belief and steady conviction of the truth of religious principles: for there are not a few who have, from their earliest years, supposed themselves, and been deemed by the world, good christians, who, nevertheless, are little qualified to give, either to themselves or others, a reason of the faith and hope that is in them. Having taken no pains to inquire into the rational grounds of religion, they are christians for the same reason for which, in another country, they would have been mahometans or pagans, because their fathers were so before them.

them. A religious profession which is not founded upon the conviction of the understanding cannot be expected to have any steady and permanent influence upon the character. It is not, therefore, surprising that they who take their religious creed upon trust find it of little use to them in the conduct of life.

Another cause of the comparative indifference which men discover with respect to religion is the spiritual nature of its objects, and the remoteness of the sanctions by which its laws are enforced. Whilst the things of this world are continually pressing upon the senses, and hereby irresistibly command our attention, the truths of religion, and the prospects of a future state, cannot be contemplated without a voluntary exertion of the mind for this purpose, in the midst of innumerable avocations from the urgent business and amusements of the present life. Hence men are in perpetual danger of forgetting

getting truths which it most of all concerns them to remember, and of growing indifferent to concerns which, if estimated according to their true nature, must be allowed to claim their first attention. Besides these general causes of the folly censured in the text, there are others of a more particular nature, arising from a man's connexions and employments in life, the turn of his education, the companions with whom he associates, and the like.

But from whatever causes this conduct proceeds, nothing can be more evident than that it is highly unreasonable and foolish. For as much as the happiness belonging to our rational nature exceeds in value that which belongs to our bodily senses, as much as everlasting life and felicity in a future state exceeds in importance the transient possessions and enjoyments of this mortal life, so much greater attention is due to the pursuits of religion than to those of this world. Did men

judge and act according to the true nature of things, they would most assuredly employ their skill and prudence, their industry and activity, in the first place, in the pursuit and attainment of those things which are most valuable and most permanent; that is, they would prefer the enjoyments of the mind to those of the body, and the happiness of immortality to all the pleasures, riches, and honours, of the present state. And, in consequence of this prudent choice, they would give all diligence to secure their spiritual and eternal welfare. No man ever repented of applying too diligently to the great concern of preparing for the world to come; but many a disappointed votary of ambition, avarice, and voluptuousness, has experienced mortification and disappointment at the close of their course, which has led them to say, with bitter regret, Oh had I served my God with half the zeal I have served the world, *he* would

would not have deserted me in the valley of death !

Were men sincerely desirous of approving themselves children of the light, by exerting their utmost endeavours to attain the happiness proper to rational and immortal beings, they might find, in the field of moral duty, an endless variety of objects on which to exercise their judgment, and employ their active powers. Among these one of the most important is particularly pointed out by our Saviour in the application of the parable before us, namely, the right use of riches. " And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, or die, ye may be received into everlasting habitations."

The phrase, *the mammon of unrighteousness*, is a Hebraism of the same kind with the phrase in the beginning of the parable, the *steward of unrighteousness*, which our translators have very properly rendered the *unjust Steward*: the phrase should, therefore,

therefore, have been translated, the unjust, unfaithful, or deceitful mammon; so called, because riches are treacherous friends, deceiving and disappointing such as place confidence in them, in opposition to which our Saviour afterwards speaks of virtue, and its rewards, as *true* riches. The meaning of the exhortation is this: As the steward in the parable made use of the revenue committed to his care in providing himself with friends and patrons after his dismissal from his office, with the like caution and prudence do you employ your worldly possessions, which are in themselves precarious and deceitful, in securing to yourselves a safe retreat, an everlasting habitation, when death shall have dismissed you from your earthly tabernacles. Like stewards, you are accountable to God for the portion of wealth with which you are intrusted; and ere long you will be called to give an account of your stewardship. Be careful, therefore, to make such a use of these un-
certain

certain treasures in acts of piety and charity, that you may hereby lay up for yourselves an everlasting and incorruptible treasure in heaven.

Farther to enforce this precept Jesus instructs his disciples, that it is only by making a prudent and faithful use of the good things of this world, that they could shew themselves worthy of being entrusted with more durable and valuable treasures in the world to come. “ He that is faithful in that which is least, will be faithful also in much ; and he that is unjust in the least, will be unjust also in much. If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the use of the deceitful mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches ? and if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who will commit to you that which is your own ? ” “ Your supreme Lord, by entrusting you with these precarious possessions, puts you to the trial whether
you

you be fit to receive the greater blessings of his heavenly kingdom: and since a man's ability and integrity sufficiently appears in the manner in which he executes a small trust, unless you make an honest and generous use of these fading riches, how can you expect to be raised to the possession of better and more enduring substance? or if ye be not faithful as stewards in those things which are only put into your hands as a temporary trust, upon what ground can you hope that your Lord will bestow upon you unalienable possessions of your own—an incorruptible and unfading inheritance?"

The sum of our Saviour's doctrine in this parable is, that men ought to be as careful to make a charitable use of their riches, as they are industrious in acquiring them; and that this is the only way to render them subservient to their future happiness. A doctrine which, perhaps, many selfish and worldly-minded men
may

may be disposed to treat with the same contempt and ridicule with which it was at first received by the Pharisees. “The Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things, and they derided him.” Covetous men have always thought it a ridiculous thing to expend their wealth in a way which promises no returns but in another world, and are little inclined to listen to the precept, “Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it again after many days.” The time, however, will come, when their profane mockery will be changed into bitter self-reproach; for though they may, for a time, conceal their true character, and even obtain the applause of men by an hypocritical profession of extraordinary piety and sanctity, their covetousness and dishonesty are beheld and disapproved, and will hereafter be punished, by the great Searcher of hearts, and Judge of men. All those who conceal a covetous and worldly spirit under a cloak of religion, are deeply

interested in the reproof which our Saviour, on this occasion, addressed to the Pharisees: “Ye are they who justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”

The Parable of the ten Talents.

MATT. XXV. 29.

*Unto every one that hath shall be given,
and he shall have abundance : but from
him that hath not shall be taken away
even that which he hath.*

THERE are two points, especially, in which christianity far excels every philosophical sect, and every religious institution, which had preceded it : first, in the stress which it lays on benevolence, and the several virtues which spring from this source ; and secondly, in the regard which it requires men to pay to the re-

wards and punishments of a future life. The moral systems of antiquity, whether they taught that hardy virtue which affected to treat with indifference all external causes of pleasure or pain, and sought its enjoyments within itself; or prescribed precepts of prudence and moderation for the regulation of men's conduct in the active scenes of life; or placed the ultimate good of man in tranquillity and virtue, in the pursuit of this end by all proper means; upon every scheme the happiness of the individual was the leading object, and little provision was made for the exercise of disinterested and universal benevolence. And even the selfish principle was not suffered to operate to its full extent: for the belief and expectation of a future state was either wholly rejected, or admitted rather as a matter of doubtful speculation, than as a steady and powerful spring of action in the conduct of life. It is christianity alone which erects its moral system upon the broad
basis

basis of universal philanthropy, and which teaches men to live for eternity. Its divine precepts are, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: Set thy affections on things above, not on things below.”

These great principles are the grounds upon which the beautiful parable of the talents, which now comes under our consideration, is framed. It instructs us that it is our duty to make a diligent improvement of the powers and opportunities of usefulness which are allotted us by the sovereign Arbiter of our condition, and that our final award in the life to come will be regulated by the manner in which we conduct ourselves in this respect during our continuance upon earth. Whatever reference the parable might originally have to the peculiar circumstances of our Saviour's apostles, it certainly admits of this enlarged interpretation, and extensive application; and in this view alone I shall consider it in this discourse.

Jesus, to impress upon the minds of his

disciples a deep sense of the importance of preparing for his coming by a diligent improvement of their gifts, compares himself to a master who, before he enters upon a long journey, distributes various portions of his property among his servants, with instructions to employ them in trade till his return, that the improvement made by each might be proportioned to the extent of the trust committed to him. The master he represents as, after a long absence, returning home, and distributing to each servant praise or censure, reward or punishment, according to the manner in which he has executed his trust. The words of the parable are these :

“ The Son of man is like one who, going from home, called his servants to them, and committed to them his substance. And to one he gave the sum of five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his capacity ; and immediately went from home. Then he who had received the five talents

lents went and traded with them, and made five talents more. In like manner he who had received the two talents gained also two more. But he who had received the *one* talent went and dug in the earth, and hid his master's money. After some time the master of these servants cometh, and setteth his account with them. And he who had received five talents came to him, and brought five other talents, and said, Master, thou didst intrust to me five talents; behold I have gained besides them five talents more. And his master said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant! thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will set thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy master. He also, who had received the two talents, came and said, Master, thou didst intrust to me two talents: behold I have gained, besides them, two talents more. And his master said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant! thou hast been faithful over a

few things; I will set thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy master. Then he who had received the one talent came, and said, Master, I knew thee to be a hard man, reaping where thou sowedst not, and gathering where thou didst not scatter. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth; behold there thou hast thine own. And the master answered, and said unto him, Wicked and slothful servant! didst thou know that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I did not scatter? Thou oughtest then to have put my money to the exchangers, that, at my coming, I might have received mine own with interest. Take, therefore, the talent from him, and give it to him that has ten talents: for to every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath: and cast the unprofitable servant into darkness.

ness without, where will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The expression throughout this parable is so clear as to need little explanation. The *talent* was among the ancients a nominal sum of money of great value. In the apology of the slothful servant, where to justify himself he charges his master with requiring from his servants more than they could perform, the expression, gathering where thou didst not scatter, is, after the Hebrew manner, a repetition of the preceding idea in different words: “Reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering sheaves where no seed was scattered.” The meaning of the general maxim with which our Saviour concludes the parable, Unto every one that hath, &c. undoubtedly is, that they who have improved their talents, shall be still further rewarded; but that he who has made no advantage of the money intrusted to him shall be even deprived of that which he had in trust, as no longer worthy of being employed

employed in his master's service. The doctrine of this parable, with whatever neglect men may be inclined to treat it, is of a very serious and important nature. In the clearest manner, and by the most expressive resemblance, it instructs us that we are accountable to that Almighty Being who created and who governs the world, for every power we possess. Life is not a treasure which has fallen into our hands by accident, and which we may squander away as we please. It is a trust which we have received from the hands of our Maker, and for which he will hereafter reckon with us. The master in whose service we are born, and to whom we must render an account, is not, indeed, like earthly masters, capable of receiving profit from our industry. His omnipotence renders him all-sufficient for his own happiness; his independence and supremacy place him infinitely above any personal motive of interest or glory, in his requisition of service or homage from his

creatures: the absolute perfection of his nature implies an immutable state of felicity which admits of neither diminution nor increase. But the great system of government which the Lord of universal nature is executing is a plan of benevolence, in which innumerable agents are employed in producing the general good. Every rational being, at the same time that he is allowed, through the bounty of the Creator, to claim his share of the common stock of felicity, is employed as the instrument of divine Providence in advancing the happiness of his fellow-creatures. In this general system man has his appointed station; and to neglect the duties of that station—to suffer those talents to lie unoccupied which were committed to him for the purposes of benevolence, is at once to sin against infinite goodness, and to war against the happiness of the creation. It is therefore perfectly reasonable to expect that the great Ruler of the world will call every man to
account

account for the improvement which he makes of his abilities and opportunities of usefulness, and will reward or punish him according to his deserts.

All the powers and means which every individual possesses of attaining happiness himself, or of communicating it to others—his understanding, judgment, memory, and active faculties—the knowledge which he has acquired from early instruction—the good principles and habits which he has received from education—the opportunities which his domestic connexions, his occupation in life, and his station in society afford him of doing good—the means and instruments of usefulness with which his industry, or his good fortune, has supplied him: these, taken together, make up the *talent* with which each man is intrusted, and which it is his duty to improve. To exercise his intellectual faculties in a diligent and impartial inquiry after truth, and his active powers in establishing habits of prudence, industry, benevolence,

nevolence, and piety; to employ the valuable moments of life in an uninterrupted series of laudable exertions for his own improvement, or for the benefit of his family, his friends, and the community to which he belongs; to make that discreet and generous use of the portion of wealth, be it larger or smaller, which he enjoys, which will at once be most advantageous to himself, and useful to others, is to employ his talent for the purposes for which it was committed to his charge, and to prepare himself for rendering an honourable and acceptable account of his trust. These are labours sufficiently important to interest the passions, and sufficiently various and extensive to occupy the industry of every one, in every condition, and through every stage, of human life.

Thus furnished with occasions, and surrounded with motives, to diligence, no man can be at liberty to remain unemployed. Our immediate connexions in the first place, and after these our neighbourhood,

bourhood, our country, our species, have demands upon our time and attention which it would be shameful and dishonest not to regard. Indebted, as we are, to all around us for the comfortable enjoyment of life, to sit down in indolent repose, without taking any pains, or feeling any inclination, to make suitable returns to society for the benefits we receive from it, is more than ungrateful; it is, strictly speaking, unjust. No man has a right to pronounce himself innocent merely because he refrains from direct acts of fraud and oppression, whilst he lives in the neglect of all the active duties of life, and gives himself up to indolence and luxury. If the artificial distinctions of society have exempted some men from the burden of manual labour, and enabled them to command every convenience and elegance of life, without paying the price which the peasant and the mechanic is obliged to pay for his daily bread, such persons ought to be convinced, and to remember,

member, that it is unreasonable and iniquitous, to make large and daily demands upon the common stock of society, and at the same time contribute nothing towards its support and prosperity. That useless class of men who, without any occupation productive of benefit to the community, without any domestic engagements to afford exercise for their kind affections, and without any plans of private charity or public utility to fill up their leisure hours, waste an insipid existence in a succession of frivolous amusements, whatever distinction they may derive from rank and wealth, must certainly, to say the least, be reckoned among the most insignificant of the human species. The more numerous this body becomes, the heavier must the common burden of labour be upon the shoulders of the industrious; and it is possible to conceive their number to be so increased that the grievance shall become insupportable, and the oppressed sons of industry shall find it necessary

cessary to drive the drones out of the hive. But, whilst this slothful herd, who live only for themselves, are grievously offending against society, they are also committing a heinous offence against that Almighty Power to whom they are indebted for every faculty of enjoyment, and every capacity of usefulness. By neglecting to cultivate the intellectual and moral powers which he hath given them, and to improve those opportunities of serving mankind which he hath afforded them, they incur no inconsiderable portion of guilt; and must not only expect to be hereafter condemned as slothful, but as *wicked* servants.

And in vain will those who in this manner suffer their *talent* to remain unoccupied, endeavour to exculpate themselves by pleading their own incapacity, and charging their Maker with unreasonable severity. Whatever encouragement some gloomy systems of religion may have given to the idea, there cannot be a notion
more

more dishonourable to the divine nature and government, or less destitute of all foundation in reason or revelation, than that the Almighty expects from his creatures a degree of excellence which he has not given them power to attain, and will punish them for omitting services which they had no power of performing. The wicked and slothful servant might certainly, with the same degree of industry which his fellow-servants exercised, have, like them, doubled the sum intrusted to him, and thus shared with them in the applause and recompence which the master was so ready to bestow upon his good and faithful servants. His master was not so unreasonable as to expect that from one talent only he should produce a return equal to that of the servant to whom he had intrusted *five*: but if he looked for a profit proportional to the trust, and required that *one* talent should yield *one*, as *five* had yielded *five*, this surely was not reaping where he had not sown, or gathering

where he had not scattered. If it would have been criminal to have buried in the earth, or hid in a napkin, the *five*, or the *two* talents, it was proportionably criminal to do this with respect to the *one*; and the slothful servant had no right to complain that the trust he had neglected was transferred to more faithful hands, and that his negligence was punished with an exclusion from the joy and festivity which attended his master's return.

Let no one, then, whatever be the number or value of the talents committed to him by the great Lord of all, think himself at liberty to keep them unemployed. The meanest understanding admits of cultivation, and was given to be improved. The lowest peasant, or mechanic, has his sphere of usefulness. No man is so disadvantageously situated as not to have some opportunities of acquiring knowledge. Every one has either a parent to respect, or a child to educate, or a friend to serve, or a poor sick neighbour
to

to be kind to, or some other object on whom he may exercise his beneficence. In the numerous relations of society, as it is impossible that any one should live without receiving, so it must be in every one's power to confer, benefits. And we may be assured, that, as the neglect of the most limited opportunities of usefulness will not pass without censure, so the faithful improvement of them will not fail to obtain approbation and reward. To him who by his *two* talents had gained other two, as well as to him who had increased his five talents into five talents more, the master said, "Well done, good and faithful servants!" and had he who received the one talent been equally faithful, he would, doubtless, have met with a similar recompence. "He that giveth a cup of cold water to a disciple in my name, saith our Saviour, shall in no wise lose his reward."

Those, however, to whom the largest trust is committed, ought to remember

that with the honour and privilege increases proportionally the responsibility. If implicit faith be pardonable in those who possess feeble faculties, and enjoy few opportunities of information, it is required of others, who have leisure and ability for inquiry, and have been blessed with the advantages of early instruction and a liberal education, that they prove all things in order to become men in understanding. If little more is to be expected from those who depend for their subsistence upon their daily labour, than that they be honest and faithful in their dealings; if the smallest tribute to humanity or piety from a poor man be acceptable to God, it is not to be presumed that such humble offerings will be deemed sufficient from those who have more to bestow. Since every gift from divine Providence is in the nature of a trust, the disposition to do good ought always to increase with the ability. The heart, instead of being, as too frequently happens, contracted and hardened, ought
to

to be expanded, by prosperity. “ To whom much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”

To that diligence in doing good which the parable before us inculcates upon men of all ranks and conditions, no greater encouragement can possibly be given than that which arises from the assurance of our Maker's approbation, so strongly confirmed by our Saviour's representation of the manner in which the industrious servants were honoured and rewarded by their master. Whatever be the talents committed to us, if we faithfully improve them, we may promise ourselves the applause of that Being whose praise is infinitely more valuable in itself than that of all mankind, and will certainly be followed by the most exalted honours and substantial rewards. God is not unfaithful to forget our works of faith and labours of love; and he who in acts of

piety and charity, during his abode on earth, soweth bountifully, may rest assured that he will reap plentifully hereafter. At the day of final retribution, through the boundless beneficence of our great Creator, fidelity in a *few things* will be repaid with the possession of *many things*; and through eternal ages we shall find that, far from serving a *hard* master, we have been engaged in a service which is in itself perfect freedom, and to which is annexed a sure and great reward. If we continue diligent and faithful in this service, we shall, at length, receive from our Lord that sentence of approbation which comprehends every honour and felicity which the heart of man can wish: “Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord!”

It is a circumstance which is peculiarly adapted to animate the good man in the practice of his duty, that the higher attainments he makes in goodness on earth, the more glorious will be his future reward,

ward. This doctrine may be, in some measure, inferred from the parable, as it is given in St. Matthew's gospel; but it is still more clearly taught by the same parable, as it is related by St. Luke, according to whom ten servants received from their master each a pound, with instructions to trade with it till his return; when he who had gained by the pound ten pounds was appointed ruler over ten cities, and he that had gained five pounds over five cities; the reward of each servant being proportioned to his acquisitions.

And the doctrine of different degrees of happiness in a future state (here and elsewhere taught in scripture) is perfectly consonant to the dictates of reason. We see through all nature a regular subordination of being, and observe an endless variety in beings of the same order, particularly in the human species. Hence we may reasonably conjecture that a similar variety will take place in the future state. This may be inferred, further, from the different degrees of intellectual and moral

excellence which are attained by different individuals in the present life. If, as we may reasonably suppose, men's dispositions and characters in the life to come will be a continuation of those which they have formed on earth, we must conclude that the man who has cultivated his understanding, and improved his heart in an eminent degree, and has been uncommonly assiduous in promoting the happiness of his fellow-creatures, will be qualified for a station of distinguished honour and felicity in another world: and it is agreeable to our best notions of the divine character to believe that the great Ruler of the world, in the distribution of rewards and punishments, will provide degrees of felicity superior, indeed, to *any* personal merit, but proportioned to men's present attainments in goodness.

How delightful and animating, fellow-christians, the prospect which this parable presents to our view! With what alacrity and cheerfulness ought we to prosecute

cute the various labours which we are required to perform in the service of our Master in heaven, when the rewards set before us are nothing less than the approbation of the first and best of Beings, and an eternal abode in his heavenly kingdom! “My beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; for as much as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.”

Christ's Treatment of the Woman taken in Adultery.

JOHN viii. 10, 11.

*Jesus said unto her, Woman, where are those
thine accusers? hath no man condemned
thee? She said, No man, Lord: and
Jesus said unto her, Neither do I con-
demn thee; go, and sin no more.*

INCIDENTS, which a hasty spectator will be ready to overlook as wholly unimportant, to a mind inured to reflection, and watchful for opportunities of improvement, will frequently furnish matter of useful instruction. The narrative which introduces

introduces the text contains some particulars concerning our Saviour which, on the first cursory glance, may appear too trifling to merit attention, except as circumstances which preserve the thread of the history, but which, on a closer inspection, will be found, without a forced construction, very instructive. The facts here related are simply these, that Jesus, probably the evening after the feast of Tabernacles was finished, went into the mount of olives; and that early the next morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him, and he sat down and taught them. If we compare this account with other passages in the gospels which speak of Christ, as retiring among the hills adjacent to the scenes of his ministry, in order to pray, we shall see reason to conclude that Jesus made this short retreat from public business for the purpose of devotion; and are consequently taught that the most important public engagements are not inconsistent

consistent with the private duties of religion, and that those who wish to succeed in great designs for the benefit of mankind, should call in the aid of meditation and prayer. Our Saviour's speedy return to the city, in the midst of the hostile designs which he knew were forming against him, affords an animating example of fortitude in the prosecution of laudable designs; and the readiness with which the multitude flocked around this divine teacher may teach us industry and perseverance in the pursuit of wisdom.

The principal fact which now comes under our consideration has occasioned much controversy among critics, and given rise to much ridicule and censure among the adversaries of christianity. It has been a subject of dispute with the former, whether the story, which is not found in some ancient versions and manuscripts, be authentic. The latter have imagined that they have discovered some circumstances in the narrative inconsistent
with

with the perfection of character ascribed to Christ. Concerning the authenticity of the story, it may suffice to observe that it is found in several ancient copies of the New Testament; and that the omission of it in others may be accounted for by supposing an early misapprehension of its meaning, as if it had been our Saviour's intention to connive at the heinous crime of adultery. To shew the unreasonableness of such a construction of the passage, and consequently the inconclusiveness of the objections which have been made by christians and others against it, we must enter into a particular examination of the occasion and circumstances of the narrative.

St. John relates, that whilst Jesus was instructing the people in the temple a company of scribes and pharisees came in and brought a woman who had just been taken in the commission of adultery, and that having set her before him in the midst of the people, they said unto him, "Master, this woman was taken in the

act of adultery; now Moses in the law has commanded that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?"

In the Jewish law it was ordained that both the adulterer and adulteress should be put to death; and it had been the custom to execute this law upon offenders by stoning them. Now the point, which they who brought this woman to Jesus proposed for his solution, was, whether, in his judgment, it would, in the present case, be right to adhere to the law of Moses, or to depart from it. The question was too clear to admit of dispute, and if the scribes and pharisees had found any real difficulty in the affair, they would not have thought of applying to Jesus for satisfaction. The offence had certainly been committed; the law had expressly declared the offence capital; and Jesus had no concern either in the judgment or the execution. Why then did these scribes and pharisees pretend to consult Jesus? The truth was, they came to him, not in expectation

expectation of obtaining farther information concerning the nature of the offence, or the justice of the punishment, but with the insidious design of ensnaring him by their question; not doubting that it would produce an answer which would be offensive either to the people or to their rulers. "This they said (the historian adds), that they might have to accuse him." In order to have a clear idea of the nature of the snare which our Saviour's enemies on this occasion laid in his way, and of the manner in which he escaped it, we must recollect the situation of Jesus at the close of the feast of 'Tabernacles.

The Jewish rulers, alarmed at his increasing popularity, had formed a design to take away his life under some specious appearance of public justice, and during the feast had sent their officers to seize him and bring him before their tribunal: but, through the wonderful energy of his doctrine, these officers had been deterred from executing their commission, reporting,

ing, in excuse for the violation of their orders, that "never man spake like this man." In these circumstances the rulers judged it inexpedient, for the present, to make a second attempt upon the person of Christ, and determined to try other more indirect methods. It happening, at this time, that they had in their custody a woman who had been taken in adultery, they took occasion, from this incident, to frame an artful method of ensnaring him, by bringing the woman before him to request his judgment concerning the propriety of inflicting upon her the punishment appointed by the law of Moses.

They concluded that his answer to the question they proposed must be such as would give them advantage against him: for either it would be, that the law of Moses was too severe, and then they doubted not but he would fall a sacrifice to the zeal of the people themselves, with whom he was now so highly in favour, that

that the law, in this case as in all others, ought by all means to be maintained and strictly executed ; and then they should be furnished with a good plea against him before the Jewish rulers, for assuming the office of a dispenser of justice, or rather before their Roman masters, for taking upon him to condemn an offender by his own authority ; whereas, at this time, it was not lawful, even for the sanhedrim itself, without authority from the Roman governor, to put any man to death, as we learn from their reply to Pilate when he desired them to take Jesus and judge him according to their law : “ It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.” They expected, in short, either that the people would kill him on the spot, as a defamer of their law, or that he would be convicted of the crime of making himself king, and thus incur the punishment inflicted upon rebels against the state.

Such being the profound artifice as well as malice of this plot, it is manifest that

the situation of Jesus was so critical that nothing but the interposition of miraculous power, or the exercise of superior wisdom, could have secured him from falling into the snare. It was through the aid of the latter that he escaped; for when he perceived their insidious purpose, he made use of an expedient which relieved him from the necessity of making an immediate reply. He stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground as though he heard them not, or as not regarding them. This appearance of writing was probably not designed to express any thing by written characters, but merely to prepare the way, by a significant silence, for the address which immediately followed. His enemies, who considered his silence as a mark of embarrassment, were clamorous for a solution of their question. "So when they continued asking him, he raised up himself, and said to them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at
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her: and again he stooped down, and wrote upon the ground."

The wisdom of this answer merits the highest admiration. He eluded by it at once the two opposite snares which were laid for him; neither expressly urging the execution of the legal punishment, and thus assuming to himself a judicial authority, nor attempting to supersede the law under the plea of its severity, and thus bringing upon himself the resentment of the people.

At the same time that Jesus thus prudently warded off the blow which threatened him, he made an attack upon the conscience of the woman's accusers, which filled them with alarm and remorse, and sent them away humbled and silenced: "When they heard this reply, being convicted by their own conscience, they went out one by one, from the eldest to the youngest, and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst of the temple."

To justify the conduct of our Saviour in this address, it must be observed that it was made to these Pharisees and scribes, not in their judicial, but in their personal capacity, and was evidently intended not to prevent the execution of justice in the due course of law, but to instruct them (and with them the numerous assembly who appear to have been spectators of this scene) that they who are forward in accusing others, should, in all equity, be free from guilt themselves.

It must be obvious to every one who considers the nature of the attack which was now made upon Jesus, that it would have been impossible for him to have adopted any expedient more likely to effect his own security, or the confusion of his enemies, than that which he made use of; and this was all that the case required. In this situation it is not, therefore, surprising, that he neither expatiated upon the heinous nature of the crime of adultery, nor urged a rigorous execution
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of the law against the offender; but that having sent away the scribes and Pharisees overwhelmed with shame and compunction, he dismissed the guilty woman with a gracious exhortation to repentance.

Perceiving that the accusers, when they could not accomplish their artful and malicious purpose against him, took no farther measures towards convicting the offender, but left her in the midst of the temple, he turned to the woman, and told her, that since her accusers themselves had not thought proper to bring her to judgment and condemnation, neither would he take upon him to pronounce on her the sentence of the law. At the same time, mindful as he always was of his commission and office as a divine instructor, he exhorted her to repent of her heinous offences, and for the future to lead an innocent and virtuous life. “When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are these thine accusers?

hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord: then said Jesus, Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more."

In this transaction, as it has been now explained, every circumstance appears perfectly natural and consistent; and no shadow of blame can lie upon the conduct of Christ, as if, by his behaviour to this woman, he had given countenance to criminality. This misapprehension has evidently arisen from understanding the phrase, "*I condemn thee not,*" as signifying "*I blame thee not:*" whereas the whole drift of the narrative shews that it ought to be understood as denoting, "I do not pass the legal sentence of death upon thee." This is the only sense in which the phrase can be taken, for the accusers had sufficiently expressed their sense of the crime by their vehement accusation of the offender; and Jesus himself supposes her guilt when he bids her "go and sin no more."

Having

Having thus (chiefly after the explanation which an able critic * has given of this narrative) vindicated it from every objection, and shewn it to be perfectly consistent with the character and office of our Saviour, it only remains that I suggest to you the chief points of moral instruction which may be deduced from it.

And first, we are instructed by our Saviour's address to the woman's accusers, that they who bring accusations, either public or private, against others, should be careful that they be not themselves guilty of notorious offences. As far as respects the civil administration of justice it is, indeed, necessary that offences against the peace and order of society (amongst which adultery is certainly one of the most heinous) should be punished with a steady hand. In these cases lenity to individuals often proves injustice to the public. Nor does the narrative before us insinuate any

* Hurd on this story.

thing against the propriety of legal prosecutions, or countenance the magistrate in relaxing the spirit and energy of penal laws. Had these Pharisees appeared before our Saviour in their judicial capacity, and been engaged in a regular course of conviction and judgment against this offender, Jesus would, doubtless, have said nothing to discourage the prosecution. But when he saw, that under the cover of a regard to public justice they were carrying on an insidious plot against his life, he thought it right to silence their accusations of the woman by obliging them to become self-accusers. "Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone." The recollection of our own frailties and sins should incline us to the side of lenity, even in our attempts to bring offenders against the peace of the state to public justice, and put us upon our guard that we do not suffer ourselves, in such prosecutions, to be influenced by any other motive than a sense of duty to
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the public. But in private censure this consideration should operate much farther. It should restrain us from unnecessarily exposing and condemning the faults of our neighbours, who, though they may fall into errors of conduct from which we have the happiness to be conscious of being free, may, perhaps, on the whole, have as much merit as ourselves: for—to say nothing of the possibility of imposing upon ourselves so far as with great exultation to trample upon the characters of others on account of faults with which we ourselves, though we little suspect it, are equally chargeable—it may very easily happen, that, though we are free from those particular vices which have awakened in us so much indignation, we are, nevertheless, guilty of others equally heinous, which bring us down to a level with those we condemn. Before we take upon us to be very liberal in our remarks upon the characters of others, and very severe and implacable against offenders, we should
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be perfectly assured that we ourselves have no concealed crimes which, if divulged, would render us equally obnoxious to censure. And, even upon the supposition that we ourselves are free from every kind of criminality, we ought still to remember that the persons we are disposed so severely to condemn are entitled to milder treatment from men of like passions with themselves, and that, in the present state of temptation and imperfection, the best of us have no right to be confident that we shall not, on some future occasion, stand in need of candour, and even of forgiveness, from our fellow-creatures. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, restore him in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted."

Secondly, Let the power of conscience, exemplified in the self-convicted Pharisees, teach us to reverence this divine monitor within us, and to exercise the utmost caution, that we may preserve our-

selves free from its reproaches. It has often happened, as in the case before us, that when persons have been most violent in their censures of others, and have stood forth before the public eye with all the confidence of superior merit, a sudden discovery of some secret guilt, or perhaps a mere apprehension lest it should be discovered, has overspread their faces with shame, and obliged them to retire in confusion. Neither age, nor rank, nor office, can defend a man from the reproaches of conscience, or enable him to meet, without disorder and dismay, the reproach or the ridicule of which he is conscious of deserving. Innocence is the only secure ground of confidence. "Then shall I not be ashamed," says the Psalmist, "when I have respect unto all thy commandments."

Lastly, Let those who are conscious of offences for which they have deserved punishment, if not from men, yet from God, and have hitherto escaped condemnation,

nation, acknowledge with gratitude the long-suffering of the Almighty, who hath not dealt with them after their sins, nor rewarded them according to their iniquities; and, instead of presuming that the sentence which is delayed will never be executed, let them give all diligence to escape from the wrath to come by repentance and reformation. It is in vain for any man to flatter himself that he may continue in his vicious practices with impunity; for it is the unalterable decree of Heaven, that it shall be ill with the wicked, for the reward of his hands shall be given him. There is not a single vice which doth not bring its own punishment along with it, even in this world. Bodily suffering, or loss of reputation, or ruin of fortune, or remorse of mind; some or all of these consequences inevitably follow vicious practices, in the established course of things, without any extraordinary interposition of divine power. Even though a man sincerely repent of his sins, and
adopt

adopt a new course of life, he must still be in some measure a sufferer for his past folly: for he can never entirely wipe off the disgrace of having violated the laws of nature and religion, or place himself perfectly in the same situation in which he would have been had he never transgressed. But they who perversely continue in their evil ways, till the habits of vice become too deeply rooted to be subdued, can have no other prospect before them in this world but a perpetual accumulation of infamy, remorse, and wretchedness, and in the world to come have nothing to expect but everlasting destruction. “Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, await every soul of man that doth evil.” Let those then who have hitherto lived in the practice of licentiousness, profaneness, dishonesty, or any other vice, without delay exert every remaining spring of resolution within them to amend the disorders of their life, and correct their vicious inclinations and habits. As the
only

only possible way of escaping the condemnation which hangs over the head of every sinner, and which will most assuredly be inflicted upon the impenitent in that day in which God will render to every man according to his works, let them cease to do evil, and learn to do well; let them hear and obey the advice which our blessed Saviour gave to the adulterous woman, "Go, and sin no more."

On the Perpetuity of the Christian Church.

MATT. xvi. 18.

Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

IT may, perhaps, at first view be thought surprising that our Saviour, whose miracles were wrought in confirmation of his divine authority, should, on some occasions, apparently defeat his own end, by requiring the persons on whom they were wrought to conceal them. Thus, after the cure of a blind man at Bethsaida, “ Jesus sent him away to his house, saying,

saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town." But, in every case of this kind which occurs in the life of Christ, if the particular situation of our Saviour, and the circumstances and character of the people among whom the miracle is related to have been wrought, be duly considered, the difficulty will vanish. The reason, for example, why our Saviour did not choose to perform the miracle just referred to in public, may be gathered from what was before related concerning the inhabitants of Bethsaida and Chorazin, that, "though many of his mighty works had been done among them, they repented not." After the proofs which they had already seen of the divine authority of Jesus, it was a just punishment of their perverse neglect of his doctrine, that they should not be permitted to be spectators of this miracle, or to hear the relation of the cure from the person upon whom, from a motive of humanity, as well as for the farther satisfaction of
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our Saviour's attendant disciples, the miracle had been performed.

It was not the manner of our Saviour to force conviction upon the minds of those who through the influence of vicious passions were disinclined to listen to his instructions. He poured the light of heavenly truth upon his hearers, but made use of no compulsion to oblige them to receive it. Hence we may account for the caution which he always exercised in discovering his true character to the multitude. Whilst he awakened their attention to him as some extraordinary prophet, both by his miracles and his discourses, he judged it more eligible that an impression in his favour should, by these means, be gradually made upon their minds, than that they should at once receive a full discovery of the nature and extent of his commission. Without some extraordinary operation upon their faculties, wholly inconsistent with freedom of inquiry and judgment, he saw that such a

sudden declaration, that he was the *Messiah*, would either, on the one hand, inflame the resentment of the unbelieving multitude against him, or on the other lead those who might become his followers to compel him, according to their notions of the Messiah's kingdom, to take upon him the titles and ensigns of royalty.

The misconceptions which even the apostles of Christ entertained concerning his office and character rendered it necessary, that, besides the general information which they might obtain from his public discourses, they should, from time to time, receive particular instructions, in private, upon this subject. It seems to have been with the design of confirming their faith in him as the Messiah, and of giving them farther intimations concerning the nature of that divine institution of religion which he was about to establish, and concerning their consequent duty as
apostles,

apostles, that our Saviour held the conversation of which the text is a part.

As Jesus was travelling with his apostles from Bethsaida, where he had wrought the miracle before mentioned, towards Cæsarea Philippi, formerly Laish, in upper Galilee, he began to inquire of them what opinion the people at large entertained concerning him, and whom he was commonly thought to be. “He asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, who am known to you under the title of the Son of Man, am? To this they replied, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; others say, that thou art Elijah, the forerunner of the Messiah; and others, that thou art Jeremiah, or some other ancient prophet, come from the dead.”

They who imagined Jesus to be John the Baptist probably did it on the ground of an opinion common among the Pharisees, that human souls pass from one body to another*. They who thought that

* See Wakefield.

Jefus was Elijah returned to life seem to have gathered up this notion from the words of the prophet Malachi, “ Behold I will fend you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.” The expectation of the return of the prophet Jeremiah was grounded upon a tradition, that before the coming of the Meffiah he would appear to recover the ark of the covenant*.

Jefus then called upon his difciples to declare explicitly their own opinion concerning him : “ He faith unto them, But whom fay ye that I am ?” Peter, who was, on all occasions, the moft zealous of all the apoftles, faid, “ Thou art the Meffiah, the fon of the living God.” Then faid Jefus in reply, “ Blessed art thou, Simon, fon of Jonas, for flefh and blood hath not revealed it unto you, but my Father who is in heaven.” That is, “ Happy are you in thus readily acknow-

* 2 Maccabees ii. 5.

ledging me as the Messiah ; for this knowledge of my character you are not indebted to any human being, but to that divine light which you have received from God.”

Farther to express his approbation of the witness which Peter had borne to his divine character, and to reward the zeal with which he made this good confession, Jesus proceeds to assure him that he should, with his fellow-apostles, be employed as ministers of God in establishing his church, and that no power on earth should be able to overturn the edifice which should be raised on the foundation of their testimony. “ And I say also unto thee, Thou art, *indeed, Peter, a rock,* and upon this very rock will I build my church, and the gates of the grave shall not prevail against it : and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, it shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever

thou shalt loose upon earth, it shall be loosed in heaven.”

Jesus here takes occasion, from the import of the name which he had himself given to this apostle at his conversion, to assure him that upon his testimony, in concurrence with that of his fellow-apostles (for Peter had spoken, and was therefore, doubtless, answered, in the name of the rest), as upon a solid rock, the structure of his future church should be reared. Such allusions to the signification of proper names often occur in the Old Testament, and in other ancient writings. Peter is, moreover, assured that no power should be able to overturn the edifice which should be erected. The original word translated *hell*, signifies death: and the phrase, the gates of death, is an allusion to the ancient custom of holding public assemblies for the execution of justice at the gates of cities, whence the word gate became a common metaphor for
power

power or strength. The meaning then is, that all the powers of death should be in vain employed against the church of Christ, or in other words, that the religion of Christ should never be destroyed. To Peter, with the rest of his brethren, as stewards of his household, Christ committed the keys; that is, intrusted them with the power of admitting new members into the family or society of christians, of superintending the general concerns of the church, and particularly of declaring what ordinances should be binding upon the church, and what institutions should be no longer in force. This explanation of the words, "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," perfectly agrees with the history of the apostles, who after their master's ascension were employed in establishing churches, and deciding disputes concerning ritual

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observances, and other incidental circumstances of worship and discipline.

Beyond this there appears no foundation for extending the limits of this commission. There is certainly none for the powers which have, upon the ground of this commission, been assumed by those who have taken to themselves the style and office of successors of the apostles. As far, at least, as these words of our Saviour are concerned, there is no foundation for those high claims of spiritual power which have been made by ecclesiastical governors in different parts of the christian church. Understanding the text in a literal sense, the Romish church has held that St. Peter was, by Jesus Christ himself, constituted the head of all ecclesiastical power; and they have hence inferred that his supposed successors, the bishops of Rome, being heirs of his authority and prerogative, are to be acknowledged as infallible guides, and absolute

solate sovereigns in the church of Christ, who have the spiritual and eternal interests of mankind at their disposal. Others, who have not assumed the high claim of infallibility, under the notion of deriving peculiar gifts and powers by uninterrupted succession from the apostles, have taken upon them the authoritative determination of articles of faith and forms of worship. Not contented with resting their pretensions on the modest ground of expediency and general utility, they have claimed a sort of divine right to spiritual dominion, such as they suppose to have been vested in Peter and the rest of the apostles. Whereas the truth is, that the apostles themselves do not appear to have been ever possessed of any powers which would interfere with the free exercise of the right of private judgment. With respect to their fellow-christians, they never acted the part of lords over their faith, but were merely helpers of their joy. But whatever extent of authority may be supposed

posed to have been included in their commission, since the miraculous powers which supported it ceased with them, there can be no reason to suppose that the commission was intended to pass by hereditary succession to future ages. “ In the church of Christ other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid : and this foundation is the witness of the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.”

With respect to the prediction of our Saviour in the text—for in that important light the words are to be considered—it hath been thus far wonderfully verified. Through a period of near eighteen hundred years the christian religion hath stood its ground against all opposition. No sooner were the foundations of the christian church laid on the rock of the testimony of Peter and the other apostles, that Jesus was the Christ, the son of the living God, than it was vehemently as-
faulted

faulted by the storms of persecution. The powers of the earth seemed at first to be combined against it, and to threaten its destruction. Nevertheless, under the protection and authority of Heaven, it spread and flourished, till, at length, many of the kingdoms of the earth became the kingdoms of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. After christianity had escaped the fury of heathen persecution, and seemed to be secure and prosperous under the auspices of the emperor Constantine, internal dissensions, concerning articles of speculative belief, rose to an alarming height. An endless diversity of opinions sprung up, which were supported on all hands with that intolerant spirit which is the natural offspring of blind zeal and bigotry, each party, as it obtained the superiority, claiming to itself the right of prescribing to the rest, and censuring and condemning all who were not within its own inclosure, as heretics. So that upon the maxim, that a house divided against
itself

itself cannot stand, it might have been reasonably expected that the house or church of Christ would have fallen into ruin. About the same time christianity was in danger from the sudden inroads of pagan superstition from the north. In a subsequent period it was violently assaulted by the fierce and bloody spirit of mahometanism; and through the long course of intellectual darkness which overspread the world, its genuine doctrines and spirit, hid behind a thick cloud of ignorance and error, seemed almost entirely lost. But neither gentile persecution, nor mahometan violence, nor christian animosity, nor antichristian superstition, has been able to overturn this sacred structure: the gates of death have not prevailed against it. After standing the assault of such storms as must soon have demolished any fabric merely human, christianity still remains unshaken. What is the reasonable conclusion from hence, but that it is founded upon the rock of eternal truth—that
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it is the word of God, which abideth for ever?

From the experience which past ages have afforded of the stability of our holy religion, may we not reasonably conclude that this goodly edifice is constructed of materials which will never decay, and rests upon a foundation which can never be shaken? may we not fairly presume, that no weapon hereafter formed against christianity will prosper, and that in this sense, it is true that Jesus Christ, the great Author and Finisher of our faith, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever?

The evangelists, after relating the conversation between Christ and his apostles, which has now passed under our consideration, adds, that Jesus forbade them (probably for the same reasons which induced him to conceal several of his miracles) to make it publicly known that he was the Messiah. At the same time, in order to check that ambitious and worldly spirit, which the explicit declarations he had

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had made of his character might be expected to raise in those who believed that the Messiah of Israel would be a temporal prince, he informed them of his approaching sufferings. “From that time Jesus began to declare to his disciples that he must go up to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”

Peter, who was unable to reconcile these predictions with his preconceived notions of the Messiah, and who had too much zeal and affection for his master to endure the thought of his being brought into such a state of humiliation and suffering, took him up in the way of rebuke, and said, “Far be it from thee, Lord: this shall not befall thee.” Jesus, though he had before applauded Peter for his fidelity, now perceived that he deserved a severe rebuke for persisting in his false conceptions, and opposing him in the completion of the spiritual design of his mission;

sion; and therefore, in a tone of vehemence which we seldom meet with in his treatment either of his friends or his enemies, said to him, "Get thee behind me, mine adversary, (so the word Satan denotes) thou art become a snare to me, for thou regardest not the things of God, but the things of men." It is as if he had said, "Let me not hear from thy lips any thing so contrary to the spirit which ought to possess my disciples. In endeavouring to persuade me to relinquish the difficult and hazardous path of duty which lies before me, you shew yourself no true friend either to me or my religion. Your vehement rebuke arises rather from an ambitious desire to share the honours of an earthly kingdom, than from a becoming zeal for the interest of religion and the glory of God."

Our blessed Saviour's conduct, on this occasion, powerfully admonishes christians in all ages to guard against the influence of a worldly temper, and instructs them to reject with indignation every
temptation

temptation to sacrifice the interests of virtue, and the happiness of mankind, to any prospect of private interest. The noble and generous spirit of our divine Master never appears with greater dignity and lustre than in the ardour with which he here disclaims all regard to the things *of men*, when they come into competition with *the things of God*. Every one who deserves the name of a true christian, or an honest man, will in similar circumstances discover the same spirit, and be inclined to adopt the same language.

The behaviour of Peter instructs us in the necessity of good principles, as the foundation of a character steadily and consistently virtuous. It was because Peter misapprehended the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, and entertained worldly views and expectations, that he expressed so much dissatisfaction at his master's approaching sufferings. Without just and solid principles of right conduct a man must be in continual danger of being misled

led by false appearances of interest or duty, and will, sometimes, fancy himself acting a laudable and meritorious part when his conduct is in fact criminal.

After what had passed on this occasion between Jesus and Peter, our Saviour thought it necessary to warn his disciples still more explicitly than he had ever before done, of the dangers which would unavoidably attend their adherence to him and his cause; to assure them that all their expectations of worldly greatness were imaginary; to instruct them that the only way to secure to themselves any reward as his followers, would be to seek for it in another world, by cheerfully hazarding their lives in the profession and practice of that true religion which he had taught them; and to declare to them that the time was hastening when a treacherous desertion of the cause of religion would be punished, and when every sacrifice which men should now make of worldly interest to this cause, would be

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abundantly

abundantly repaid: “ Then said Jesus to his disciples, If any one would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me: for whoever shall wish to save his life, will in the end lose it; and whoever is willing to lose his life on account of me and my word, shall preserve it. For what will a man be profited if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man will hereafter come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then will he render to every man according to his works.”

Fellow-christians! the solemn warning which our Saviour here gives his apostles, is applicable in its general import to christians in every age—is applicable to every one of us. You are not, it is true, called upon literally to take up the cross and follow Christ, or to lay down your lives for his sake. But, if you wish to approve yourselves his sincere disciples,

and

and to save your immortal souls, you must exercise much resolution and self-denial; you must adhere to the profession and practice of christianity, without suffering yourselves to be drawn aside by any motives of interest, vanity, or pleasure.

If you would be real christians you must practise whatever the christian law requires, though all the world should reproach or ridicule you. If the christian law requires you to be meek, and humble, and peaceable, and to forgive injuries, you must obey this law, though the world should despise you for want of spirit. If the christian law requires you to be sober, chaste, and temperate, you must refrain from licentiousness and excess, though all the world should laugh at your unfashionable strictness and preciseness. If the christian law requires you to do to others as you would that others should do to you, you must engage in no schemes of gain which imply a violation of this precept, though you could assure

yourselfes that the riches of the whole earth would be your reward. For without observing the christian law you cannot possibly obtain the christian prize of immortality. And what is there in this world which can compensate for the loss of such a prize? What is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

If, my brethren, you do not feel the force of this argument, it must either be because you do not heartily believe the christian doctrine of a future state, or because you do not allow yourselves leisure to reflect, compare, and judge, on topics in which your first interests are concerned. If the former be the cause, weigh attentively, I beseech you, every proof which reason and revelation suggest in support of this great truth, before you venture to reject it, lest ye be found, in the issue, to have "wronged your own souls." If the latter, consider well, before it be too late, the awful import of our Saviour's declaration ;

ration; “Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my word, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he shall come in the glory of his Father, to render to every man according to his works.”

The best Christians unprofitable
Servants.

LUKE xvii. 10.

So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do.

IN the verses preceding the text our Saviour repeats several precepts which he had delivered on a former occasion. They appear to have been repeated at this time with a particular reference to the opposition which the Pharisees and Scribes had
made

made to the doctrine of Christ. In the first place Jesus denounces a woe upon those who were attempting to prevent the success of his ministry; strongly intimating, that, although, in the present state of human nature, it is to be expected that faithful endeavours to instruct and reform the world, would meet with opposition from the bigotted and interested, yet this opposition originated from such corrupt principles, and selfish passions, as must involve the persons by whom it was made in aggravated guilt, and expose them to severe punishment. “Then said Jesus to his disciples, It must needs be that offences come, but woe to him through whom they come: it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should occasion the fall of one of these little ones, the meanest of my disciples.”

Having thus censured the malignant opposition of the Pharisees against his doctrine, Jesus, perceiving probably that

their conduct was likely to excite warm indignation in the breasts of the more zealous of his followers, proceeds to exhort his disciples not to indulge an implacable resentment even against their most inveterate enemies. "Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him: and if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him."

The apostles, thinking this precept a hard saying, and perhaps, too, somewhat disheartened by the violence with which the progress of their Master's doctrine had been opposed, prayed that he would confirm their faith by some new exertion of his miraculous power. The apostles said unto the Lord, "Increase our faith:" hereby intimating, as more fully appears from the sequel, that it was not without great difficulty that they adhered to him in the midst of so many discouragements,
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and consequently assuming to themselves no small share of merit in continuing to follow him. Upon this Jesus assures them, that how much soever they might value themselves upon their zeal and fidelity, they had, in reality, little occasion, on this ground, for boasting: for if they had a real faith and confidence in him at all, proportioned to the proofs which they had seen of the divine power which accompanied him, their difficulties would immediately vanish, and every obstacle would be removed out of their way: “And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say to this sycamore tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea, and it should obey you.”

In order still further to correct the spirit of vanity and conceit which Jesus at this time discovered in his apostles, whom he perceived to be inclined to assume to themselves extraordinary merit, on account of their steady attachment to him,

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he introduces an illustration of the impropriety and unreasonableness of such claims from the case of a master who demands attendance from his servants as a matter of right. As a man whose servant has been employed through the day in the labours of the field, does not permit him to sit down to his own meal till he has waited upon his master's table, and after all does not think himself obliged to the servant for an attendance which was a part of his office: in like manner Jesus instructs his disciples, that in adhering steadfastly to him, in the midst of difficulties and discouragements, they only discharged the obligation which arose from their relation to him, and therefore could have no pretension to uncommon merit.

“ Which of you having a servant ploughing or feeding cattle, will say to him as soon as he returns from the field, Go, and sit down to meat? and will not rather say to him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself and serve me, till I have

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have eaten and drank, and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he owe any favour to that servant because he did the things which were commanded him? I apprehend not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which were commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants, we have done only that which it was our duty to do.”

This doctrine, though originally applied to the attendance and service which was due from the apostles of Christ to their master, is equally applicable to that obedience which every man, as a rational being, owes to his Maker. “We are unprofitable servants; we have done only that which it was our duty to do,” is the proper language of a creature to his great Creator: it is the language of humility and of truth. After our most perfect services we are not to indulge the vain conceit that we have done any thing which can, in strict propriety of language, *merit* the rewards of immortality. Even upon
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the most favourable supposition we have done no more than was our duty ; no more than we should have been indispensably obliged to have done, although no such rewards had been promised. Our obligations to the practice of virtue are immutable and eternal. They necessarily arise from the reason and nature of things prior to every consideration of reward. The rewards of obedience should, therefore, be regarded not as the foundation of our obligations, but as motives and encouragements to fulfil them. Indeed, he who discharges his duty faithfully is entitled to approbation, protection, and favour, in proportion to his diligence and fidelity. But if any thing greater or better than this is promised to the good man, or shall be conferred on him, this must be considered as a reward, not of debt, but of grace ; not as what might be claimed on the ground of just desert, but only as the free gift of divine beneficence.

Among men, a servant, although he
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does whatever his master is pleased to command him, and performs his whole duty faithfully, is, nevertheless, entitled to no extraordinary reward, nor can have any claim to peculiar privileges. He is still a servant, and whatever he does in that capacity by order of his master is his duty, and no more than his duty. The assiduous and cheerful performance of this duty may be allowed to merit his master's approbation, and will give him an undoubted right to the wages for which he contracted, and to the benefits naturally belonging to his office. But beyond this no master thinks himself bound in strict justice to confer reward; nor can his servant reasonably accuse him of injustice if he withhold it. So likewise *we*, being servants of God, are bound by that relation to perform the service which he requires of us; and having done this, we ought not to overrate our services, or to imagine that they entitle us to any uncommon recompence, but humbly to acknowledge

knowledge that we have done no more than our condition as his servants demands from us.

This our Saviour instructs us to consider as the true state of the case, even upon the supposition of a constant and complete obedience; how much more, then, since our obedience is so defective, and since our purest and best services are alloyed with so many imperfections.

The truth and propriety of this representation is so evident at first view, that one cannot help wondering whence the doctrine of absolute merit, or of a power in human nature to perform works of supererogation, by which the distinguishing favour of heaven might be claimed as a debt, should ever have arisen. But especially one must stand amazed that it should have ever entered into the mind of man to suppose that he could not only merit heaven for himself, but perform such a superfluity of good works as should, when transferred to another, be sufficient

to supply all his deficiencies, and merit salvation for him likewise. The absurdity of these opinions will be sufficiently manifest when we have considered, as our text naturally leads us to do, upon what grounds it is that we reject all pretensions to merit in our obedience, and confess ourselves unprofitable servants.

First, then, there can be, strictly speaking, nothing meritorious in our best services, because our goodness extendeth not to God, nor can, in the least degree, be beneficial to him. In order to render any action meritorious, it is necessary that it should, in some way or other, produce the advantage and benefit of him for whom it is performed, and of whom we pretend to merit. But—to borrow the words of Eliphaz to Job, “Can a man be profitable to his Maker, as he that is wise may be profitable to himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him that thou makest thy ways perfect?” Between the
servants

servants of God and the servants of men there is this difference. The servants of men have it in their power, by their diligent and honest services, to promote their master's interests, and therefore may, in this view, have some claim upon their affection and kindness: but the servants of God can only by their obedience do themselves good, and promote their own happiness. Even upon the supposition of doing, what no man (excepting only the great Saviour of the world) ever yet did, keeping all the commands of God without deviation or defect, as we are still unprofitable to our master, utterly incapable of increasing his glory and happiness, or making the least addition to his perfection, what can all our services merit from his hands, or with what decency and propriety can we challenge him as our debtor?

Farther, if upon the supposition that we had done all that was commanded us, and perfectly obeyed the whole will of

God, it would yet become us to acknowledge ourselves unprofitable servants, what shall we say when we recollect how much imperfection appears even in our best actions—to how many failings and defects the best of us are liable? Where is the man who can say that he has always been as vigilant and circumspect, as diligent and active; in his obedience, as he might and ought to have been? Who can say that in all the scenes of life through which he has passed he has never, in a single instance, suffered his virtue to be subdued by temptation? Who can say, I have kept my heart clean, I am pure from sin? Do we not often see persons who apparently mean well, and are even zealous advocates for religion, chargeable with indiscretions which bring a reproach upon the holy name by which they are called? Such instances of imprudence and frailty, even among sincere professors of christianity, surely afford sufficient ground for humbly renouncing all

pretensions to absolute perfection, and all claims of merit. Although we are under the government of a merciful God, who will not be strict to mark every thing we do amiss, and who is always ready to accept of the sincerity, instead of the perfection, of our obedience; yet surely for creatures, who have in their characters such a mixture of good and evil, to expect the unspeakable rewards of immortality as in strict justice due to their imperfect and interrupted obedience, may justly lay them open to the imputation of arrogance and presumption. The sincere and humble christian will rather acknowledge, that though it is his habitual and prevailing intention and endeavour to obey the will of God, yet since he is encompassed with infirmities, and in the course of his life frequently falls into errors, he must take to himself the title not of a meritorious, but of an unprofitable servant. He will look forwards to the happiness.

pinens of heaven, the inconceivable and everlasting glories of the future state, not as a debt due to his merit, but as the free gift of divine bounty, promised to sincere christians, not as an equivalent for their services, but in consequence of the unmerited goodness and mercy of God.

Moreover, the best of men, considered in themselves, have little reason to boast of their merit, and may be justly styled unprofitable servants, because, whatever good actions they perform, they have received the whole power of performing them from that great and good Being "whose they are, and whom they serve." It is to the Almighty that we are indebted for all our capacities of action. If by our original frame we have any ability to perform an acceptable service to God, this very ability is his gift. It is God who hath taught us the use and application of all our powers, and it is to him we owe every encouragement and assistance by which we are enabled to exercise our

natural powers in the most advantageous and useful manner. There is, doubtless, something amiable and praise-worthy in a right application of our powers, and a faithful improvement of our talents—something upon which God himself is pleased to look down with approbation and complacence, and on account of which he is represented as calling us good and faithful servants. But, if we consider through whose bounty, and under whose guidance and direction, our best and highest improvements are made, and to whom we owe even our capacity of performing any part of the service required from us, unless we think of ourselves much more highly than we ought to think, we shall see sufficient reason to acknowledge ourselves unprofitable servants, and to disclaim all pretensions to merit. The apostle Paul was an eminent pattern of this lowliness of mind, from whom we may learn how to estimate, and whither to refer, the merit of our services. When he
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was constrained by the malicious accusations of his enemies to vindicate his own character, and to declare, as he himself expresses it, in the foolishness of boasting, that he had laboured more abundantly than all the apostles, he closes his apology for himself by acknowledging his obligations to divine assistance, and laying the glory of all services at the feet of his Master: "Yet not I," says he, "but the grace of God which was with me." In like manner the best of christians, those who have been most eminent for piety and virtue, have always been most ready to acknowledge their obligations to that Divine Power from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works, originally proceed—to whom, therefore, they ought, with all humility and gratitude, to be ultimately referred.

Add to all this, the manifest impropriety suggested in the text, of making a merit of that which is a mere matter of duty, and challenging a reward for doing

that to which we are indispensably obliged. Were there no future rewards promised to the righteous, it would still be fit and reasonable that we should do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. As creatures of God we are his servants, and bound by this relation to do whatever he commands us. As daily objects of his paternal goodness we are under the powerful obligation of love and gratitude, and should make it the daily study and business of our lives to render unto him a tribute of cheerful obedience. All pretensions to merit, with reference to the Supreme Being, must therefore be inconsistent with our condition as derived and dependent beings, and discover a mind under the dominion of that pride which was not made for man. "When we have done all those things which are commanded us we are unprofitable servants, for we have done only that which it was our duty to do."

Having said thus much to shew that
merit

merit cannot belong to human actions in such a sense as to give us a claim, in strict justice, to the rewards promised to sincere obedience in the gospel of Christ; I shall, in conclusion, caution you against some false and pernicious inferences which may possibly be deduced from the doctrine we have been establishing.

In the first place, we are not to conclude, because obedience to the laws of God cannot profit him, or make him our debtor, that therefore it is not a service by which we may profit ourselves, and promote our own happiness. Both scripture and reason teach us a very different lesson. From the former we learn that godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come; that the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart, and in keeping them there is a great reward. And indeed it is obvious to every man's experience, that there is an intimate connexion between virtue

and happiness. No man can sincerely endeavour to do his duty, as an honest man and a good christian, without reaping great present advantages from his obedience. The righteous is not only more excellent, but also more happy, than his neighbour. Besides laying the best foundation for the enjoyment of the outward comforts and blessings of life, such as health, reputation, and a competency of worldly possessions, he secures peace in his own mind, enjoys a consciousness of having done what is right, and lives under a sense of the divine approbation. Great peace have they that love the law of God, and nothing shall offend them.

Secondly, As we are not to conclude from the doctrine of the text, that obedience to the will of God will be unprofitable to ourselves, so neither are we to infer that it will be unprofitable to others. Though our goodness cannot extend to God, our fellow-creatures are greatly interested

terested in it, and much of their happiness may depend upon it. The laws of God, like the great lawgiver, are holy, just, and good. If they were more regularly and perfectly obeyed it is evident that the condition of human nature would be proportionally improved. In fact, who doth not see that the happiness of every individual greatly depends, not only upon his own virtuous conduct, but upon that of those with whom he is connected; and that we are indebted for many of the most valuable blessings of life to those who practise whatsoever things are just, true, lovely, and of good report? We hear frequent complaints of the miseries of human life; but whence do the greater part of them spring, if not from the follies and vices of men? “Whence come wars, and fightings, contentions both public and private, but from our ungoverned passions?” On the other hand, how much happiness is enjoyed, what great blessings

blessings do men become to one another, where the duties of righteousness and mercy, integrity, faithfulness, and humanity, are conscientiously practised. In short, every faithful servant of God, or, which is the same thing, every truly good man, is a blessing to the world, and a benefactor to his kind, and every one who is in any respect connected with him may be the better and the happier for him. So profitable are good works to men, though they cannot be profitable to God.

Nor, lastly, are we to conclude that because our best service, and most complete obedience, cannot make the Almighty our debtor, therefore they are of no value in his sight, or will contribute nothing towards obtaining his favour. This is an error of the most pernicious kind; an extreme into which many, through an indiscreet zeal against the doctrine of merit, and an injudicious jealousy .

lously for the honour of divine grace, have fallen. To say that the good actions of the best of men give them a claim of right to everlasting rewards, is evidently absurd; but to depreciate good works, and to represent the practice of virtue as of no efficacy in obtaining our final salvation, is not only absurd but dangerous. Such a doctrine may lead incautious men, who are under the influence of licentious passions, to treat the obligations of morality with indifference, and to think it a matter of no consequence whether they be virtuous or vicious. If the doctrine of merit be adapted to feed the pride of man, and to encourage presumption, that doctrine which represents moral obedience as of little account in the sight of God, by falling in with the vicious inclinations of men, tends to dissolve every moral obligation, and opens the door to all manner of wickedness. "These things," saith the apostle Paul

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to Timothy, "I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who believe in God be careful to maintain good works: these things are good and profitable unto men."

The truth upon the present subject is briefly this: That though our good actions, even upon the supposition that we had done all that was commanded us, cannot deserve the exceeding great reward promised in the gospel, yet they are the indispensable condition of our obtaining it. That though we are, at the best, unprofitable servants, it is still our duty to obey the laws of God with sincerity and steadfastness, leaving it to him to reward our obedience in what manner, and in what degree, he pleases: and finally, that though our virtues cannot give us a claim to future happiness, there is an intrinsic excellence, and (in the latitude in which the term is commonly used) we may add, an intrinsic worth or merit in
them,

them, which will render us objects of divine approbation, and insure to us, as our future recompence, that eternal life which is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. “ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, &c.”

The Wisdom of foreseeing and
providing against Difficulties
and Dangers.

LUKE xiv. 28.

*Which of you, intending to build a tower,
sitteth not down first, and counteth the
cost, whether he have sufficient to finish
it?*

IT is a decisive proof of our Saviour's integrity that he always treated his followers with frankness, never raising in them expectations which it was not his intention to fulfil, or concealing from them circumstances of difficulty or ha-

zard which were likely to attend them in the profession of his religion. Had Jesus secretly entertained the design of establishing himself in the possession of wealth and power, he would naturally, after the manner of impostors in all ages, have amused his followers with fair promises of temporal honours and rewards, proportioned to the fidelity and zeal with which they should adhere to his cause. And the universal expectation which at that time prevailed among the Jews, that their Messiah would be a powerful prince, would have furnished him with an opportunity of raising and encouraging such hopes, which, in the hands of many an artful and ambitious adventurer, would have turned to very good account. But instead of availing himself of this prejudice, and of other circumstances which might have given him the command of the Jewish populace for any purposes of ambition or avarice, he did not even suffer those who attended upon his discourses

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to deceive themselves with fruitless expectations of worldly advantage, but informed them, in the most explicit terms, that in following him they would be so far from taking the road to preferment and wealth, that they would place themselves in the way of hardships and dangers, and might, perhaps, come into situations which would require no less a sacrifice than that of life itself.

That portion of the gospel history with which the text is connected affords an admirable example of this part of our Saviour's character. When he was surrounded with a large assembly of people, many of whom probably had attended him from place to place, and discovered a disposition to become his stated disciples, he fairly warned them what to expect if they took upon them the profession of that religion which he was establishing; and exhorted them, before they assumed a character which would expose them to so much hazard, deliberately to consider
whether

whether they possessed zeal and fortitude sufficient to carry them through the trials which lay before them. “ A great multitude accompanying him, he turned and said to them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple ; and whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” It is as if he had said, “ Your readiness to accompany me in my ministry, and to take upon you the character of my disciples, is very acceptable to me. But lest you should delude yourselves by indulging hopes which it will not be in my power to gratify, I must plainly forewarn you, that by adhering to my cause you will probably, instead of advancing your worldly interest, expose yourselves to such severe persecutions that you will be obliged, in approving your fidelity to me, to break through the strongest ties of natural affection, to submit to the most grievous

ous sufferings, and even to part with your life for my sake.

This passage cannot reasonably be understood in any harsher sense than that which has now been given. In the strict meaning of the phrase, for a man to hate his own life would commonly be impossible, and to hate his nearest friends and relations would be criminal. But we have had frequent occasion to remark, that it was a common form of speech among the Jews to substitute opposition instead of comparison, and particularly to say that one thing is loved and another hated, when the one is preferred to the other, or the one chosen and the other neglected. Thus the prophet Malachi, speaking in the name of the Lord, says, “I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau;” that is, “I have chosen Jacob, and rejected Esau.” According to the same form of speech our Saviour says, “No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to
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the one, and despise the other;" where it is evident that the latter phrases of *holding to*, and *despising* or *rejecting*, are introduced as similar in meaning to the former, *loving* and *hating*. It would, therefore, be not only unreasonable, but contrary to the usual analogy of the language in which our Saviour spake, to understand the words under consideration in any other sense than as denoting, that when the cause of religion, and the ties of natural affection, or self-love, interfered, the latter were to give way to the former;—that whenever it should become impossible for a disciple of Christ to adhere to the profession of his gospel without hazarding his interest in the affections of his relatives and friends, or even exposing his own life to danger, he must risk every thing that is dear to him in this world, rather than forsake the post of duty.

Further to engage his hearers to a diligent examination of themselves, in order to determine whether they had sufficient

fortitude and resolution to meet the trials which awaited them, Jesus reminded them, that it was a usual thing with persons who had any great undertaking before them, to consider well the hazard, or the expence, which would attend it, that they might judge whether they were able to execute it, and thus save themselves the mortification and disgrace of leaving the design unfinished. “ Which of you, having formed a design to build a tower, or other edifice, would not first sit down and count the cost, in order to know whether he have sufficient to finish it? lest it should happen that, when he has laid the foundation, and is not able to complete the building, every one that observes it should say in derision, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. In like manner, What prince, who is engaged in war with some neighbouring power, would not, before he hazard a battle, thoroughly inquire into the number and condition of his own forces and

those of the enemy, that, if he should find himself greatly inferior in strength, whilst the army he has to encounter is yet at a distance, he may send messengers to treat with him, and make the best terms of accommodation he can obtain. What king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand : or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an embassy, and desireth conditions of peace.”

Agreeably to this common practice among mankind, of weighing the difficulties and hazards of any enterprize before they undertake it, our Saviour advised the people who accompanied him to consider well the dangers which they must encounter if they became his disciples, warning them to prepare for the loss of every worldly possession, and even of life itself. “ So likewise, whosoever he

be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”

The general doctrine suggested by our Saviour in this discourse admits of an extensive application to the purposes of practical instruction.

In the first place, we are hereby taught, before we undertake any important business, to make ourselves well acquainted with its nature, and to inquire whether we have ability and resolution equal to the undertaking. From the want of a due attention to this maxim of prudence it often happens that people engage in designs, or step forwards into offices for which they are wholly unqualified, without once entertaining a suspicion of their inability. Urged on by that vanity by which they who take no pains to be acquainted with themselves are commonly misled, such persons take upon them, with the most comfortable self-complacency, a charge of the nature and extent of which they are uninformed, and promise themselves

selves no small share of credit from the execution. Repeated disappointments and mortifications by degrees convince them that they are unequal to the task they have undertaken, and they are obliged, at last, to leave the work unaccomplished; a monument of folly which invites every passenger to say in derision, "This man began to build, and was not able to finish."

To this kind of rashness young persons, through their natural impetuosity of temper, and their want of experience, are more especially liable. It is one of the kindest offices of friendship in such cases to supply the place of experience by reasonable hints of caution and advice. An excellent example of this kind of friendship is preserved in the account which Xenophon gives of the life and actions of Socrates. Observing a very young man taking upon him to give his opinion in those public assemblies of the people which were frequent in Athens, and im-

patient to be intrusted in a certain post with the management of public affairs, Socrates, after his usual manner, engaged him in a conversation, in which he very successfully taught him a lesson of self-knowledge. After winning his favourable attention by allowing, that to serve his country in the direction of her public affairs was a laudable object of ambition, he asked him in what manner he proposed to execute the office for which he was solicitous to become a candidate; what plans he had laid for enriching the state, for defending it against its foreign enemies, and for the administration of justice; what was the present state of the public revenues and military force; by what means he proposed to increase the one, and strengthen the other;—and the like. To these inquiries the young man had nothing to reply but that he had not sufficiently considered these matters, and must get further information. Having thus made the forward youth heartily ashamed

ashamed of his ignorance and presumption, he took his leave of him with this caution; "If you wish hereafter to escape disgrace, never presume to speak upon a subject, or to undertake a business, which you do not understand." How much discredit to individuals, how much disappointment to the public, would be prevented by a due attention to this maxim of prudence!

Another important concern to which the rule of counting the cost may be applied, is the choice of a profession or occupation for life. This is an affair which certainly requires the utmost caution and deliberation. In making this choice much attention ought to be paid to a young man's genius and cast of mind; for, unless there be a suitableness between these and the employment to which he is destined, it must be expected that he will be all his days beating against the stream, with little prospect of satisfaction to himself,

self, or benefit to the public. This choice, it is true, is a matter of too much difficulty, as well as importance, to be entirely left to the discretion of young persons at the early period when it is commonly necessary to make it. But the parents, or friends, upon whom the determination chiefly falls, ought to be careful that they be not more influenced in their choice by interest, partiality, or family pride, than by a regard to the abilities, qualifications, and dispositions of the young person whose designation is in question.

The doctrine of *counting the cost* is also applicable to numberless cases in which men are tempted to trespass the limits of prudent economy in order to gratify some favourite inclination. Whatever direction this folly may happen to take, whether it employs itself in providing costly ornaments, in raising and adorning magnificent structures, in collecting objects of curiosity,

curiosity, in procuring admired productions in the fine arts, or in furnishing a splendid and luxurious table; if the passion be not resolutely restrained by discretion, it will bring with it a train of expences which will render it exceedingly burdensome, if not entirely ruinous, to its owner. That which was at first intended to be nothing more than an elegant amusement, or a fashionable indulgence, becomes at length a most serious occupation, and interferes with the most important concerns and duties of life. In this manner a taste or fancy, in itself innocent, often leads those who suffer it to become predominant, from one extravagance to another, and, in the issue, involves them in inextricable difficulties. And even where no such particular passion seizes the mind, the general ambition of being distinguished and admired frequently leads men into an ostentatious display of wealth in their whole manner of living, to which their resources are unequal;

unequal ; till, at last, for want of having prudently counted the cost, they have the mortification to become objects of pity to their friends, and of ridicule to the world ; and are obliged to adopt the lamentation of Solomon, on grounds which Solomon never experienced, “ I looked on all the labour which my hands had wrought, and behold all was vanity and vexation of spirit.”

But, that we may bring the prudential maxim suggested in the text nearer to the occasion upon which our Saviour introduced it, I proceed to observe, that in the important concern of professing the christian religion it is necessary to make use of the precaution of preparing ourselves, by forethought and deliberation, for the difficulties and dangers which attend it.

Although we live at a period, and in a country, which leaves us exposed to few of the hazards which threatened the first christians ; although we have the sanction of the civil authority to countenance
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our public avowal of the christian faith, and an effectual security in the liberal spirit of the times against persecution for religious opinions or practices; difficulties, nevertheless, of another kind, attend the sincere profession of christianity, which require the exertion of no small share of resolution, of which, therefore, you ought to be well apprized when you take upon you the christian name.

There are certain principles of action essential to the christian character, and therefore common to the true disciples of Christ in every age. These are, reverence for the authority of Almighty God, and a regard to a future state of rewards and punishments. It was under the influence of these principles that the early christians maintained their fidelity to their master, in defiance of all the terrors of persecution. And wherever these principles are firmly established in the mind; that is, in other words, wherever the christian religion is sincerely embraced, they

they will, in every situation, operate with equal efficacy, in producing steadfast obedience to the laws of Christ. The first concern of every real christian is, to please God, and obtain everlasting life : for he is well persuaded, that without his Maker's favour it is impossible he should be happy, and that eternal felicity in a future life is an object of infinitely greater value than all the pleasures, riches, or honours, of this world. In order to obtain the great end for which he lives, he sincerely resolves to comply with the condition on which alone his religion teaches him to hope for it, a steady and persevering obedience to the laws of Christ.

Such being the principles, views, and purposes, which are essential to the christian character, it is manifest that no man can be a true christian who will suffer himself to be deterred from performing his duty by any apprehension of present inconvenience, or be enticed to part with his innocence and integrity by any allure-

ments which the world can offer. If it was necessary, in the ages of persecution, to “resist unto blood, striving against sin,” rather than make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, it is equally necessary, in periods the most favourable to the profession of christianity, still to strive against sin, by resolutely withstanding every temptation which would seduce us from the path of christian obedience.

Let those, then, who take upon them the profession of the christian faith, and especially young persons, whom it much concerns to settle their plan of life with all possible circumspection, consider well the conditions upon which alone they can become christians. Many seem to imagine, that for this purpose nothing further is necessary than to be baptized in the name of Christ, to rank themselves with some public body of professing christians, and to attend upon the ordinances of christianity. But consult the original records of the christian law, and you will find
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that you cannot be christians without a strict and constant attention to your moral conduct; without abandoning your vices of every kind, and leading a sober, righteous, and godly life. If you would be christians for any higher purpose than merely for the sake of being called such, in a country where it is still some discredit to be without the pale of the christian church; if you would enjoy the benefit of christian principles, and the consolation of christian hopes at present, and entitle yourselves to the rewards provided for the disciples of Christ hereafter, you must resolutely shun the contagion of bad example. In the midst of the greatest degeneracy of manners you must keep yourselves unspotted from the world. Even at a time when the virtues of sobriety, chastity, and moderation, are treated with ridicule, you must be sober, chaste, and temperate, in all things. In a state of society which places in your way innumerable allurements to licentious pleasure,
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you must preserve your innocence uncontaminated. While thousands around you are pushing forwards to wealth and distinction, without stopping to ask themselves whether the expedients they make use of to accomplish their purposes be consistent with honour, integrity, and humanity, you must be contented with such a competency as you can acquire without offering violence to conscience; and, if you are so situated that it is only in your power to obtain riches by fraudulent or oppressive means, you must be content to be poor. At a time when the sacred obligations of religion are by many despised, and by more forgotten, and when its public offices are neglected by many of those who lead the manners of the age, you must not be ashamed of your religious principles and profession, or forsake the assembling of yourselves together for religious worship. In fine, even in a “crooked and perverse,” and irreligious and licentious generation, you must shine

as lights in the world. On these conditions alone will you be entitled to rank among the true disciples of Christ on earth, or qualified for an admission into his everlasting kingdom.

Before you solemnly profess yourselves christians look, then, into the secret recesses of your heart, to examine whether you are possessed of a sufficient share of resolution and fortitude to perform the labours, and to make the sacrifices, which christianity requires. Diligently "count the cost," lest haply, after having named the name of Christ, ye bring upon yourselves that sorer punishment of which he shall be thought worthy who hath forsaken the holy commandment delivered to him. In making this important determination be it, however, carefully remembered, that if from any apprehension of present danger, or from any hope of present advantage, you refuse to enrol yourselves among the followers of Christ, you hereby relinquish all claim to the

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glorious and everlasting felicity promised in the gospel, and must expect that in the great day, when you will be called to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, he will say to you, “ I know you not; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.”

Mutual Condescension recommended by the Example of Christ.

JOHN xiii. 13—16.

Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am: If I then your Lord and Master have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet; for I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

THERE is scarcely any incident in the whole course of the gospel history in which our benevolent Saviour appears in a more amiable light than that to which the text refers. In order to be fully sensible

sible of the merit of his conduct, and the propriety and excellence of his doctrine, upon this occasion, we must advert to the particulars of the narrative.

It was a religious custom among the Jews, on the *fifth* day of the week, in which the great festival of the passover, in commemoration of the deliverance of their ancestors out of Egypt, was celebrated, to eat, with great solemnity, the paschal supper; in which, after several preliminary ceremonies, the members of each family, in their respective houses, partook of a lamb, according to the precept of Moses. The supper began with a benediction pronounced by the master of the family over a cup of wine, which was afterwards tasted by the guests. The master having then washed his hands, the company eat of bread which had not been leavened, and bitter herbs: upon which it was customary for one of the younger branches of the family to ask the reason of this ceremony. This introduced

what was called the *shewing forth*, or *declaration*, when the master, in reply to the inquiry, "What mean ye by this service?" said, (Ex. xii. 26.) "It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses." After a second washing the paschal lamb was eaten; and the whole ceremony was concluded with a hymn of praise.

The day for celebrating this paschal supper being arrived, Jesus, who appears to have been now with his disciples in his usual retreat on the mount of Olives, determined to perform this ceremony with them at Jerusalem, the scene of his approaching sufferings. Two of his disciples, to whom he communicated his intention, and whom he requested to make the necessary preparations, went, according to his instructions, into the city to the house which he pointed out to them, and there prepared the passover. "And on the
first

first day of unleavened bread, when the passover was to be killed, Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat: and they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare it? And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, a man will meet you, carrying a pitcher of water: follow him into the house where he enters, and say to the master of the family, The teacher saith to thee, Where is the guest chamber, where I may eat the passover with my disciples? and he will shew you a large upper room furnished, there make ready. And the two disciples went, and found as he had said to them: and they prepared the passover."

During the interval between our Saviour's instructions and the paschal supper, or perhaps as soon as they were assembled for this celebration, the apostles, who had not yet sufficiently spiritualized their ideas concerning the nature of their master's

kingdom, renewed their old contest concerning power and precedency. Jesus, as he had often before had occasion to do, rebuked their vanity and weakness, and exhorted them, after his example, to condescend to each other with all humility, charity, and meekness. Instead of aspiring after those distinctions, and that dominion, which so commonly excited ambition among the great, he taught them to direct their emulation into the channel of benevolence, and seek their highest praise from mutual condescension and kindness. And to encourage them to the practice of the difficult lessons of self-denial and humility, he directed their views to the honours and rewards of the future life, assuring them that the consequence of a firm and unshaken attachment to him, through all the scenes of trial which awaited him, would be a participation of the dignities of his future kingdom. "And there was also a strife among them who of them should be accounted the greatest.

greatest. And he said to them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them; and they that exercise authority upon them have the title of benefactors: but ye shall not be so; but he who is eldest among you let him be as the youngest, and he who presides as he who serves. For which is greater, he that sitteth at table, or he that serves? Is not he that sitteth at table? but I am among you as one that serves.”

It was probably in consequence of this contention, and for the immediate purpose of checking the proud and ambitious spirit which it discovered, that Jesus performed the expressive action which followed.

Before the immediate celebration of the passover by taking of the paschal lamb, when Jesus was sitting at the table with his apostles, knowing that the time of his departure was approaching, and continuing to the last period of his life to love his
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select disciples and friends; to express in the strongest and kindest manner his unalterable affection for them, he determined, before they eat the passover, to perform for his disciples the humble office, common in the East, and usually discharged by servants, of washing their feet. "Now before the feast of the passover," saith the apostle John, "as Jesus knew that his hour was come, when he should depart from this world to the Father, having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them to the end; and the *time of supper being come*, (so the words should be rendered, and not *supper being ended*) the devil having now put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God, rose from the table, laid aside his upper garments, and took a towel and girded himself: then pouring water into a vessel,

a vessel, he began to wash the feet of his disciples, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded.”

Can a more illustrious example of condescension be conceived than that which is presented before us in this scene? The (great) Saviour of the world, conscious of his superiority to the ignorant and prejudiced, though (except in one instance) honest and faithful men, who had attached themselves to his interest, acquainted with the full extent of the important office which, under the authority of God, he was called to execute, (and no stranger to the exalted station he was afterwards to occupy, as head over all things to his church) nevertheless assumes the humble character of a servant, and performs, to those who looked up to him as their master and guide, the menial office of washing their feet. To a spectator deeply sensible of the dignity of his character, and at the same time not fully apprized of his intention in the action, it must have
appeared

appeared a degree of humiliation in which it would scarcely become his disciples to acquiesce. In this light the transaction appeared to Peter, who, as usual, with more zeal than judgment, when Jesus came to him, thought his master degraded by the servile office he had undertaken, and expressed no small degree of reluctance in submitting to receive from one whom he so highly revered such an humiliating testimony of affection. “Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?” And when Jesus assured him, that though he did not then understand the meaning of the action, it should immediately be explained to him; he still persisted in his respectful but injudicious refusal. “Jesus answered, and said to him, What I am doing thou dost not now understand, but wilt understand afterwards. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet.” Jesus then assured him, that unless he submitted to be washed

washed by him, he could not be his disciple; meaning, doubtless, in his usual allusive manner, that without that purity of mind which is naturally represented by washing the body with water, he could not be worthy of the relation in which he stood to him. “Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in me.” Violent spirits, upon a change of opinion, commonly fly from one extreme to another. Peter had too much affection for his master, and zeal for his cause, to endure the most distant apprehension of being separated from him, or of being deficient in his expressions of attachment to him. Understanding the words of Christ literally, he exclaimed, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hand and my head.” But Jesus, who well knew how, on every occasion, to temper and restrain the unnecessary ardour of this zealous apostle, assured him that if the feet were washed it would be sufficient: “He that is washed needeth only to wash his feet, and

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is entirely clean." He adds, hinting at the dishonesty and treachery of Judas, in terms which plainly prove that he is here speaking of moral impurity, "And ye are clean, but not all; for," adds the historian, "he knew who would betray him;" therefore, said he, "Ye are not all clean."

When Jesus had thus washed his apostles feet, and had put on his garment, and was set down again, he said to his disciples, "Know ye not what I have been doing to you? Ye call me teacher and master; and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your master and teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet; for I have herein given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. In truth, I say to you, The servant is not greater than his master, nor the messenger greater than he who sent him: if ye know these things, you are happy if you do them." Is as if Jesus had said, the lesson which I have taught

taught you by the action of washing your feet is sufficiently plain. You acknowledge me as your instructor and leader, and herein you do well, for I am in reality appointed by God to guide you in the path to everlasting life. If, then, you see me, who am invested with authority from heaven, notwithstanding my exalted character and station, condescend to perform the humblest offices to you my disciples, how much more ought ye, if ye be sincere in your attachment to me, with all humility and cheerfulness to perform offices of condescension and kindness one towards another? What I have now been doing has been for the purpose of setting you an example of humility and condescension, that ye may, on all occasions, be ready to perform similar offices to each other, and, instead of contending for superiority, may only strive who shall most readily serve, and most condescendingly oblige his brother. You who profess to be my disciples, and the messengers of my doctrine,

doctrine, cannot think it beneath you to exercise that humility towards each other which I have, in this instance, as well as many others, exercised towards you. If, then, ye are sufficiently instructed in your duty on this head, happy will ye be if ye act accordingly.

It was surely impossible that those who were witnesses of this interesting and instructive transaction should not have profited by it. The remembrance of it would, doubtless, remain upon the minds of the apostles long after the death of their master, and suggest to them many useful lessons of mutual forbearance and condescension in the discharge of their duty as teachers of religion, and guides of the church. Their subsequent history plainly shews that their master's precepts and examples were not lost upon them: happy would it have been for the world had they been, in this respect, more closely copied by their successors! The christian church would not then have
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been, as it has for a long series of ages remained, a field of contention for power; christian teachers, even then, instead of exercising spiritual tyranny over the understandings and consciences of men, have become eminent examples of humility and moderation, candour and charity.

But let us not imagine that the doctrine taught by our Saviour in the expressive act of washing his disciples' feet, was intended to be confined to the apostles, or to the teachers of religion in succeeding ages. The duty of *mutual condescension* is founded in the nature and condition of man, and is of great importance to the happiness of individuals and of society. It is a virtue made up of *humility* and *benevolence*: the *former* inclining us not to make any unreasonable claims of attention and respect from others; the latter not to think it beneath us to perform any office of civility or kindness in our power. It consists in a readiness to give way to the just pretensions of others, without being

too tenacious of our own. It requires us to suppress our petulant claims of superiority, to decline all frivolous contests for power or precedence; to moderate our demands of pre-eminence and priority; and, in a word, to be inclined to please others rather than ourselves, in honour preferring one another.

The exercise of this condescending and yielding temper is strenuously opposed by a passion which too often gains the predominancy in the heart of man, that pride and haughtiness which can scarcely endure an equal, much less yield due respect to a superior, or condescend to an inferior. The only effectual corrective of this spirit is philanthropy; that principle which disposeth us to consult the happiness and conciliate the good will and affection of mankind. This benevolent disposition it is the mutual interest of all men to cherish and exercise. For benevolence, at the same time that it prompts a man to recede from his own pretensions, takes the most likely

likely way to moderate those of other men, and thus disarms pride by submission. By this means the generous affections are kept in continual exercise: reciprocal condescension and kindness are maintained; the peace of society is preserved; its enjoyment increased; and even vanity itself, as far as it is a natural and innocent affection, is gratified and indulged.

Unless mutual condescension be grounded on a genuine principle of benevolence, it is of little value. If instead of performing acts of civility and kindness, from a real desire to contribute to the comfort and happiness of others, we only perform them to further our own interest, we have no pretensions to the merit of christian charity or humility. Condescension, when it is prompted by selfishness, becomes nothing better than mean officiousness and base servility. The world affords many examples of an affected deference to the opinions, and compliance with the

X 2 inclinations,

inclinations, of others, which has no other foundation than that low cunning which serves its own ends by appearing to devote itself to the service of others. It may, therefore, be of some use to distinguish by certain marks that genuine spirit of condescension which our Saviour recommends, and which is an essential branch of the christian temper, from that mean servility with which it is too often confounded. The truly christian spirit of condescension is always modest, unpretending, and generous. Whatever civilities or kindneses it shews are done with as little parade as possible. It wishes rather to conceal than to display its favours. It chooseth silently to forego its own claims rather than to make an ostentatious boast of the merit of withdrawing them. It engages a man to prefer another to himself because he really esteems him, because he is tender of his reputation, because he thinks it more generous to lower himself than to degrade another; in short, because

because he has a disinterested regard to the reputation and credit of his neighbour. *Servility*, on the contrary, endeavours to attract the notice of others wholly for its own sake, in order to gain attention and favour. It pleases only that it may be taken notice of, and obliges only to secure and increase its popularity. A man of this character does not modestly offer, but confidently obtrude his services. Despairing of obtaining regard by more worthy qualities, he endeavours to extort attention by officious assiduities. Anxious to establish his own credit and interest, and ever fearful of giving offence, he omits no punctilious observance, and always takes care to exceed, rather than be deficient, in civility. In a word, his condescensions are not designed to gratify another, but to serve himself.

Farther, the man who condescends to others from a genuine principle of benevolence, discovers his obliging disposition in ways not inconsistent with innocence and

virtue. In his endeavours to please and serve others he never steps beyond the bounds of honest services, and decent and manly compliances. On the contrary, the man of the world, who is governed by a selfish spirit, is by no means scrupulous concerning the methods which he pursues to accomplish his purpose. He neither respects his own dignity nor the majesty of truth. Reason and virtue are basely deserted, whenever the desertion will favour his own sinister designs. He assents to the errors of others, however pernicious; he applauds their follies, however ridiculous; he soothes their vices, however flagrant, provided he can by this means serve his own interest.

In fine, if you would distinguish between these condescensions which christianity prescribes, and those which worldly wisdom dictates, you must remark the ends and purposes for which they are respectively practised. The benevolent christian will endeavour to promote the
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credit and interest of his neighbour by all proper means, because he knows that by this generosity to each other the general welfare of society is promoted; because he is convinced that mutual compliances prevent animosities, soften the violence of men's dispositions, and incline them to all the offices of benevolence and charity: in a word, because he understands and feels it to be his duty to love his neighbour.

The man of the world, on the contrary, will be assiduous by every means in his power to yield to the inclinations, and comply with the humours, of others, because he regards ultimately nothing beyond his own private interest, because he perceives that his own selfish designs are best advanced by such practices; in a word, because it is his first principle to love and take care of himself.

Thus we see the genuine virtue of condescension consults the inclinations and complies with the wishes of others,

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by worthy means, and for the noblest purposes; the counterfeit pays attention to others by dishonest means, and for the basest ends.

The main point, then, to be regarded in judging of, or forming our characters, with respect to that *mutual condescension* which our Saviour so forcibly recommends by the expressive action of washing his disciples' feet, is to lay the foundation of this virtue in that christian charity which seeketh not its own profit, and in that christian humility which thinketh not of itself more highly than it ought to think. The sum of our Saviour's doctrine, inculcated in the narrative which we have considered in the present discourse, cannot be more properly or fully expressed than in the apostolic precept: "Be kindly affectioned to one another with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another."

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The Folly of ambitious Desires.

MATT. XX. 22.

Ye know not what ye ask.

It is a circumstance which displays the integrity and dignity of our Saviour's character, that he at all times pursued the course of his duty with calm and steady perseverance; neither, on the one hand, vauntingly rushing upon dangers which, without relinquishing the office assigned him by his heavenly Father, might be avoided; nor, on the other, timidly declining any station, however hazardous, which piety towards God, and good-will towards

towards men, called him to occupy. Whilst it was necessary, in order to complete his important labours as a divine instructor, that he should attend to his personal safety, he made use of every prudent precaution to secure himself from the machinations of his enemies. But, when nothing remained of the great work he had undertaken but that “he should be made perfect through suffering,” he met, with calm intrepidity and determined resolution, the approaching storm.

In the various scenes through which we have hitherto attended our Saviour, we have seen him always aware of the designs of his adversaries, and on every apprehension of danger prudently retiring out of their way. Through the remainder of the history of his life we shall find him facing danger with fortitude equal to the prudence with which he had hitherto avoided it.

The public festival of the passover being now approaching, in which (he fore-
saw

saw that) the last trying part of his commission was to be executed, with all the firmness which the best principles employed in the noblest cause could inspire, he resolved (to leave Ephraim, the retreat to which, after the alarm occasioned by the resurrection of Lazarus, he had withdrawn, and) to go up to Jerusalem. Both his friends and his enemies were, in the mean time, waiting, with painful solicitude, or eager curiosity, to see whether he would venture to make his public appearance at the feast after the order which had been issued from the great council of the nation for seizing his person. “The Jews passover drew near: and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the feast, to purify themselves according to the law; then they inquired for Jesus, and said one to another, as they stood in the temple, What think ye? will he, or will he not, come up to the feast? For both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders,

orders, that if any one knew where he was, they should declare it, that he might be apprehended.”

The fortitude and alacrity with which Jesus entered upon a journey which was to have so fatal an issue, must be allowed to be no inconsiderable proof of the sublimity of his views, and the divine excellence of his character. His disciples, whose prejudices would not suffer them to enter into his exalted conceptions, and who, though they were ignorant of the events which were before them, were, from what had already passed, sufficiently alarmed for the safety both of themselves and their master, when they saw him resolutely going before them in the way towards Jerusalem, followed him “with heavy hearts, in great fear and amazement.” “They were in the way going towards Jerusalem: and Jesus went before them; and they were amazed; and as they followed they were afraid.”

Observing these appearances of alarm,
Jesus

Jesus thought it expedient to prepare the minds of his apostles for the disappointment and suffering which awaited them, and taking them aside as they were on the way, he said to them, “ Behold we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be fulfilled, and he shall be betrayed to the chief priests, and the scribes, and they will judge him worthy of death ; and will deliver him up to the Gentiles ; and they will mock him, and scourge him, and crucify him : and the third day he will rise again.” Plain as this declaration was, the apostles, who were strongly prepossessed with the idea of the kingdom which their master was to establish, and consequently were very unwilling to believe that he would be put to death, were prevented by this prejudice from clearly apprehending their master’s meaning, and “ hoped that his words would bear some other than the literal sense, though they
knew

knew not what it might be." "They understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken."

Notwithstanding the repeated warnings which Christ had given his disciples of the difficulties and sufferings which awaited them, they still expected that he would conduct them to the possession of a temporal dominion, and that each of them should have some share in the honours and emoluments of his government. A singular proof of the powerful hold which this prejudice still had upon their minds occurs in the application which, during the course of this journey, a fond mother made to Christ in behalf of her sons. Salome, the wife of Zebedee, came with her two sons, James and John, to Jesus, and respectfully and earnestly entreated him that he would make her a promise, that her sons should, in his approaching kingdom, be advanced to the first places
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of distinction. "The mother of Zebedee's children came up to him, with her sons, bowing down before him, and asking something of him: and he said to her, What dost thou wish? She said to him, Grant that these my two sons may sit one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left, in thy kingdom."

Even upon the supposition that this woman and her sons were right in their notions of their master's kingdom, there was little modesty in the request; for it does not appear that James and John had any peculiar claim to such pre-eminence. But nothing could be more grossly erroneous than the notions which were entertained concerning our Saviour's kingdom, not only by the wife of Zebedee and her sons, but by all the apostles. They expected a temporal kingdom, affording those who should preside in it every kind of worldly honour and advantage. Jesus was sent to establish a spiritual kingdom of righteousness, the
rewards

rewards of which would be present peace and everlasting happiness. They hoped to obtain places of dignity through the partial favour and affection of their prince. Jesus directed their views towards the honours and felicities of another world, and taught them that these were only to be obtained by a patient continuance in well doing. Such fundamental errors it was highly necessary that our Saviour should correct, especially in those who were to propagate his religion in the face of persecution, and who must follow him, not to partake of the splendours of royalty, but to lay down their lives in the cause of religion and virtue. Accordingly, we find him reproving the ignorance and weakness of this woman's petition, and warning her sons, that in continuing to follow him they were preparing for themselves a bitter cup of suffering, which would require more fortitude than they apprehended. "Jesus answered, and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able
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to drink of the cup of which I am to drink? and to be baptized with the baptism with which I am to be baptized—to be plunged into those depths of sorrow with which I am to be, for a while, overwhelmed?” The apostles, little aware of the nature and extent of their master’s question, confidently replied, “We are able.” “Jesus answered, Ye shall, indeed, drink of my cup, and be baptized with my baptism; but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, except to those for whom it hath been prepared by my Father:” that is, “Ye shall indeed follow me in my persecutions and sufferings, and may thereby obtain a place in my kingdom, and a share in my rewards; but for the chief seats of dignity, these I can only bestow upon those persons, and upon those conditions, which God hath appointed.”

The example which this story exhibits of a worldly and ambitious spirit, should

serve as a warning to us not to make the honours and riches of this world the principal objects of our wishes and desires. After all that christianity has done to enlarge men's conceptions, and to direct their views and desires towards higher dignities, and more durable possessions, than this present world affords, we still see too much of the spirit of Zebedee's wife and her sons in many who profess themselves followers of Christ. If we observe the impatience with which multitudes are pressing forwards to higher stations, the envious eye with which they gaze upon their superiors in rank and fortune, the eager impetuosity with which they pass by one another in the career of ambition, and, above all, the sacrifices which they are contented to make in accomplishing their ends; charity itself will scarcely be able to prevent us from concluding that worldly splendour, power, and wealth, have higher charms, and stronger attractions,

tions, for the generality of christians, than the spiritual honours and rewards of virtue and religion. Whatever men may profess in public acts of devotion, whatever petitions they may in words address to their Maker, if a man's secret *wishes* and *desires* be in fact his *prayers*, there is too much reason to suspect that men still pray, if not so publicly, yet as sincerely and fervently as ever, for wealth, for advancement, for dominion, and other temporal blessings. And yet surely, if the equivocal nature, and the fleeting duration, of those possessions which mankind are so eagerly pursuing, be duly considered, we cannot doubt of the propriety of applying to men whose daily prayer is, Give me riches—give me pleasure—give me power, the rebuke of our Saviour, “Ye know not what ye ask.” “Who knoweth,” saith Solomon, “what is good for a man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?” How often is it seen that

riches, which men so emphatically covet, prove a fore evil, kept by the owners thereof to their hurt? Instead of increasing a man's enjoyment, how frequently do they involve him in a round of engagements which rob him of the tranquil pleasures of self-possession, and entangle him in connexions which are productive of vexation rather than satisfaction. Instead of calling forth latent virtues, in how many lamentable instances do they enervate and corrupt the mind! When men have with great labour, and at an expence which nothing can justify, reached the summit of their wishes, how commonly do we see that they become the slaves of their own passions, and make their wealth and power instruments of oppression to others, and of folly and vice, of infamy and wretchedness, to themselves? That distinction which confers splendour not unfrequently banishes happiness; and the scene, which in prospect promised to be a paradise,

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upon possession becomes a desert. In the midst of so much uncertainty respecting the effect and influence of prosperity, the wisest measure we can take is to confine our prayers for external good to the general petition, "Feed me with food convenient for me," and to expand our wishes in those fields of substantial good which admit of no disappointment. "Blessed," saith our Saviour, "are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

From the censure which our Saviour here passes upon the mother of James and John, for preferring a request in their behalf which could be dictated by no other principle than worldly ambition, let parents learn to restrain their desires respecting the advancement of their children within the bounds of virtuous moderation. It is the natural wish of every good parent to see his child prosper; but let us be careful that our ideas of their prosperity be not sordid and deceitful.

Whilst we employ our industry to introduce them into the world with all the external advantages of rank and fortune, let us not be so anxious for success in this respect as to betray a total indifference to the more valuable possessions of the mind, wisdom, and virtue. If we wish for nothing more for our children than that they may be rich and great, we, in fact, “know not what” we desire: for it is a well-known fact, that those young men who with few advantages of birth and fortune enter upon the world under the influence of good principles and habits, generally succeed better than those whose connexions and wealth render them indifferent to personal merit; and, whatever be a young man’s success with respect to external acquisitions, it is impossible that he should succeed in the attainment of that which is the ultimate end of all human pursuits, happiness, unless his mind is at the same time enriched with knowledge and wisdom, and his

his heart adorned with amiable and generous affections. Instead then of harassing themselves with anxious wishes and restless endeavours, to obtain for their children those possessions which are at best dubious and precarious blessings, and which often prove destructive snares, let parents be, above all things, concerned to provide their children with those treasures which never fade, by “training them up in the way in which they should go.”

The ambitious spirit which led the mother of James and John, and even these apostles themselves, (for it appears from St. Mark’s account that they were principals in the transaction) at the same time possessed the rest of the apostles, and prompted them vehemently to resent the unfair attempt which the sons of Zebedee had made to raise themselves above their brethren. No sooner did they perceive these disciples aspiring to a superiority to which each of them imagined

that he had himself an equal claim, than “they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.”

A spirit so contrary to that which it was the main design and tendency of the doctrine of Christ to inspire, could not appear among his companions and friends without occasioning him much concern and regret. Determined, if possible, to cast out from them the evil demons of envy and jealousy, Jesus no sooner heard their murmurings than he called them all to him, and endeavoured to give them more just and elevated conceptions of the nature of his kingdom, and to awaken among them a more generous kind of strife, by saying to them, “Ye know that the rulers of the heathen nations domineer over them, and their great men exercise authority upon them : Let it not be so among you ; but let him who wishes to be greatest among you, be your minister ; and let him who wishes to be first among you, be your servant ; even

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as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." It is as if he had said, " You observe in the civil communities and kingdoms, that princes and subordinate rulers exercise dominion over the people, and you expect that, in the kingdom which I am to establish, a similar kind of subordination will subsist, and that those of you who are so fortunate as to obtain the superior posts of honour and authority will receive the greatest deference and respect. Be assured you entirely mistake the nature of my kingdom. Distinction among you shall not arise as among the rulers of the world, from superiority of rank and power. He who desires to be esteemed great and honourable among you, must seek to deserve it by humility and kindness, and must exercise his power, not in domineering over any, but in doing good to all. Whoever is ambitious of pre-eminence among you, let him be eminent

ment for his ready disposition to become the servant of his brethren; after the example which I myself have set before you, who came into the world not to be served but to serve, and to lay down my life in completion of the great design of redeeming and rescuing from the bondage of sin all those who become my sincere disciples."

Nothing could be better adapted to answer the purpose of subduing the pride and resentment which had crept in among the apostles, than the methods which our Saviour here employs. To correct the malignant passions of jealousy and envy he calls forth the generous affections of meekness, gentleness, and kindness. To incite them to those active exertions in the service of each other which must extinguish every remaining spark of suspicion and ill-will, he appeals to the respect and attachment which they all entertained for him as their common master, and calls upon them to imitate his
active

active services for the benefit of mankind. Such lessons, from such a master, could scarcely fail of producing their desired effect. We have reason to believe, from the sequel of the apostolic history, in which we hear nothing more of these jealousies and struggles for power, that they were efficacious.

Be it our care, fellow-christians, that this wholesome doctrine, and this bright example, have their due influence upon us, to restrain every swelling gust of pride and jealousy, and to kindle every hidden spark of kindness into a flame. To what cause must we ascribe it that we still see in the christian world so much love of superiority; so much jealousy of rising merit; so many contentions for place and precedence; such a scrupulous adherence to every punctilio of ceremony; such haughty claims of distinction on account of family, titles, and high birth; so much value put upon the trifling circumstances of dress and equipage; in a word,

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so much stress laid upon every external appearance of superiority and pre-eminence; but to the prevalence of the selfish over the benevolent affections? Were men properly inspired with that spirit of christian charity which envieth not, which vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, and seeketh not her own profit, but the profit of many, an end would soon be put to those restless aspirings after dominion, and those jealous contentions for distinction, which have created so much disturbance, and produced so many mischiefs, in the world. Nothing would then be done through strife or vain glory; but each would, in all lowliness of mind, esteem others better than himself. Men would then place their highest glory where their highest merit unquestionably lies, in doing good. To raise an inferior out of the vale of obscurity, to rescue an injured character out of the hands of calumny, to minister relief to the meanest vassal, to visit the
lowliest

lowliest cottage where affliction calls for the soothing voice of sympathy, and poverty solicits the aid of liberality, would then be deemed juster grounds of distinction, and would dilate the bosom with a higher sense of dignity than any of those artificial badges of superiority which have no necessary connexion with personal merit. The doctrine of our Saviour in the text, duly regarded, would produce that kind of equality among men which would be most productive of universal happiness; for the great strife would then be, not who should be greatest, but who should be most useful.

If you wish to turn your ambition into a channel which will render it not only innocent but laudable, never lose sight of the great example of him (the Son of Man) who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister (and to give his life a ransom for many). During the course of his public ministry (though invested with the distinguished
honour

honour of a divine commission, and on this account entitled to high respect as the representative of God) he made himself of no reputation, assumed the form of a servant, disclaimed every appearance of grandeur, and stooped to minister to the meanest of his disciples, whose interest he regarded both in his life and in his death. If he who was so great, and so wise, “did not think it beneath *his dignity* to lead such a life, and to die such a death, in order to minister to the necessities of mankind,” it cannot be beneath the dignity of any of us to imitate his example, by submitting to the lowest offices of humanity, and becoming, as we have opportunity, the servants of all.

“Let the same mind, then, be in you which was in Christ Jesus; and, like him, mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.”

Christ's

Christ's last Conversation with
his Apostles before his Cru-
cifixion.

JOHN xiv. 1—3.

Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me: in my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you: and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.

THE last discourses of eminently wise and good men have always been thought peculiarly interesting. At the time when
they

they have passed they have been listened to with eager curiosity, and often with a degree of respect approaching to reverence. And, in many instances, they have made so deep an impression upon the memory of the hearers, that they have afterwards been committed to writing as precious relics, to be carefully transmitted to posterity. The conversations which Socrates held with his friends before he received the cup of hemlock which his infatuated fellow-citizens had decreed for him, preserved by his disciples Plato and Xenophon, are some of the most valuable remains of antiquity. The biographical history of the christian church affords many interesting narratives of the same kind. But to the followers of Christ no memoirs of the last days of eminent men can appear so deserving of diligent attention, and religious respect, as the accounts which are given by the evangelists, particularly by the apostle John, of the last discourses which our Saviour, before his crucifixion,

crucifixion, addressed in private to his confidential companions and friends, the eleven faithful apostles. The true import and spirit of these addresses will be best perceived if they be viewed in their entire connexion with a diligent attention to the circumstances which occasioned them, and to the method and order in which the several parts are introduced. I shall, therefore, in the present and two subsequent discourses, lay before you the whole of these addresses, as they are related by the apostle John, endeavouring, as we proceed, to give you a true idea of their meaning, and at the close of each to point out to your attention the important practical reflections which they suggest.

After Jesus had instituted the ordinance of the Lord's supper, whilst he was still in Jerusalem sitting at the table with his apostles where they had eaten the pass-over, on the evening of the day before his crucifixion, aware of the dangers which threatened them, and desirous of

ministering to them that consolation which their situation required, he began an address, in which he suggested to their thoughts every topic of comfort which his divine doctrine could afford. He warns them of the hazards to which they would shortly be exposed, allows them to make use of every natural precaution for their security, but teaches them to seek their chief support from faith in God, and the hope of a future state; confirms their belief in him as a divine messenger by reminding them of his miracles; assures them of supernatural aid from heaven to support and prosper them in the great undertaking of propagating his religion in the world; exhorts them to prove the sincerity of their attachment to him by a steady adherence to his doctrine; and lastly, consoles them under the gloomy prospect of *his* sufferings and *their own* danger, by directing their views to the first Fountain of all hope and comfort, that Almighty Being, to whom he himself

self was subject, and whose will it was his delight to obey. In the first place, comparing their former situation when he first sent them forth as teachers of his doctrine, with their present condition and prospects, he says to them, "When I sent you out, without purse, or scrip, or shoes, did ye want any thing? And they said, nothing. Then he said to them, But now, let him that has a purse take it, and also his scrip, and let him who has no sword sell his garment and buy one; for I declare to you, that what is written must be fulfilled in me: And he was numbered with the transgressors; for the things concerning me must be accomplished." And they said, "Master, behold here are two swords: and he said to them, It is enough." The meaning is, "Formerly, when I sent you forth to preach the gospel, I instructed you to make no provision either for your support or defence, and I appeal to yourselves whether you were not, through the care

of divine Providence, furnished with necessary supplies of every kind. But you must in future expect, in the prosecution of your ministry, to be exposed to much greater sufferings and hazards, and will, therefore, be perfectly justifiable if you take every precaution in your power both for your subsistence and defence. The time is just arrived when, according to the predictions of the prophets, I must suffer as a malefactor; and you must not expect, after my death, to be free from the hazard of meeting a similar fate. At present, however, the two swords you have are more than sufficient.

Having thus turned the attention of the apostles to the dangers which were before them, Jesus, whose chief purpose was, not to put military weapons into their hands, but to fortify their minds with the principles of religion, proceeded to say to them, "Let not your heart be troubled: Believe in God; believe also in me: in my father's house are many mansions: if
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it were not so I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also: and whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." It is as if he had said: "Let not the expectation of my approaching death, and temporary separation from you, and the apprehension of your own danger, overwhelm you with grief or terror. Believe in God, the supreme governor of the world, by whose wise and righteous providence all events are directed; believe also in me, as the messenger of the divine will, and rely on the promise which I give you of a future abode in the regions of everlasting life. That state of felicity to which I am shortly to be raised is also provided for you: in heaven, my Father's house, there is abundant room for your reception, and you may assure yourselves of a place and station there, proportioned to the degree of fide-

lity and zeal with which you have on earth adhered to the cause of true religion. Were this not the case, I have too much regard for your happiness to have deluded you with false expectations. Endure with patience the thought of my present separation from you, and meet with fortitude the dangers that threaten you; for, be assured, that I am only leaving you for a short time, in order to prepare a place for you; and that I will hereafter, at the general resurrection, return, and take you with me into those mansions where you will dwell with me for ever in the enjoyment of eternal felicity. After all the instructions I have given you, you cannot be at a loss concerning the place to which I am going, or the path that leads thither."

Evident as it is to us who are instructed in the spiritual nature of our Saviour's kingdom, that the sentiments expressed in the preceding paraphrase, were those which our Saviour meant to convey by
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the words of the text, so much were the disciples still under the influence of the expectation of temporal power, that they did not clearly understand his meaning. Thomas, therefore, in the name of the rest, said, "Master, we do not know whither you are going, and how can we know the way?" Jesus, in reply, said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me: if ye had known me ye would have known my father also: and henceforth ye know him, and have seen him."—"I am going, as I have said, to my Father, and the true and only way you can take to follow me to that happy state which I have revealed to you, is to make my doctrine your guide: there is no other way to the eternal mansions of my Father's house but that which I have marked out. If ye are still unacquainted with my Father, it must be because ye have not properly understood the doctrine I have taught you; for I have given you instructions con-

cerning God and religion abundantly sufficient for your information." One of the apostles, Philip, not clearly comprehending in what sense it could be true that they had seen God, requested some visible display of his presence. "Philip saith unto him, Master, shew us the Father, and we shall be satisfied." Jesus replied, "Have I been so long time with you, Philip, and yet hast thou not known me? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father, and how then sayest thou shew us the Father? Dost thou not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? The words which I speak to you, I speak not of myself, but the Father, who dwells in me, he doth the works: believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or at least believe me on account of those works. In truth, I say to you, he that believes in me shall himself also do the works which I do: and even greater works than these shall he do, because I go to my Father: and

and whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son : if ye ask any thing in my name, I will do it." The general meaning may be thus expressed : " Can I have been so long with you, and am I yet unknown to you ? In seeing me, you have, in effect, seen him that sent me ; for I am the messenger of his truth and mercy, and act under his immediate influence and authority. The doctrines I deliver are the declarations of his will, and the works I perform are the operations of his power. Believe me when I assure you, that the Father dwells in me by his peculiar presence and energy ; or, at least, pay credit to the evidence arising from the miracles I have performed. And rest assured, that, if your faith in me be sincere, you will be endued with power not only to do the same kind of works which I have done, but to perform still greater wonders in the successful propagation of my gospel, after my departure. What-
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ever powers may be subservient to this purpose, I shall be instrumental in conveying to you from my Father : nothing of this kind, however extraordinary, will be denied you, whilst you pray to God as my disciples, and with a view to promote the spread of my religion in the world."

To this general promise Jesus adds a special assurance, that, if they persevered in their attachment to him, and in their obedience to his injunctions, they should receive from his Father a divine power, or energy, which supplying the place of their master, might be justly considered under the *personal* character of a comforter. "If ye love me, keep my commands, and I will pray the Father, and he will give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever : even the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him, nor knows him ; but ye know him, for he dwells with you, and shall be in you.

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I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you: yet a little while and the world sees me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you: he that hath my commands, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." That is, "Let your affection for me be expressed, not in useless sorrow, but in obedience to the laws which I have given you. Persevere in this obedience, and you may be assured that my absence from you will be amply compensated by those extraordinary communications of divine power which will raise you superior to every difficulty, and will never forsake you. That divine spirit of truth which has accompanied me through the whole of my ministry will be always with you to assist, comfort, and direct, you. Though the corrupt
world

world is incapable of receiving these communications from the eternal Fountain of wisdom and power, you will be conscious of them in yourselves, and will manifest them to others by the most astonishing effects. Far from leaving you like orphan children, without a friend or guardian, I will give you proofs of my unalterable affection for you, which will convince you that I am, according to my prediction, risen from the dead, and will be to yourselves a pledge of your future immortal life. I repeat it again, if you manifest your affection for me by keeping my commands, the divine communications of power and wisdom which you will receive from my Father will convince you that the most perfect union of design and affection subsists between my Father and me, and between me and my disciples."

Jesus having spoken of "manifesting himself," to his disciples, Judas (not the *traitor*, who was no longer among them, but

but another disciple of this name, called also Thaddeus) taking it for granted that his master was to be a temporal prince, and therefore could not remain concealed, said, "Master, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us and not to the world?" Jesus, to correct his misapprehension, assured him that the manifestation of which he had been speaking was not personal and visible, but would consist in the communication of supernatural illumination and energy from God himself, for the purpose of propagating the gospel. Jesus answered, "If a man love me, he will observe my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him: he that loveth me not, doth not observe my sayings: and the word which you hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me."

"These things," adds our Saviour, "I have spoken to you, while I continued with you; but the comforter, the Holy Spirit,

rit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatever I have said to you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world giveth do I give unto you: Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid: Ye have heard how I said to you, I go away, and come again to you: if ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said I go to the Father; for my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it comes to pass, that when it is come to pass ye may believe. Hereafter I will not converse much with you; for the prince of this world is coming, though he hath nothing against me: but that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father has commanded me, so I do." The meaning is, "When I shall be absent from you in person, if you still love me, and observe my commands, which are in effect the commands of God,

the communications of divine light and power, by which you shall be enabled to carry forward the great design of establishing my religion in the world, will afford you the most consolatory proof that you still enjoy the presence and favour of God. In the mean time, I take my leave of you, with affectionate wishes for your peace and happiness. I give you my farewell benediction with more sincerity than is common among men; and I have the fullest persuasion that, through the blessing of my heavenly Father, you will be safe and happy. Let not, then, your hearts be troubled at the thoughts of my departure, nor terrified at the apprehension of what may befall you. I have, indeed, told you, that I shall be absent from you for a time; but your love for me should lead you to rejoice on this account, because I am going to my Father, (who is infinitely my superior,) and the source of all honour and happiness. When this event shall have been accomplished let my prediction

prediction confirm your faith in my divine mission. I must, at present, say little more to you; for my enemies are now laying wait for my life; and, though they can convict me of no crime, I shall willingly submit to death, to convince the world how entirely I am devoted to the will of my heavenly Father."

Through the whole of this pious and affectionate address, in how amiable a light do the temper and character of Christ appear? In the immediate prospect of the severe sufferings which the malice of his enemies was preparing for him, his own sorrows are for a time forgotten in benevolent sollicitude for his friends. More attentive to the hazards of their situation than to the impending terrors of his own, he spends the remaining moments of intercourse with them, not in vehement expressions of indignation against his persecutors—not in bitter lamentations over his own fate—but in suggesting to the disconsolate and terrified minds of his friends

friends every consideration which might serve to comfort them under their present distress, and to fortify them against future dangers. He even looks beyond their personal safety and comfort, to the success of the great cause in which he had engaged: and that he may effectually encourage them to prosecute the design of propagating his religion in the world, he promises them divine support and assistance. At once to furnish them with the noblest consolation, and the best support under their personal trials, and to inspire them with resolution and courage in the accomplishment of the important services which were appointed them, he assures them of the favour of God, and a mansion of eternal rest and felicity as the recompense of their fidelity and perseverance. The religious principles, and heavenly hopes, which supported his own spirit under the apprehension of his approaching sufferings, are the cordial which he ministers to his desponding and af-

frighted disciples. Who does not admire the generous friendship, the noble serenity, the sublime piety, which breathe through this address? Who does not perceive the infinite superiority of a character formed and actuated by these exalted principles, above that of the selfish and sordid spirit which in prosperity rejoices only in its own good fortune, and in adversity is wholly absorbed in the contemplation of its own sufferings? If, my brethren, you wish, like the Saviour of the world, to retain your self-command, and even to exercise your benevolence, in seasons which will afford the severest trials of your fortitude, habituate yourselves to the exercise of religious principles and christian hopes, through seasons of prosperity. Look beyond yourselves to the interests of your friends, the benefit of mankind, and the honour of religion, and learn, like your divine master, to esteem it your meat to do the will of him that sent you, by advancing the happiness of your fellow

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low creatures; and you will rise superior to the events which affect merely your own personal safety, and will be able, in every scene of hazard or suffering to which duty may call you, to preserve your tranquillity. You will experience the inestimable value of that divine legacy which Jesus left to all his faithful followers when he said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you: let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Under the loss of pious and virtuous friends by death, our best consolation is, that they are removed to some happier region, where they will enjoy the peculiar presence and favour of that glorious Being whom Jesus Christ acknowledged to be greater than himself, to whom he yielded willing submission as his Father and God, and who will be an inexhaustible fountain of felicity to all good men, through everlasting ages: if we truly love them, we shall rejoice that they are gone to the

Father. With respect to ourselves, the firmest support we can find in seasons of affliction and danger, and in the prospect of our dissolution, must be derived from the belief that we are at all times under the protection of an Almighty guardian, and from the hope, that when we have completed the course of duty and trial allotted us on earth, we shall ascend into those happy mansions where we shall dwell for ever with our benevolent Saviour, who is gone before us to prepare a place for us, and in the society of just men made perfect. And it is our great felicity that we are disciples of a master whose doctrine is a sure guide to everlasting felicity, and who, therefore, may be truly said to have been the way, the truth, and the life. One thing, however, ought never to be forgotten, that the only way to realize to ourselves the delightful prospects which christianity opens before us, is to live in obedience to its divine precepts, and to manifest the sincerity of our religious and
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christian principles, by the uniform practice of every virtue. “ If ye love me,” saith our Saviour, “ keep my commandments.” It is not by a ceremonious respect paid to the external forms of religion, or the positive institutions of christianity; it is not by the zeal and fervour with which we profess our love to Christ that we can fulfil the gracious purpose for which his religion was appointed. They only love Christ who keep his commandments. Be it, then, the first study and business of our lives to practise the virtues which his gospel prescribes, and to imitate the excellent example which he hath set us, that whilst we live we may enjoy that peace of God which passeth all understanding, and that after death we may be admitted to a distinguished place in our Father’s house, where “ are many mansions.”

Christ's last Discourse to his
Disciples.

JOHN XV. 1, 2.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman: every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth, that it may bring forth more fruit.

IN the course of our reflections upon the gospel history we have met with many examples of our Saviour's happy talent in illustrating his important doctrine, and impressing it forcibly upon the minds of his hearers by means of pertinent allusions

sions to present occurrences, and lively images borrowed from visible objects. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water from a well, at the side of which he was sitting, he spoke to her of a fountain of living water, which should spring up into everlasting life. When his disciples importuned him to take refreshment, he said, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." In passing through a corn field on the sabbath day, he plucked a few ears of corn, and took occasion from this circumstance to instruct his followers, that the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath; and that the law of nature could never be superseded by any positive institutions. The different success attending the labours of the husbandman, according to the nature of the soil which he cultivates, furnished him with a happy illustration of the different effects of his ministry upon hearers of different characters. Many other similar applications of natural objects to the il-

Illustration of moral truths occur in the history of our Saviour's ministry.

Among the rest, that of the text is peculiarly beautiful, and pregnant with important instruction. The discourse, of which it is a part, was most probably delivered at the time when Jesus sat with his apostles partaking of the paschal supper. As, during this supper, he had drunk with them of the fruit of the vine, and, on drinking the last cup after supper, had said that he would drink no more of it till he should drink new wine with them in the kingdom of God; it may be reasonably conjectured that the mention of the wine in this part of the conversation suggested the beautiful similitude under which, in the text and the following verses, he so well describes the relation which subsisted between him and his disciples, and in which both he and they stood to that great and good Being who was his father and their father, his God and their God, and the obligations which
arose

arose from these relations to a diligent, universal, and exemplary obedience to the laws of God.

“ I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman: every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit he cleanseth, that it may bring forth more fruit: and ye are already clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, so neither can you except ye abide in me. I am the vine, and ye are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for separate from me ye can do nothing. If any one abide not in me, he is cast away as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them up, and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. Herein is my
Father

Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit ; so shall you be my disciples : as the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you : continue ye in my love. If you keep my commandments you will continue in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and continue in his love. These things have I said to you, that my joy in you might remain, and that your joy might be full." The sentiments expressed in these words may be thus unfolded more at large :

“ To give you a lively idea of the nature of that union which subsists between you and me, and of our common relation to God, consider me under the image of a vine, yourselves as branches of the vine, and my Father as the husbandman or vine-dresser. As in the management of a vine the skilful vine-dresser cuts off all barren and superfluous branches, that they may not burden or exhaust the tree ; and prunes, dresses, and cleanses, the fruitful branches, that they may become still more fruitful ;

fruitful; so God, the supreme head of that spiritual kingdom which I am about to establish, cuts off, in righteous judgment, useless and wicked members of my church; but those who are well disposed he cultivates and improves both by instruction and discipline, that they may abound more and more in all good works. Such, at present, is the condition of you my apostles. Through the influence of my doctrine your minds are purified, and you are prepared to become eminently useful. Only let me exhort you to continue steadfast in your attachment to me, and in your obedience to the instructions which I have given you; that as the branches of a vine receive sap from their union with the root and stock, so you, by your union with me, may receive that nourishment which is necessary to the support of the spiritual life. As a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remain connected with the vine, so neither can ye bring forth the fruits of righteousness unless
you

you continue under the influence of my doctrine. Remember, then, that I am the vine, and ye are the branches. Whilst you preserve your connexion with me, and attend to my doctrine, you will be fruitful in piety and virtue: but if you separate yourselves from me, and become unmindful of my precepts and example, you will bring forth no fruit; and the consequence will be, that, like withered branches which the vine-dresser gathers up and casts into the fire, you will be consigned to destruction. If, by obeying the commands which I have given you, you continue united to me, you will then bear the same relation to my Father that I myself do, and may be assured, that as he always hears me, so you will never pray to him in vain. As it is the glory of a vine-dresser that his vine should be fruitful, so my Father will regard himself as honoured if ye abound in all the fruits of righteousness: and this is the only proof I require of the sincerity and steadfastness
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of your adherence to me as my disciples. To this conduct you are bound by the strongest ties of affection and gratitude; for even as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Cease not then to merit, and to preserve, my affectionate esteem, by the same means by which I myself secure the approbation of my Father, by a diligent obedience to his commands. I urge this upon you the more earnestly before my departure from you, that my complacency and joy in you as my faithful friends may still continue, and that, in the midst of the gloomy prospect with which you are at present surrounded, you yourselves may not want sufficient grounds of consolation and joy."

Such was the salutary and friendly counsel which Christ gave his apostles respecting their general character and conduct. Considered merely as addressed to them, the passage deserves attention as a proof of our Saviour's wisdom, benevolence,

lence, and piety. But is this, fellow-christians, the only light in which we ought to consider this address? Have we no immediate and personal interest in it? By the public profession which we make of the christian faith do we not acknowledge Jesus Christ to be the true vine planted by the great master of the vineyard, and ourselves to be branches, springing from this stock, which may reasonably be expected to bring forth much fruit? Will not the vine-dresser observe whether the branches of this vine are fruitful in proportion to the cultivation he has bestowed upon the tree—and, if he find that, after all his pains to prune and dress it, many of the branches remain barren, will he not cut them off, and cast them into the fire? If by any means the branches be separated from their stock, whence should they receive that nourishment which is necessary to their life and fertility? And if they cease to

be fruitful, what remains but that they be committed to the flames?

To speak without a figure: The great moral governor of the world has, among other gracious dispensations in favour of virtue, instituted the christian religion as a means of correcting the errors and vices of mankind, and raising them to eminence in wisdom and goodness. To produce these great effects he has, in the gospels, provided an excellent code of moral precepts, exhibited an example of distinguished merit, and enforced the laws of morality by the most solemn sanctions. These benefits christians in every age enjoy. And if, at the same time that they bear the christian name, they are careful that their relation to Christ be something more than nominal, by diligently improving the advantages which christianity affords them for the cultivation of a pious and virtuous temper, the natural consequence will be, that they will become distinguished ornaments to religion,

ligion, and blessings to the world, and that their exemplary virtues will procure them the esteem and love of their brethren, and obtain the approbation of their Almighty parent. But if, on the contrary, notwithstanding any verbal professions which they may make of faith in Christ, they, in reality, separate themselves from him by paying no attention to those rules of conduct which he has prescribed, by becoming indifferent to those sublime and interesting views of a future state which he presents before his followers, and by abandoning the pure, generous, and noble principles of christianity, to adopt the corrupt and selfish maxims of the world, it will become impossible that they should derive any real benefit from their christian profession, or should escape the condemnation which is due to the ungrateful neglect of important privileges. The name of Christ cannot operate as a charm to make men wise and virtuous, and happy, without any labour
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or attention of their own. As well might you expect a vine branch, after it is lopped off from the stock, to bring forth fruit, as a christian to be the better for his christian profession, whilst he separates himself from his master by paying no regard to his doctrines. In order to render ourselves worthy of the character of disciples of Christ, and to derive any important benefit from our relation to him either in this world or in the world to come, "his words must abide in us," his doctrine must dwell in our memories and our hearts; we must be inspired with that piety and benevolence which are the leading features in the christian character; we must be diligent in the practice of every christian virtue. In this manner let Christ abide in you, and you in him; and you will become worthy of the affectionate esteem of the master whom you serve; you will be entitled to peculiar honours and rewards from your Father in heaven, who is himself glorified if ye

bear much fruit; and the joy which is begun on earth, in the consciousness of well-doing, and the hope of future happiness, will, after a life of patient and persevering obedience, be completed in the kingdom of heaven.

If you inquire more particularly what that course of conduct is which your christian profession requires from you—what it is to keep the commandments of Christ—I refer you for an answer to the numerous precepts contained in his discourses, and to the genius and spirit of his religion. Some particulars of the christian temper and character are specified in the sequel of the discourse under consideration. Two things, more especially, Christ here requires from his followers: the *first*, that they shall love one another; and the *second*, that they should resolutely persevere in the discharge of their duty, to whatever difficulties or hardships their fidelity may expose them.

“ This is my commandment,” says
he,

he, “that ye love one another, even 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 you do whatsoever I command you: henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his master doth; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another.” It is as if our Saviour had said to his apostles:

“When I exhort you to express your affection for me by observing my injunctions, I am more especially desirous that you should obey the precept I have so often given you, to love one another. And in your mutual exercise of kindness let

my example be your guide. It is impossible that any man should afford his friends a greater proof of affection than that which I am about to give you of mine, in laying down my life for you: but even this sacrifice I shall not think too great if you approve yourselves worthy of the appellation of friends by complying with my injunctions. Though on account of my high commission I have a right to command you, and to expect from you the obedience of servants, yet, in the intimate familiarity to which I have admitted you, and in the full discovery I have made to you of whatever has been communicated to me from my Father, I have given you the fullest proof that I have regarded you, not as servants, but as friends. You must allow it to be an evidence of my superior affection for you, that it was not you who, of your own accord, attached yourselves to me, but I who selected you to be my companions and apostles. My purpose herein has been to provide for the
propagation

propagation of my gospel. I have appointed you to go and publish what you have heard from me to all the world, that the happy fruits of your apostolic labours may remain to future ages: and I have assured you, that whatever powers shall be necessary to ensure your success in this great work, will be granted you. After all these proofs of my affection I may be allowed to repeat it to you again, as my express command, that ye love one another."

The argument by which our Saviour urges upon his apostles the observance of the precept of mutual affection, was peculiarly forcible as addressed to those who had enjoyed his personal confidence, who had received the commission of apostleship from his lips, and for whose immediate benefit he was just about to lay down his life. But it is by no means without its weight with respect to christians in all ages. The benefits of his religion being intended to extend, and ac-

tually extending, to mankind in general; the efficacy of his death, as a confirmation of the truth of his doctrine; being experienced wherever his religion is known; and the happy effects of the commission which he gave to his apostles being enjoyed in every christian country; christians in every age have abundant reason for a grateful and affectionate remembrance of Christ, and may find in his love to mankind a powerful motive to obedience in general, and particularly to the exercise of benevolent affections towards each other. The apostle's reasoning is still valid, and will still have great weight with all who have a just sense of the value of christianity: "Beloved, if Christ so loved us, we ought to love one another."

Another duty which Christ inculcates upon his apostles, and through them upon christians in all ages, is a steady perseverance in their duty, in the midst of hatred and persecution.

"If the world," says he, "hate you,

ye know that it hated me first; if ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, upon this account the world hateth you: remember what I said to you, The servant is not greater than the master; if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you: if they have kept my words, they will keep yours also. All these things they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin: he that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them such works as no other man ever did, they had not had sin; but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this has happened so as to fulfil what is written in the law: They hated me without a cause. But when the comforter is come whom I will send to you

from the Father, even the Spirit of truth which proceeds from the Father, he shall testify of me; and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning." The meaning is:

“ Whilst I exhort you to mutual love, I must remind you, that from the world you must expect hatred and persecution. If you meet with such treatment you ought not to be surprised, or to think it hard; for it is only what I myself have met with before you. The reason why I have been opposed and persecuted has been, that my doctrine has contradicted the prejudices and corrupt passions of men; and for the same reason you, whom I have chosen to teach my doctrine, and to combat the errors and vices of men, must expect to incur obliquy and hatred. The disciple, as I have told you, is not above his master: had the world yielded a willing submission to my doctrine, you might have hoped that yours would meet with a similar reception: but since they have
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rejected my message, and persecuted me, you must not hope to be more successful. Your consolation, however, will be, that you are persecuted only for preaching in my name the doctrine of true religion, and that the conduct of your enemies is only the effect of ignorance concerning God, and the design of my mission. The guilt of our persecutors is aggravated by my appearance among them. Whatever apology their conduct might otherwise have admitted of, they are now wholly without excuse; for the obstinacy with which they have rejected the evidence which my miracles have afforded of my divine mission, is a full proof of their enmity to God, and their wilful hostility to true religion. But, although they have hated me, and will also hate you, without a cause, persevere courageously in the good work you have undertaken; for by the evidence of that divine Spirit which will be communicated to you, and by the
testimony

testimony which you yourselves, who have been with me through my whole ministry, will bear to what you have seen and heard, the credit and authority of my religion will at length be fully established."

If Jesus and his apostles met with opposition and persecution in the propagation of true religion, let not their followers expect a better fate. Prejudice, interest, ambition, and vice, are in all ages powerful adversaries, with which the honest and zealous friends of truth and virtue must contend. The world will always have its own maxims and principles, which will be contrary to those of pure and undefiled religion. Those who espouse the former are of the world, and the world will love its own: but those who espouse the latter being not of the world, must expect to be hated by the world. If the teachers of religion so far desert their station and character as to
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yield to the prejudices, indulge the humours, and flatter the vices, of men, they may have their reward in popular favour and applause. But if they faithfully reprove and admonish offenders of every rank, if they boldly censure fashionable vices, and dare to set up the standard of justice and humanity against that of avarice and ambition; if, moreover, they venture to pull off the mask from the face of hypocrisy; to expose to deserved contempt the follies of superstition and fanaticism, and to exhibit religion in all its native simplicity, they must expect to raise against them a powerful host of adversaries: for every one, saith our Saviour, that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. Let them, however, persevere with inflexible firmness and undaunted courage: for the Spirit of truth will at length cast out the demons of error; the thick darkness of
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prejudice will, ere long, be dispersed by the rays of knowledge; and every cloud of ignorance and vice will at last flee away before the beams of the sun of righteousness.

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Christ's last Discourse to his
Apostles.

JOHN. xvi. 7.

It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart I will send him to you.

IN the part of our Saviour's last discourse to his apostles which yet remains to be considered, he insists, more at large than he had before done, upon the promise of the Holy Spirit as a topic of consolation under the prospect of his departure, and of the dangers which threatened
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them in the execution of the important office to which they were appointed. Before we can ascertain the meaning of this promise, it will be necessary to determine what we are to understand by the term so frequently used in scripture, Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit. This is the more requisite, as very different notions have been entertained upon this subject by different sects of christians, some of them wholly inconsistent with the simplicity and unity of the divine nature.

In order to form an accurate judgment upon this subject, let us first observe the different senses in which the words, the Spirit of God, and the Holy Spirit, are used by the writers of the Old and New Testament.

In the first place, it is very evident that in many places the term, the Spirit of God, merely denotes God himself. Thus, when it is said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man," the obvious meaning is, "I will not always strive
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with man." What the prophet Isaiah expresses by saying, "They rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit," the Psalmist expresses thus: "Yet they tempted and provoked the Most High God." In Hebrew poetry the latter part of the verse repeats the sentiment of the former in different words. Thus, when David says, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, whither shall I flee from thy presence?" the meaning, in both cases, is, "Whither shall I go or flee from thee?" The term *soul*, which is nearly of the same meaning with *spirit*, is also used in this sense by the prophet Isaiah: "Mine elect, in whom *my soul* delighteth," that is, "in whom I delight." When it is said in the book of Job, "By his Spirit he has garnished the heavens, his hand has formed the crooked serpent," the meaning is, "that God by his power has formed the constellations of the heavens." In the New Testament, the writers of which were intimately conversant with the Hebrew

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brew scriptures, the same phraseology is retained. In the words of the angel to Mary, recorded by Luke, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee;" the latter words evidently explain the former, and the Holy Ghost appears to mean the power of God. According to Matthew, our Saviour, speaking of his power of dispossessing demoniacs, says, "If I cast out demons by the *Spirit of God*, then is the kingdom of God come unto you." According to Luke he said, "If I by *the finger of God* cast out demons, no doubt the kingdom of God is come among you." The *Spirit of God* is therefore equivalent to the *finger of God*, which is evidently a figurative expression, signifying the agency of God. In each passage the same meaning is conveyed: "If I by the power of God cast out demons." The Spirit of God then, in the language of scripture, is God himself exerting his power.

When the power of God is exerted in
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the communication of extraordinary wisdom or power to man, this communication is, in the language of scripture, the gift of the Spirit, or the Holy Ghost. Thus the Spirit of the Lord is, in the Old Testament, frequently said to have come upon the prophets and priests of Israel. For example: "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon:—The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon Samson:—The Spirit of the Lord, saith Ezekiel the prophet, fell upon me:—Behold, I will pour out my Spirit upon you, I will make known my words unto you:—There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, (saith the prophet Isaiah) and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding; the Spirit of counsel and might; the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." Again, "Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth. I have put my Spirit upon him." In all these passages it seems very evident, that

by the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of the Lord, is meant not a being, or intelligent agent, but a special gift or power communicated to men from God himself. And it will, upon examination, appear equally evident that the term Spirit of God, Holy Spirit, or Holy Ghost, is commonly used in the same sense in the New Testament. When Christ applies to himself the language of prophecy, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor." When John said concerning Jesus, "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God; for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him." When Christ, upon giving his apostles their first commission, encouraged them not to be solicitous how or what they should speak in the presence of their persecutors, by promising them that the Holy Spirit should teach them what they ought to say, or, according to Luke, that "the Spirit of their Father should speak
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in them." When just before his ascension to heaven Jesus said to his apostles, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit," and promised them, that as John was baptized with water, they should be baptized with the Holy Spirit, and should receive power, when the Holy Spirit should come upon them. In all these passages it is plain, that by the Spirit, and the Holy Ghost, is meant, not a person or being, but a divine communication of wisdom and power.

And this explanation of the matter perfectly agrees with the subsequent history of the apostles. The fact, as related by Luke in the Acts of the apostles, was, not that there was a visible descent and residence of any being, who became their guide and protector in the room of their master, but they received gifts and powers from heaven, by means of which they were enabled to speak in various languages, led to the knowledge and remembrance of all necessary truths, and enabled to per-

form great wonders and miracles among the people. When these gifts and powers were communicated to any individuals, the Spirit of God, or the Holy Ghost, was said to fall upon them. God is said, by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, to have borne witness to the apostles both with signs, and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts or distributions of the Holy Ghost. And St. Paul speaks of the Holy Ghost as shed on them, or poured out upon them abundantly through Jesus Christ.

From comparing these and other passages of scripture, in which the Spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit, is spoken of, it is sufficiently evident, that by the Spirit of God we are not to understand a *person* or *being* proceeding from, yet, in some mysterious manner, subsisting in the divine nature, but either God himself, or certain communications of wisdom and power from him. The promise, therefore, which Christ made to his apostles, that
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that he would pray the Father, and he would give them another Comforter, the Holy Ghost, or Spirit of truth, is not to be understood as denoting that any divine person or agent should come among them after his ascension; but that, by the influence or energy of God himself, spiritual gifts or powers should be communicated to them, which, as an advocate, would plead their cause against their adversaries, and as a Comforter would support them under the trials which awaited them. That Christ should speak of this communication of gifts and powers, or rather of the divine energy by which they were to be communicated, under the personal character of a *comforter* or *advocate*, (for the original word has both these significations) will not appear at all surprising to those who recollect the figurative manner of expression which every where prevails in our Saviour's discourses, and observe how commonly in the scriptures, as in all eastern

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writings, attributes, qualities, and powers, are spoken of as real persons.

The mental quality or attribute, wisdom, is by Solomon, in the book of Proverbs, spoken of as a person, and represented as having dwelt from eternity with God, and as visiting the children of men to give them instruction and counsel. In the New Testament distinct personal characters are ascribed by St. Paul to charity, to sin, and to death; and our Saviour speaks of riches under the personal character of mammon. There is nothing, therefore, harsh, or contrary to the rules of sound criticism, in supposing, that when Christ promises his apostles the Holy Spirit under the character of the Comforter, he makes use of a figure of speech common to all nations, and frequent in eastern writings, by which qualities and powers are spoken of under personal names and characters.

I have insisted thus largely upon this point, because I thought the passage which

came in course under our consideration afforded me a proper opportunity of laying before you what appears to me the true doctrine of scripture concerning the Holy Spirit. After these preliminary remarks, a few words will serve for explaining the meaning of this part of our Saviour's last address to his apostles.

Having compared himself to the vine, and his disciples to the branches, and having exhorted his apostles to obedience, mutual love, and stedfast perseverance, he repeats his warning of the opposition and persecution they were to meet with, and suggests topics of consolation in the promise of the Holy Ghost, and of his speedy return to them.

“ These things,” says Jesus, “ I have spoken to you concerning your approaching trials, that when they arrive you may not be surpris'd, offended, and dishearten'd. So great is the malice of my adversaries against me and my cause, that you must expect, as my followers, and

teachers of my religion, to suffer from them the severest and most cruel treatment. "They will cast you out of the synagogues," and expel you from their religious societies: "yea, the time is coming, when" they will judge you unworthy of life, and "he that killeth" any of "you will think that he renders" an acceptable "service to God: and this they will do" through ignorance concerning God and the nature of my religion, "because they have not known the Father nor me. But I have forewarned you of these things, that when the season comes you may remember what I foretold," and your faith in me may be strengthened. "I did not, indeed, tell you of these things at the beginning," when you first became my disciples, "because I was with you," and was myself the chief object of popular resentment. "But now," at my departure, it is become necessary that I acquaint you what you are to expect, and whence you may
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derive comfort. You receive the account I give you of my departure with evident marks of grief and distress, but you do not sufficiently attend to the intimations I have given you of my return to my Father. “ Now I am going away to him that sent me, and none of you asketh me whither goest thou? but because I have spoken these things to you, sorrow hath filled your hearts. Nevertheless,” believe me when “ I truly assure you that it is,” on the whole, “ expedient and advantageous for you” that I depart; “ for unless I depart the Comforter will not come unto you; but when I am gone, I will send him to you.” After my departure you may expect those communications of divine power which will amply supply the want of my presence, and be to you as an advocate and comforter, in the execution of the arduous task which will devolve upon you. In these gifts and powers bestowed upon you through me by my heavenly Father, you will find an
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able advocate, "who, when he is come, will," as in a court of justice, "arraign the world," which has rejected me, and plead my cause against them "on" the three heads of "sin, of righteousness, and of judgment:" convicting them of sin in not believing in me, the truth of whose mission you are thus enabled to attest; confirming my innocence, and the *righteousness* of my cause, by proving that when ye see me no more I am gone to my Father; and "convincing men of" the reality of that authority by which I am to execute judgment upon those powers of the world by which I was put to death, and to establish my kingdom upon earth. "I have many other things to say to you, but," on account of your prejudices and misapprehensions, "ye cannot bear them at present." However, when that divine illumination shall come upon you which I have promised you, "the Spirit of truth will guide you into all the truth" which it concerns you to know for the purpose of
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of propagating my doctrine, and will even enable you to foretel future events. The communications of wisdom and knowledge which you will in this manner receive will proceed to you from my Father through me, to whom he has committed the whole charge of establishing his kingdom in the world, and will terminate in the confirmation of my divine mission. “He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shew it unto you.”

The particulars of the accomplishment of this promise are recorded at large in the Acts of the Apostles; and the confirmation which this narrative affords of the divine mission of Christ manifests the value and importance of the promise, not only to the apostles themselves, but to the christian church in all ages.

It now remains that we attend to the conclusion of our Saviour’s last address to his apostles, and observe with what tender affection he ministers further consolation

tion to them under the immediate expectation of his departure.

He assures them, for their consolation, that he was only returning to his Father, and that after a short time they would see him again. And when they did not clearly understand his meaning, perceiving their embarrassment, he repeated his assurance, that his separation from them, and their grief on that account, would only be temporary, and that the pleasure they would experience on his return would as entirely obliterate the remembrance of their past sorrow, as a mother's joy on the birth of a child obliterates the pains of child-bearing. "A little while, and you will not see me; and again a little while, and you shall see me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of the disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith to us, A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again a little while, and ye shall see me, and because I go to the Father? They said, therefore,
What

What is this little while of which he speaks? We know not what he says. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him what he meant, and said to them, Do ye inquire among yourselves of what I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again a little while, and ye shall see me? In truth I say to you, that ye will weep and lament on my account, whilst the world will rejoice, as if it had triumphed over me: but, though ye will for a while be sorrowful, your sorrow will at last be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labour, has sorrow because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered she remembers her pain no more, for joy that a child is born into the world. So ye, indeed, have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice; and no man shall deprive you of your joy."

In their present desponding state of mind, when the apostles were looking forward to scenes of trial and hazard, in
which

which they must encounter difficulties without their wonted protector, Jesus, with equal benevolence and piety, directed their views to their Almighty Father, plainly and without any figure, assuring them, that though they could now no longer apply to their master for instruction and assistance, they might certainly, by praying to God as his disciples, obtain whatever their circumstances required; and that it would be unnecessary for him to plead with his Father on their behalf, since God himself, on account of their ready acknowledgment of his messenger, regarded them with complacency, and was disposed to do them good. “At that time, when I am separated from you, ye shall ask *me* nothing; but, in truth, whatever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you: hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name; but now ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken to you in parables; but the time is coming, when
when

when I will no more speak to you in parables, but plainly tell you what relates to the Father. At that time you shall ask in my name; and I do not say to you that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came from God."

In conclusion, Jesus, in more express terms than he had hitherto used, assured his apostles, that by his departure he meant *leaving the world*, and that he was going to him from whom, by virtue of his divine commission, he had come forth as the messenger of truth and mercy to mankind. "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world;" again, "I leave the world, and go to the Father."

His disciples said to him, "Behold now thou speakest plainly, and usest no parable: now we are sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any one should question thee for a solution
of

of his difficulties: on this account we believe that thou camest forth from God."

Jesus, upon this declaration of their belief in him as the Messiah, reminded them that their faith would soon be put to a severe trial, which would, for a time, prove too powerful for them; but nevertheless encouraged them to persevere in their attachment to him, by again referring them to those divine consolations on which he himself relied, and which he hoped to find abundantly sufficient to enable him to overcome every difficulty, and to gain the victory over all the terrors of the world. "Jesus answered them, Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, yea, is now arrived, when you will be dispersed every man to his own home, and will leave me alone; but yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. These things have I spoken to you, that in me ye might have peace: in the world ye will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Upon

Upon a review of the manner in which our Saviour took leave of his apostles, at the moment when he was expecting to be betrayed by a false disciple into the hands of his enemies, it is impossible not to admire that benevolence which could, at such a moment, interest itself in the safety, and provide for the consolation of his friends, that philanthropy which could prompt him to take so much pains to secure the propagation of his religion after his departure from the world, and that piety, which could inspire him with such serenity and fortitude amidst the terrors of approaching death. What an amiable and excellent example is here exhibited for our imitation! Let the contemplation of it inspire us with sentiments of generosity and kindness, which will rise superior to every personal feeling and selfish passion, and enable us, in the hour of distress and danger, and even in the immediate prospect of death, to retain our solicitude for the welfare of our friends,

and exert our utmost endeavours to minister consolation to their dejected spirits, and to provide for their future support and comfort. Let it engage us to live, to the last day of our existence on earth, not for ourselves alone, but for the benefit of others. Let it teach us the infinite value of religious principles and christian hopes, to sustain the heart of man under the trouble of life, and the fears of death. What was it which enabled our blessed Saviour to pass the evening which preceded his sufferings with so much tranquillity in the society of his friends? Doubtless the recollection, that he had faithfully executed the important commission delivered to him, the assurance that his conduct was approved by his Father, and the prospect of the joy set before him in the kingdom of heaven. His consolation was, that though persecuted by the world, and shortly to be forsaken even by his friends, he was not alone, because his Father was with him,

and that his approaching sufferings would terminate in his everlasting exaltation. What were the considerations which he suggested to his apostles, as best adapted to sustain their courage and alleviate their sorrows? Were they not these—that God himself loved them, and was, from his own unsolicited goodness, inclined to hear their prayers—that so long as they should persevere in their duty they might promise themselves every kind of consolation and assistance which their situation should require—that their present sorrows and sufferings would, ere long, come to an end, and that the same goodness which was ready to support and assist them at present, would at last conduct them to mansions of eternal rest and felicity? In this manner it was that Jesus overcame the world, and enabled his disciples to do the same. And we, too, fellow-Christians, possessing the same principles, and enjoying the same prospects, have the same sources of consolation. The victory

which overcometh the world is our faith. If, then, in the world we have tribulation, let us be of good cheer: looking unto Jesus, the captain of our salvation, who being made perfect through sufferings, has given us an example, that we should follow his steps, let us, by patience in enduring, and diligence in obeying, the whole will of God, secure to ourselves that peace which the world cannot give, and that glorious recompence which our divine master has promised to all his followers.

The Institution of the Lord's Supper.

LUKE xxii. 19.

This do in remembrance of me.

TOWARDS the close of the paschal supper of which Jesus partook with his apostles; after he had discovered to them the traitor, and after Judas was gone out to execute his guilty purpose; having exhorted them to exercise mutual affection, and warned Peter of his approaching fall, he proceeded to the institution of a rite, or ceremony, which was to serve as a memorial of him among his disciples af-

ter his death, and among his followers in all ages.

In order to form a true judgment concerning the nature of this institution, known by the several names of *The Lord's Supper*, the *Eucharist*, the *Communion*, the *Sacrament*, nothing further can be necessary than attentively to compare the several accounts of this institution given by three of the evangelists, *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*, and by the apostle *Paul*. This is the only way to gain a true notion of the kind of obligation under which christians lie to observe this rite, and of the manner in which it ought to be performed. And it is the more necessary to make this inquiry with accuracy, because there is no part of christianity which has been more mistaken and misrepresented, or which has been more grossly perverted, to support the extravagancies of fanaticism, and the delusions of superstition, than the ordinance of the *Lord's Supper*.

The narrative related by the evangelist

is this : “ Whilst Jesus was sitting at table with the apostles, he said, I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer : for I say unto you, I shall not eat thereof any more till it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And Jesus took bread, and having given thanks, he brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body, which is given for you ; do this in remembrance of me : in like manner, also, he took the cup after supper, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. And I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink new wine with you in the kingdom of my Father.”

To render the institution of this rite the more interesting and affecting to the disciples, Jesus, at the opening and the close of the ceremony, tells them, that this

was the last time he should eat bread and drink wine with them, before the complete establishment of the kingdom of God, at the final consummation of all things. It appears, from comparing the expressions of the evangelists, that the phrase, "he blessed," used by Mark, denotes nothing like a blessing or consecration of the bread and wine, but merely an act of thanksgiving to God. When Jesus says, on distributing the bread, "This is my body;" and on distributing the wine, "This is my blood," nothing can be more evident than that the meaning is, "This *represents* my body, or my blood." It was *quite impossible* that the apostles could imagine the bread and wine which they saw before them to be in fact that body of their master which was also before their eyes, and that blood which was then flowing through his veins. And one would have imagined it might with equal certainty have been pronounced *quite impossible* that any one should
ever

ever have imagined that the body of Christ, after he was ascended into heaven, was truly and properly present in every place where the sacramental bread and wine were used, and that the bread and wine were verily and indeed the body and blood of Christ. Yet this doctrine, notwithstanding its extreme absurdity, has been for ages embraced in the Romish church as a fundamental article of faith. Millions have believed, or fancied they believed it; and it has been thought sufficient to silence every objection which common sense might raise against it, to plead that it is a sacred mystery. A wonderful fact in the history of mankind, which ought to put us upon our guard against every doctrine that is offered to us under the veil of mystery, and to lead us to bring every article of our faith to the touchstone of reason. A very small exertion of this faculty (supposing it to have been emancipated from the tyranny of priestcraft) would have been sufficient to convince the believers

lievers in transubstantiation, that the expression, "This is my body," cannot be understood literally, any more than many other phrases which our Saviour makes use of, such as, "I am the vine, I am the door."

The original phrase, rendered in our translation the New Testament, should have been translated the *New Covenant*. The whole narrative of the institution of the Lord's Supper may be thus paraphrased :

"After Jesus had eaten the paschal lamb with his disciples, he took a piece of bread in his hand, and having given thanks to God, he broke it in pieces, and distributed it among his disciples, saying, Take ye this bread, and eat of it, as a representation of my body, which is shortly to be torn on the cross, and to undergo a painful death for your sakes. In this manner, after my death, break and eat bread in commemoration of me and my sufferings. Then, at the close of the supper, taking
a cup

a cup of wine in his hand, he said, Drink ye all of the wine contained in this cup, as a representation of the blood which is soon to be shed for your benefit, and for that of many others, who, according to the terms of my gospel, shall obtain, by their repentance and obedience, the pardon of their sins and everlasting life. I call this cup, that is, this wine, "the new covenant in my blood, or my blood of the new covenant," because you are, hereafter, at stated seasons, to drink wine in remembrance of my blood, shed in confirmation of the truth of what I have declared to you concerning the divine covenant, which assures you of the remission of sins, and the rewards of immortality, on condition that you forsake every evil way, and observe all the commands of God. When, therefore, as my disciples, you meet together for religious purposes after I am taken from you, partake, in this manner, of bread and wine in commemoration of me."

With

With this account of the institution of the Lord's Supper perfectly agrees that which St. Paul has left in his first epistle to the Corinthians. "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you—that is, it has been communicated to me from undoubted authority, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you, this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood; this do ye, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." The apostle adds, addressing his fellow-christians, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death, till he come:" herein plainly intimating that he understood the observance of this rite to be of perpetual obligation. And in this light it was evidently

dently considered by the christians in the time of the apostles, of whom it is recorded, that they met together on the first day of the week, for breaking of bread, and for prayers ; and by the succeeding generation of christians, among whom it was the constant practice to make the celebration of the Lord's Supper a part of their public worship.

If we make Christ himself and his apostles our only guides in this matter, we shall have no difficulty in perceiving that the Lord's Supper is a plain, simple, and easy ceremony, the design of which every one may comprehend, and the performance of which is attended with no formidable or unpleasing circumstances. The sole purpose of the institution is the commemoration of Christ. Whoever, therefore, as an acknowledgment of his relation to Christ as his master and teacher, and in remembrance of his public ministry, and of the great benefits derived to mankind from his doctrine and example, performs

pérforms the ceremony of eating bread and drinking wine, certainly partakes of the Lord's Supper agreeably to the design of the institution. If christians, whenever they assemble for religious worship, or at other stated intervals, eat bread and drink wine in remembrance of Christ, the action is a public declaration that they belong to the society of christians, that they are sensible of the value of their christian privileges, and that they voluntarily submit to the authority of his laws, "taking upon them his yoke, which is easy, and his burden, which is light."

There is in all this so little to excite terror or alarm—so much to accord with the most generous feelings of the human heart—that it is surprising it should have been regarded as a duty of greater solemnity than any other; and still more that it should have been thought so awful, and even hazardous, that many conscientious christians have chosen rather to neglect the duty entirely, than to run the risk of
eating

eating and drinking unworthily. This has in a great measure arisen from a misapprehension of the meaning of St. Paul's advice to his Corinthian brethren upon this subject in the passage immediately subsequent to that which has already been quoted. It may not, therefore, be improper, in this place, to explain the meaning of this passage, as it may be gathered from the connexion in which it is introduced, and the well known customs of the people to whom St. Paul wrote this epistle.

It was usual among the Corinthians to have public entertainments in their houses, to which every one brought his own provision, of what kind and in what quantity he thought proper. This would naturally occasion a great variety, according to the inclinations or circumstances of the guests. It would give those who were in affluent circumstances, or had a luxurious taste, an opportunity of gratifying their vanity, and would, at the same time, lay
a foundation

a foundation of envy and discontent in those of an inferior class. This practice the Corinthians seem to have united with their public celebration of the Lord's supper in commemoration of Jesus Christ; they carried the provision for their entertainments to the places where they assembled for christian worship, and there, instead of eating and drinking together in a decent and regular manner, and endeavouring to excite in each other a grateful remembrance of their master, and to promote mutual affection, every one gratified his own appetite, in his own time and manner. Those who were able to provide plentifully for themselves ate and drank to excess, and suffered their poor brethren to eat their scanty morsel by themselves, without inviting them to partake of their abundance. In eating every one took before another his own supper, and one was hungry and another drunken. This fault the apostle thus reproveth.

“What! have ye not houses to eat and

to drink in, or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say unto you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not." It is as if he had said, "Have you not houses of your own for your ordinary meals? Have you forgotten that these assemblies of christians are collected for the religious purpose of eating and drinking in commemoration of Jesus Christ? Do you despise your fellow-christians, and insult your poorer brethren, who are not able to make such luxurious provision for themselves? Do you thus pervert and abuse a right which was instituted for such wise and good ends? I cannot help severely censuring your conduct, which is wholly inconsistent with the nature of this institution, the only end of which is to shew forth, or preserve the remembrance of, the Lord's death till he shall return."—"Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the

body and blood of the Lord." It is plain, from the preceding account, that by eating and drinking unworthily the apostle means partaking of the Lord's supper without a proper regard to its original design, without a grateful remembrance of Christ, and particularly considering it as a common meal, or a luxurious entertainment. The person who was chargeable with such an abuse, he says, was guilty of the body and blood of Christ. By which concise form of expression he undoubtedly means, that he was culpable in offering an affront to Christ, of whose body and blood the bread and wine were designed as memorials. He adds this advice to the Corinthians with respect to their future attendance upon this ordinance: "Let a man examine himself, and *so* let him eat of this bread, and drink of this cup." The examination which the apostle here requires appears from the preceding verses to be nothing more than an inquiry whether they attended in such
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a manner as to answer the end of this christian institution. Let a man attend diligently to his own design in performing this christian rite, *and so*, that is with a proper care to awaken in his mind a grateful remembrance of Christ, let him eat of this bread. To enforce this precept the apostle adds, " For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body : " that is, " I recommend this attention to the dispositions with which you perform this rite, because he that eateth and drinketh without any regard to the design of the institution, without gratefully commemorating Jesus Christ, as represented by this bread, eateth and drinketh *damnation*, or, as the word should certainly be rendered, and as in another form it is afterwards, *judgment*, to himself; he exposeth himself to the displeasure of God, and may reasonably expect to be punished for abusing this most wise and gracious appoint-

ment to the purposes of luxury and intemperance. That the apostle means temporal afflictions, and not final condemnation, by the term judgment, is evident from what immediately follows, for he adds, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." The consequence of your irregularity, and the divine disapprobation of your conduct, are visible in the afflictions which have fallen upon many of you, and the deaths that have lately been frequent among you. That this condemnation refers only to temporal punishment is still more apparent from the directions which the apostle gives them for escaping these punishments for the future. For, "if we would judge ourselves," if we would take proper care to ascertain to ourselves that our views in our attendance upon this ordinance are right, "we should not be judged;" we should escape that punishment which the displeasure of God has inflicted upon unworthy communicants; but
"when

“ when we are judged,” when this punishment is inflicted upon us, “ we are chastened of the Lord,” that we should not be condemned with the world. The apostle adds, “ Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home, that ye come not to condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.”

Such appears to be the plain meaning of the apostle's advice to the Corinthians. He censures their conduct in changing the holy ordinance of the Lord's supper into a common banquet, reminds them of its original design, and recommends to them constant circumspection with respect to their dispositions and views in attending upon this ordinance, as the certain way to avoid those temporal punishments which had been the consequence of their former irregularities.

There is, then, nothing in this passage of scripture which ought to deter any one,

who is sincerely desirous to approve himself a worthy disciple of Christ, from attending upon the Lord's supper. It is, indeed, true that christians, in the present time, may eat and drink unworthily, or without becoming views and sentiments, and that such an attendance upon this rite must be more or less culpable. But it is inconsistent with every idea of moral probation, and contrary to the general doctrine of scripture, to suppose, either on the one hand, that a worthy attendance on the Lord's supper will be in itself sufficient to secure a man's final happiness, or, on the other, that any particular instance of negligence in this transaction will be sufficient to exclude a man, whose temper and conduct are, on the whole, virtuous, from the hope of future happiness. The future state of every individual will be determined, not by any single action of his life apart from the rest, but by the general habits of his mind, and the ordinary tenor of his conduct, as these shall

shall appear to the all-discerning eye of his righteous judge.

If we attend merely to the plain and simple account, given in the New Testament, of the Lord's supper, without regarding the glosses which have been put upon this account, by ignorant or interested men, it will be impossible to find any thing in this ordinance more formidable or forbidding than in any other religious duty. If we reflect upon the original ground of this practice, the dying injunction of Christ, the reasonableness of allotting some stated season to the purpose of recollecting our obligations to the benevolent Saviour of the world, and the natural tendency of a worthy performance of this christian duty, to cherish the purest and best affections, and to fix a deep and lasting conviction of the obligations under which every disciple of Christ is laid, to lead a sober, righteous, and godly life; the ordinance of the Lord's supper must not only cease to be an object of painful ap-

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prehension, but appear highly interesting and delightful. Were this christian rule divested of the imaginary terrors with which it hath been clothed, and viewed under the simple aspect of a grateful commemoration of Christ, I am persuaded we should not see the table of the Lord so commonly neglected. Those who are convinced of the divine excellence and authority of our Saviour's doctrine, and who look up to his character with admiration as a perfect pattern for their imitation, would find no difficulty in giving this public testimonial of their relation to Christ as their master and guide, and recognizing each other, by an express act, as fellow-disciples and brethren.

Let those, then, who have hitherto neglected to attend upon the Lord's supper, fairly ask themselves upon what grounds they have proceeded. Has it been from an apprehension of some peculiar solemnity or hazard attending this service? Let them diligently inquire
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whether this notion has any other foundation than a misconstruction of certain passages of scripture, or a blind respect to ecclesiastical authority. Has it been through a total indifference to whatever has the appearance of ceremony in religion? Let them recollect that nothing ought to be deemed trifling which conduces to the important ends of cherishing virtuous sentiments, and confirming good purposes. Has it been from a secret disinclination to take upon themselves a character which requires great sanctity and strictness of manners? Let them be assured, that whatever is *more* than belongs to a truly respectable and virtuous character is not enjoined by christianity, nor required from *any* of its professors; and that whatever is *less* than this will not be sufficient to secure their happiness either in this world or another. In fine, let those who refuse this tribute of respect to the memory of Christ be well assured that they do it upon grounds which they can, at
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all times, and in every situation, justify to their own consciences; and let those who profess themselves by this public action disciples of Christ, never forget the obligation which this profession lays upon them, to abstain from every vice, and to live in the uniform practice of every virtue.

The general Conclusions from
the Gospel-history concerning
Christ.

THROUGH the favour of divine Providence I have at length completed the course of discourses upon the Gospel-history which I began soon after the commencement of my happy connexion with this Society. I have laid before you at large a view of the history of our Saviour's ministry from the time when John prepared the way for his appearance to his final ascension into heaven. Comparing the different accounts of the several evangelists, I have collected from them a connected narrative comprehending all
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the occurrences related by each, in the order in which it appears to me most probable that they happened. At the same time I have distinctly considered, in its proper place, every discourse, parable, or conversation, of our Saviour, preserved in the gospels, and thus brought before you, in a full and entire series, the WORD and DOCTRINE of CHRIST.—Through the whole course of this undertaking it has been my constant endeavour to give you a correct version of the text, an exact representation of facts, and a faithful representation of the meaning of every part of the gospels, whether historical or doctrinal, and to suggest to you every article of instruction, theoretical or practical, which could be naturally and fairly, without any mystical glosses, or fanciful analogies, deduced from the text. In fine, I have endeavoured to give you a clear and connected account of all that Jesus Christ did and taught during the interesting period of his ministry, and to enable
you

you to peruse, with intelligence and improvement, the only authentic records of his life.

Having thus unfolded to you at large, in the best manner I have been able, the contents of the gospel history, I may now, without presumption, ask you, in the words which you will find in

MATT. xxii. 42.

What think ye of Christ ?

IN order that you may the more distinctly discern the general conclusions which are to be drawn from a retrospect of the gospel history, I shall consider the inquiry of the text as branching out into several particulars, and as calling upon you to declare your opinion concerning the PERSON, the MISSION, the DOCTRINE, and the RELIGION, of Christ.

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In the first place, What think ye of the PERSON of Christ?

This is a subject which has occasioned violent dissensions, and given rise to numerous sects, in the christian church, and upon which controversialists are still disputing with great vehemence. Three different opinions have been entertained concerning the person of Christ. The *first*, that he has existed from eternity as a part of the divine nature, or the second person in that trinity of which the godhead or deity is supposed to consist: the *second*, that he is a subordinate spirit, or intelligent being, created by God, and employed by him in creating and governing this world, who, upon the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus, animated his body, and supplied the place of a human soul: the *third*, that Jesus Christ was in body and mind truly and properly a human being, who had no existence before his conception, and was only distinguished from other men by the high office which

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he was appointed to execute as the Saviour of the world, and by the miraculous interpositions by which his divine authority was attested. The first of these doctrines is called the *Trinitarian*, the second the *Arian*, the third the *Unitarian*, or, more properly, the *Socinian*, for the first professes to be, and both the second and third schemes are strictly, unitarian. The trinitarian doctrine having, so early as the fourth century, obtained the protection of the civil power, has ever since been commonly regarded as a part of the orthodox faith, and has enjoyed the sanction of councils and synods, and found a principal place in the creeds of all established churches. Hence both the second and third schemes have been condemned as false doctrines, and their professors have suffered much odium, and often severe persecution, as heretics. Nevertheless, as the truth of any doctrine cannot depend upon the edicts of emperors, the decree of councils, or the prescription of churches,

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it still remains to be inquired which of these doctrines is the true one; and certainly, the best method of determining the point must be to consider which of these schemes is most reasonable in itself, and most consonant to the general tenor of the gospel history.

With respect to the first of these schemes, the trinitarian, which supposes "three persons in the unity of the godhead, of one substance, power, and eternity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost," and makes Christ to be the second of the divine persons, "very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father;" it seems evidently to contradict the first principle of the Jewish and Christian religions, the unity of the divine nature. It was the first commandment of the Jewish law, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." The doctrine of the Jewish prophets, speaking in the name of the Lord, is, "I am the first, and I am the last; and besides me there is no God. Is there a God besides me?"

Yea, there is no God." And this doctrine our Saviour, in the most express terms, adopts and asserts. To the tempter he said, "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." In reply to the scribe who asked him which is the first commandment of the law, he answered, "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." And in his last prayer for his disciples, he saith, "This is life eternal, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." If there be no God but one, and if that God be the being to whom Jesus Christ declares all worship to be due, and whom he himself, in an act of worship, acknowledges to be the only true God, it seems evidently to follow that Jesus Christ is not that only true God. Nothing can appear

to common understandings more contradictory than to assert, that there is but one God, and at the same time to say that there are three divine persons. If the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be three distinct minds, each possessing his own proper consciousness and power, it is impossible that they should be one God. The supposition implies a direct contradiction; for three beings of any kind cannot be one being, nor one, three. If by the term *person* be understood (as seems to be done by many who profess the trinitarian doctrine) not an individual being, but a character or manner of acting, and by the three persons in the divinity be only meant three characters under which the one supreme deity acts, as the creator, redeemer, and sanctifier, this, it is allowed, at once solves the difficulty, and terminates the dispute; but then, it at the same time converts the doctrine of the trinity into strict unitarianism, for the most zealous advocate for the unity of
God

God will not deny that God, though one in nature, may act in various capacities. Besides these two representations of the doctrine of the trinity, only another remains; which is, that the doctrine of *three persons in one God* is a *mystery* which we must receive with all reverence, without attempting to explain or comprehend it. But this is only saying, in other words, that we must believe a certain proposition to contain a christian doctrine, without knowing what that doctrine is, or so much as understanding the meaning of the terms in which it is expressed. Before we acquiesce in this blind subjection of the understanding to an unintelligible dogma, it is surely reasonable to expect that it be plainly shewn that such acquiescence is expressly enjoined by divine authority. But so far is this from being the case, that the whole drift and tenour of the gospel history represents Jesus Christ as inferior and subordinate to God, and as deriving all his power and autho-

rity from him. Nay, our Saviour himself, as if to guard against this corruption of the christian faith, expressly acknowledged that he could of his own self do nothing, and that it was his Father who did the works by which his authority was confirmed;—declared, “ My Father is greater than I;”—rested his claim to the title of Son of God only upon the ground of his divine commission;—confessed that he was ignorant of the day of his second coming; and spoke of the Almighty as alike, to himself and his disciples, a Father and a God :—expressions which it is impossible to reconcile with the notions of his proper divinity.

The second opinion concerning the person of Christ, that he is a created spirit, of an exalted nature, but infinitely inferior to the eternal deity, who was united to the body of Jesus, and animated it instead of a human soul, appears to have been first introduced into the church in the fourth century, with the view of
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avoiding the difficulties which hung upon the trinitarian system, originally derived from the platonic philosophy. Its chief advocate was Arius, a presbyter of the church of Alexandria, who zealously maintained it in opposition to the orthodox Athanasius. In later times this opinion has been resumed and defended by many divines, equally eminent for learning and ability, and for candour and liberality. It is certainly less obscure, and less liable to the charge of inconsistency, than the trinitarian opinion. It must be added, that there are several texts of scripture which may be easily interpreted in a sense favourable to this doctrine. Nevertheless, it appears to me liable to several material objections. It seems highly improbable that a being of transcendent dignity and excellence employed, as the scheme supposes, in creating and governing the world, should quit his exalted station in the universe to reside for many years in a human body. *Had* this been

the case, it is scarcely supposable that its powers, so far superior to any thing human, would have lain dormant without any public manifestation through a course of thirty years. Nor is it at all probable that a human body, animated by such a spirit, would have been, as we learn to have been the case with our Saviour, liable, like an ordinary body, to fatigue, hunger, pain, and other infirmities. This doctrine takes away every thing wonderful in the resurrection and ascension of Christ, which, upon this supposition, might have happened without any interposition of divine power, by the immediate agency of this indwelling spirit. It is inconsistent with the representations given in the New Testament, of Christ's exaltation after his resurrection, in reward of his humility and obedience; for, according to this scheme, his advancement could be nothing greater than a restoration to that dignity and power which he before possessed as subordinate creator and
governor

governor of the world. It is, moreover, very evident, that if Christ was so glorious a being as he is represented to be in this scheme, he could not have been capable of those feelings, peculiar to human nature, which alone could render him a proper object of imitation to human beings; he could not have been touched with the feeling of our infirmities, nor in all points tempted as we are, though without sin. But the consideration which appears most decisive against this scheme is, that Jesus Christ himself makes no claim to the honour of such a superior nature. Instead of insisting upon his pre-existent greatness and glory as a ground of homage and obedience, he rests all his pretensions to regard upon the divine authority under which he acted. “If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works.”

The third opinion, that Jesus Christ was properly a human being, only distin-

guished from other men by his high office, and miraculous powers, has, in successive ages of the church, had its supporters, though they have often been a despised and persecuted sect. It is certainly a doctrine which strongly recommends itself by its clearness and simplicity: it requires no fancy to embellish it, no subtlety to explain it; but approves itself as intelligible and rational to every understanding. I think, too, after a careful examination, I am justified in adding,—though upon a question on which different opinions are entertained by excellent men of different persuasions, I do not mean to decide dogmatically, much less to dictate magisterially—that this is the doctrine which best accords with the general tenour, and ordinary language, of the New Testament, particularly with the history of our Saviour's life. In the course of the narrative we see him passing through the usual stages of human life; in childhood waxing strong in spirit, and increasing in wisdom

dom and stature; subject to the common innocent infirmities of human nature; conversing with his disciples and others as a man with men; afflicted like another man with grief; troubled in spirit at the approach of suffering; in the midst of tortures to which his piety and benevolence enabled him patiently to submit, giving natural tokens of anguish; and at last, in consequence of the pain of crucifixion, yielding up his breath. On the whole (without excepting even those passages which, though they have been repeatedly claimed, first by trinitarians and then by Arians, as confirmation of their respective doctrines, admit of a consistent interpretation on the third scheme) the New Testament appears uniformly to represent our Saviour in no other light than as “a man approved of God, by signs, and wonders, and divers miracles.” The simple creed which it seems to me most reasonable to adopt on this subject, is that of the apostle Paul, “There is one God,
and

and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

Having thus, as I thought it my duty, insisted fully, and without reserve, upon the first point, the *person* of Christ, I proceed to ask, secondly,

What think ye of the MISSION of Christ ?

Admitting, on grounds which have been repeatedly laid before you, the authenticity and credibility of the books of the New Testament, you cannot doubt that Jesus Christ was, what he professed to be, a divine instructor and Saviour. A very considerable part of the narrative contained in the gospel consists of relations of immediate interpositions of divine Providence, to convince the Jews that Jesus was appointed by God for some important purpose, and to engage their attention to his doctrine as a revelation of the will of God. And these interpositions were certainly in their nature well adapted to make a strong impression upon the
minds.

minds of the spectators, and to give them a full persuasion, that the person in whose favour they were made, was a messenger sent from God. The history of our Saviour's ministry from his baptism to his ascension is one continued series of wonders.—Suppose yourselves to have been in the time of our Saviour resident in Judea, and spectators of the marvellous events recorded by the evangelists.—Had you seen the supernatural appearance in the heavens which accompanied our Saviour's baptism, and heard the voice which said, “ This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased;”—had you been present at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, and witnessed the instantaneous change of water into wine;—had you been with him while he laid open to a stranger, whom he casually met with in his way through Samaria, some of the occurrences of her past life;—had you beheld the miraculous cures which he performed;—had you seen him commanding fevers

fevers to depart from the sick, reason to return to the insane, or, in the language of the times, demons to quit the possessed; the leprous to be purified from their loathsome disease; the paralytic or infirm to recover their former strength; the dumb to speak, and the blind to see;—had you been among the astonished crowd for whom a few loaves and fishes were, on the instant, multiplied into a quantity of provision sufficient to afford a plentiful meal to several thousand persons;—had you accompanied the apostles on the sea, when Jesus furnished them with a miraculous draught of fishes; when he walked towards them on the water as if it had been dry land; when he commanded a fish to supply him a piece of money for the payment of a tax; and when, in a terrifying storm, he said to the boisterous waves, Peace, be still;—had you beheld Jesus, when, with three of his disciples, he was transfigured on the Mount, and in vision conversed with Moses and Elias,

while

while a voice from heaven again said, This is my beloved son;—had you contemplated this Son of man exerting the astonishing power of giving life to the dead, and been with the happy family of Jarius whose daughter Jesus commanded to arise from the bed of death; among the delighted multitude who beheld the only son of the disconsolate widow of Nain restored to his mother, or among the astonished people who stood by the grave of the friend of Jesus while he said with a loud and efficacious voice, “Lazarus, come forth;”—had you seen the barren fig-tree withering before his prophetic curse;—had you heard him, in the high capacity of a prophet, predicting an event which a few years afterwards was accomplished, the destruction of Jerusalem;—lastly, (to conclude this detail) had you been witnesses of that greatest and most important of all miracles, our Saviour’s resurrection from the dead, been present at his numerous subsequent inter-views

views with his disciples, and, among the astonished spectators at Bethany, stood gazing up into heaven whilst a cloud received him out of their sight——At the close of such a series of surprising and beneficent miracles, had any one asked you, “What think ye of Christ?” would ye not have said, with mingled emotions of wonder, reverence, and gratitude, “Truly this was the Son of God?” And will you hesitate, on the testimony of competent and faithful witnesses, to draw the same conclusion from the perusal of their narrative as if you had yourselves witnessed the facts they relate, and to receive it as a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that God sent his well-beloved son into the world to save men from their sins, and conduct them to eternal life?—Which leads me to the third branch of the inquiry,

What think ye of the DOCTRINE of Christ?

If, in the solution of this question, you
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were to make the polemical writings of theologians, ancient or modern, your guides, you would soon be lost in an endless labyrinth of controversy. Systems of opinions, or, as they have been called, *bodies of divinity*, have been piled up one upon another, age after age, each professing to exhibit the true doctrine of Christ, but all filled with metaphysical and logical subtleties, with which the true doctrine of Christ has little concern. If in hopes of attaining satisfaction upon easier terms than the endless fatigue of turning over massy volumes of controversial divinity, you were to have recourse to the brief summaries of christian doctrine which have been given as the result of the deep studies and sage counsels of learned men, you would still find yourselves involved in uncertainty and perplexity. These formularies, issued from councils, synods, or assemblies of divines, under the title of confessions, catechisms, creeds, or articles of religion, you would

find to consist, for the most part, of propositions expressing, in scholastic terms hard to be understood, tenets of the most abstruse kind, respecting, for example, the divine essence, the union of the divine and human nature in Christ, original sin, free-will, justification by faith, predestination, and the like. Whatever is declared by any church to be the truth concerning these and other subjects of speculation, is called by that church the doctrine of Christ; the articles of belief, thus determined, are called *doctrinal points*; and the person who embrace them is said to hold the true faith.—But turn your attention from these obscure and contradictory systems to the original records of christianity; search for the doctrine of Christ where you are certainly most likely to find it, in the discourses and conversations of our Saviour himself, as recorded by the evangelists; and you will soon be convinced, that in making christianity a system of speculative dogmas, men have

deviated widely from the original intention of its author ; you will learn that the christian school is not like the schools of ancient pagan philosophers, or those of modern christian theologians, a field of disputation, but a practical institution, intended to render men virtuous and happy. Review the gospel history, to remark the general drift and tenour of our Saviour's instructions, and it will be impossible you should not perceive that they all uniformly tend towards one point, moral improvement. Because good principles are necessary, as the foundation of right conduct, our Saviour did indeed teach his followers certain great and fundamental truths ; such as the unity of the divine nature ; the universal providence and moral government of God ; the necessity and efficacy of repentance ; and a future state of rewards and punishments. But, let it be observed, these truths are never introduced in the New Testament in a systematic form as topics of mere speculation, but always

in connexion with moral precept, and as furnishing motives to reformation and obedience. All the occasional conversations, and all the continued discourses of our Saviour, have a moral design and tendency.

It was his custom, as we have frequently seen, to seize every occasion of suggesting useful instruction to individuals, or to the people at large. When Nicodemus, one of the Jewish rulers, came to Jesus by night to profess himself his disciple, he instructed him in the necessity of reformation under the figure of "being born again." On his way through Samaria, meeting with a Samaritan woman at a well, he gave her important instruction concerning the nature of religion. After giving a numerous multitude a miraculous supply of provision, he made this incident the ground of a discourse, in which he spoke of his doctrine under the metaphor of bread. When the Sadducees proposed to him an ensnaring question concerning

concerning the future state, he diverted the attention of the company to the general doctrine of the resurrection from the dead; and when the Pharisees attempted to embarrass him by the question, Which is the first commandment of the law? he declared the substance of religion to consist in the love of God and man; and those commandments which enjoin these duties he pronounced to be the sum of the divine law. At a festival, observing the guests eagerly striving for the more honourable seats, he took occasion to deliver a lesson of humility, and at the same time remarking the hospitality of the host, he introduced an exhortation to liberality to the poor. On these and many other occasions Jesus converted casual occurrences into opportunities of moral instruction.

Besides this he delivered many distinct parables and other discourses, the direct purport of which is to discountenance

some vice, to recommend some virtue, or, in general, to inculcate obedience to the laws of God, in expectation of an everlasting recompence. How beautifully does the parable of the sower represent the different effects of moral and religious instruction on different characters, according to the disposition with which it is received! What an instructive picture of humility and penitence on the one hand, and of self-conceit and spiritual pride on the other, is exhibited in the contrasted characters of the Pharisees and publican! In what lively colours is the odious nature of an unforgiving temper exposed, in the parable of the unrelenting servant! How pathetically are the virtues of philanthropy, humanity, and compassion, recommended in the beautiful parable of the good Samaritan! With what energy is the folly of avarice represented in the parable of the rich man who, having determined to pull down his barns
and

and build greater, was, on a sudden, called away from all his possessions! In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, how forcibly are the different issues of prosperous wickedness, and of oppressed virtue described! What important lessons, on the folly of prodigality, the efficacy of repentance, and the superior value of uniform obedience, are taught in the parable of the prodigal son! Under what impressive images are the different consequences of virtue and vice represented in the parables of the wheat and the tares, and of the wise and foolish virgins, and in our Saviour's sublime description of the day of final judgment! It is impossible to cast the most cursory glance upon these parables of our Saviour, without perceiving that they are richly fraught with moral and religious instruction.

But the discourse which affords the most complete detail of our Saviour's doctrine,

trine, is his sermon on the mount. Here we find him inculcating upon his followers the exercise of the purest affections, and the practice of the strictest and most sublime morality; requiring them to cultivate meekness, and the forgiveness of injuries; instructing them to perform all their acts of beneficence and piety with unostentatious sincerity; furnishing them with directions concerning devotion, and a model of prayer; cautioning them against the influence of avarice and other corrupt passions; prohibiting slander and censoriousness; enjoining a strict adherence to the universal principle of equity; and exhorting them to persevere in their obedience to the commands of God, as the only way to merit the character of christians, or obtain the rewards of immortality.

Without extending this detail further, I may safely rely upon your recollection of the gospel history to justify me in the
general

general conclusion I draw from it concerning the doctrine of Christ, that its great object is to teach men good morals, and to enforce the practice of virtue by the sanctions of religion, and the expectation of future rewards and punishments, or, in the words of the apostle Paul—that it is “ a doctrine according to godliness.”

It now only remains that I ask, in the fourth place, What think ye of the RELIGION of Christ? or of that religious profession which is founded upon his doctrine and authority? After what hath been said concerning the doctrine of Christ, it cannot be difficult to perceive that the profession of christianity is a much more plain and simple thing than many of its teachers have represented. If the end of the doctrine of Christ be to teach men their duty on the great principles of faith in God, and a future state, the profession of christianity must consist in receiving, as divine truths, those general principles of religion which are clearly taught, and

in yielding a willing obedience to those precepts of virtue and piety which are expressly laid down in the gospel. In order to be of the religion of Christ, or, in other words, to be a christian, it is not necessary to assent to this or that list of articles of belief prescribed by any self-constituted body of men; it is not necessary to be enrolled by any formulary in any particular society, or sect of christians; it is not necessary to acknowledge the authority of any other head of the church than Jesus Christ himself; it is not necessary to submit to any civil prescription of religious forms and ceremonies. All that is essential to the *nominal* profession of christianity is, to unite with some christian society in religious worship, and in the performance of christian rites. But the *real* profession of christianity requires much more; it requires that we admit the first great principles of religion not only into our understandings, but our hearts, and that we not only confess the divine authority .

authority of the laws of Christ, but conscientiously make them the rule of our conduct. A man may be a christian without studying the abstruse questions on which the different sects of christians have been divided ; he may be a christian without classing himself under any of the subordinate leaders in the christian church ; but no man can be a christian without keeping the two great commandments on which depend all the law and the prophets, the love of God and the love of man ; no man can be a christian without possessing the christian principles of faith in God, and the hope of immortality, and under their influence living in the practice of every virtue. Let me, then, in conclusion, leave with you, as the sum and substance of christianity, on a practical regard to which all your right to the name, and all your title to the hopes of christians, must depend, the words of the apostle Paul : “ The grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching

teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and piously, in the present world, looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing, of the great God, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ."

THE END.









Stranger
Chapman
Old Warden
Mason
Crosby
Gibbs
Lynch
Fred Liles
Tony Dick

