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SERMONS

ON

THE PUBLIC MEANS OF GRACE,

THE

FASTS AND FESTIVALS

OF

The Church,

SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS,

AND VARIOUS PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY THE LATE

RIGHT REV. THEODORE DEHON, D.D.

RECTOR OF ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH, CHARLESTON;
AND BISHOP OF THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN SOUTH-CAROLINA.

TOGETHER WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR, AND A SERMON
PREACHED ON ACCOUNT OF HIS DEATH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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ADVERISTEMENT

TO THE

FIRST LONDON EDITION.



THE following Sermons (to which are annexed some very interesting particulars of the life of their able, pious, and Right Rev. Author,) are printed from an American Edition of them; under a conviction that they are well calculated to do credit to the Episcopal Church of the United States of America, and through God's blessing, to forward the Christian edification of the English Reader, by their luminous and energetic enforcement of the doctrines and duties of Christianity, and of the importance of adhering to primitive views of Church Order and Communion.

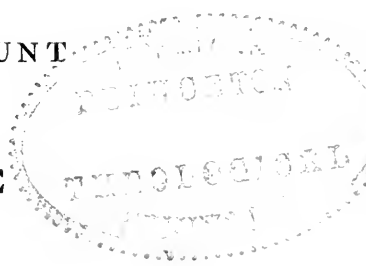
Whatever profits shall arise from the publication of this Edition, will be appropriated to 'the Protestant Episcopal Society for the Advancement of Christianity in South-Carolina;' of which meritorious Institution Bishop Dehon was one of the Founders, and its first President.

GEORGE GASKIN, D.D.

RECTOR OF STOKE-NEWINGTON, MIDDLESEX.

Lady Day, 1822.

SOME ACCOUNT
OF
THE LIFE
OF THE
RIGHT REV. THEODORE DEHON, D.D.*



BISHOP DEHON was born at Boston, Dec. 8, 1776. Having received the rudiments of his education in the Latin School in that town, he entered Harvard University at 14, and graduated in 1795, before he was 19 years old. He then entered upon the study of divinity, kept a school, and on Sundays acted as a lay-reader at Cambridge and at Newport. He was confirmed by Bishop Seabury of Connecticut, and ordained by Bishop Bass of Massachusetts, Deacon Oct. 9, 1797, and Priest Dec. 17, 1800. In 1798, he was appointed to the charge of Trinity Church, Newport R. I. and in the summer of that year took his Master's degree. Possessing a slender constitution, he found it necessary to pass a winter in a more southern climate. He made his first visit to Charleston in 1803, and was soon after invited to St. Philip's Church, as assistant minister; but he declined the offer and returned to Newport. On the death of the Rev. Mr. Frost in 1804, he was offered the rectorship of that church, which he likewise declined. When the Rev. Dr. Bowen resigned the rectorship of St. Michael's, Mr. Dehon was elected his successor, July 19, 1809. In the following October, the College of New-Jersey conferred on him the degree of D.D. He was one of the founders, and greatly instrumental in promoting the prosperity, of the

* Extracted from 'An Historical Account of the Protestant Episcopal Church in South-Carolina:' by the Rev. F. Dalcho, M.D.

Protestant Episcopal Society for the advancement of Christianity in South-Carolina: was elected its first president, July 2, 1810, and annually sustained that honour to his death. In consideration of his learning and exemplary piety, he was elected by the Convention, Feb. 20, 1812, Bishop of the diocese, and was consecrated in Philadelphia, Oct. 15, following. He died of the yellow fever, Aug. 6, 1817, in the 41st year of his age, in the fifth of his Episcopate.

The memorials of public bodies will shew the high estimation in which Bishop Dehon was held in his diocese, more fully than individual opinion, and be more honourable to his memory than any expression of private feelings. With this view the following are here placed upon record.

‘ To the society *, and to the church in this diocese, the death of this great man has been one of the most afflictive dispensations of the Divine Will. Well may they say with the Prophet, “ the joy of our heart is ceased ; our dance is turned into mourning. The crown is fallen from our head : woe unto us that we have sinned ^a.” From the earliest period of the Society, the name of this distinguished Prelate has been identified with its prosperity. Moulded into its present form by his judgment ; influenced by his wisdom, and supported greatly by his zeal, it has grown in strength, and has already attained to a prospect of usefulness, equal to the wishes, and beyond the expectations, of its most sanguine friends.

‘ The life of this excellent and learned man was one continued scene of virtue, piety, and benevolence. From his earliest years Religion marked him for her son : and as he “ increased in wisdom” and “ waxed strong in the spirit,” the influence of her divine precepts controlled all his desires, and directed all the affections of his soul. His zeal and perseverance in the cause of the Redeemer, were only equalled by the fervour and sincerity of his devotion. Wherever duty

* The Protestant Episcopal Society for the Advancement of Christianity in South-Carolina. See their Eighth Report.

^a Lam. v. 15, 16.

or affection called him, the same amiableness of disposition and active piety animated his conduct, and adorned his character. Whether performing the highest functions of the apostolical office, or exercising the ordinary duties of a parish priest; whether in the midst of his clergy, his friends, or his family, unfolding the mysteries of religion, illuminating the pages of science and of secular learning, or discharging all the tender duties of domestic life, whether enlivening the board of hospitality, or administering to the wants and comforts of the poor; whether presiding at the head of the Society, or superintending the details of its operations:—the same beneficent and pious principles filled his heart and guided all his ways.’

‘ *Resolutions of the Vestry of St. Michael’s Church,*

‘ *Aug. 9, 1819.*

‘ The Committee appointed to report such resolutions as are calculated to evince the value and affection which the Vestry of this church entertained for their late Rector the Right Rev. Theodore Dehon, feel in common with the entire Church the melancholy loss sustained by his death, by which a very near and dear connection between them has been dissolved; and believe that seldom indeed has the Church experienced so heavy a calamity. With a mind rich in materials, and a zeal almost without a parallel, he faithfully pursued with unwearied assiduity his various duties, to the entire satisfaction and invaluable edification of those under his spiritual care: and it is a fact, not less true than melancholy, that the Church in the interior of this State was in a situation truly alarming to episcopalians, when our late Rector entered upon his duties as Bishop of the diocese; but by his bright example, persuasive manner, and indefatigable efforts, he experienced the reward of beholding the most happy change. He fertilized the soil which was barren and unproductive, and gave life and activity to the waste places in Zion.

‘ The liberality which governed him in his opinions, and the respect which marked his intercourse with his fellow-

men, reflected no less credit on the goodness of his heart, than the soundness of his understanding. To the memory of such a character every mark of respect is certainly due. Your committee therefore recommend the following resolutions.

‘ 1. That the Vestry of St. Michael’s church sincerely deplore the calamitous event with which it hath pleased Almighty God to visit this diocese, and their church in particular, by the death of their late Rector, the Right Rev. Theodore Dehon.

‘ 2. That the members of this Vestry do wear crape on their left arm, for thirty days from the date hereof.

‘ 3. That a marble slab be placed over the grave of the deceased in the chancel, with a suitable inscription.

‘ 4. That a monument be erected in the open space on the east wall, north of the chancel *, which will bear record of a grateful tribute to departed worth.’

‘ *To the Vestry of St. Michael’s Church,*

‘ *Charleston, 9th Aug. 1817.*

‘ Gentlemen,

‘ The Vestry and Wardens of the Lutheran Church of German Protestants have appointed us a committee to address you on the lamentable event which has bereaved your church of its invaluable pastor, and the Episcopal Church of this State of its Bishop. The loss of this eminent Minister, whose talents were as profound as his benevolence was extensive, must be deeply felt by the whole Christian Church within the influence of his example. Bishop Dehon was distinguished by the apostolic dignity of character and humility of deportment, which marked the primitive Christians, who are revered for their beauty and excellence, and are held up as a model to Christians. To say we sympathize with you on such a loss, would be a cold expression: we lament him as a friend to mankind, and shall ever gratefully remember the attention he paid to our spiritual wants for many years, while our church was without a minister. As a testimony of regard, that church in which he officiated

* The place was subsequently changed. See page xvi.

with so much kindness and toleration, has, by the unanimous voice of its Vestry, been hung in mourning, which is to continue for three months.

‘ With an expression of our individual regret we remain,

‘ Gentlemen, yours, &c.

(Signed)

‘ JACOB SASS,

‘ ABR. MARKLEY,

‘ JOHN STROBLE.’

Extract from the proceedings of the *Standing Committee* of the diocese, Aug. 20, 1817 :

‘ The Committee appointed at the last meeting to express the sentiments of this board, in relation to the loss sustained by the church in the death of its Bishop, and to consider what proceedings are rendered necessary by that unexpected and distressing event, beg leave respectfully to submit the following observations:

‘ In the Christian Church the Bishop is the chief counsellor in spiritual matters, the guardian of its unity in faith and worship, the only dispenser of the apostolic and useful rite of confirmation, and the only mean of preserving the succession of the sacred ministry. Without a Bishop the Church is in an imperfect state, as a body without a head.

‘ The diocese of South-Carolina had been for more than ten years without this important officer; and an indifference to the distinguishing principles of our Church was gradually extending itself. By a happy union of sentiments in both the clergy and laity, the Rev. Dr. Dehon was elected Bishop; and the difficulties in his own mind, in the way of his acceptance of this office, being happily removed by a kind Providence, he was consecrated on the 15th October, 1812.

‘ He immediately devoted himself to the duties of this station.

‘ He administered confirmation to a great number in most of the parishes of the diocese*. He visited every parish under his care, and, by particular request, the church in Georgia: and considering that he had the sole charge of

* Bishop Dehon confirmed 1016 persons, in this diocese, and 60 in Savannah.

a very large congregation in this city, that our climate permitted him to travel only during half of the year, and that many of the churches were remote from his residence, his visitations were very frequent. He consecrated several churches *, and was active in endeavouring to revive the worship of the Church where it had been neglected, and to establish it in those places where it was unknown, and particularly in Columbia, the capital of the State and the seat of its College. He presided in the Convention of this diocese with singular dignity, judgment, and impartiality, and in his annual addresses enforced the best cautions and directions in the most affectionate and persuasive manner. He guided the conduct of the clergy by the influence of affection, and encouraged them by his example to love each other and their sacred calling more and more. He took every opportunity to encourage capable persons, and particularly pious and intelligent youths, to devote themselves to the ministry; superintended in a detailed and particular manner the studies of the candidates; and, before he ordained them, strictly examined their proficiency in every branch required by the canons. He uniformly attended the meetings of the general convention of the Church, although from the remoteness of this diocese from the place of session, and the season in which they were held, he was subjected to much inconvenience and hazard of health and life. He discharged the various functions of the apostolic office with a dignity and feeling of the most engaging character.

‘ Deeply afflicted by the loss of services so valuable, and of an example so instructive, the Ecclesiastical Authority of the diocese has deemed it proper to adopt the following resolutions :

‘ Resolved, that the Standing Committee feel their responsibility greatly increased by the death of their Bishop, and they now engage themselves to the Church to do all they can to promote her welfare.

* St. Paul’s, Colleton; Trinity, Columbia; St. Mark’s, St. Paul’s, Charleston; All-Saints, Waccamaw; St. John’s, Colleton; and the Church in Savannah.

‘ Resolved, that the secretary of the Standing Committee be requested to write to the Right Rev. Wm. White, D.D. presiding Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the United States, informing him of the melancholy loss which the Church has sustained in the death of the late Right Rev. Theodore Dehon, D.D. Bishop of the diocese of South-Carolina, on the 6th of August, 1817. And that the presiding Bishop be requested, when he communicates this mournful bereavement to the venerable house of Bishops, to solicit the prayers of our Right Rev. Fathers in behalf of the clergy of this diocese; that the Almighty would graciously bestow upon them a double portion of His Spirit, that they may daily increase in wisdom, piety, and zeal, and so faithfully and diligently discharge their sacred functions, that God may be glorified, and man be saved.

‘ Resolved, that it be respectfully recommended to the ministers, the vestries, and the congregations in this diocese, to meditate seriously on this afflictive dispensation of Divine Providence, to humble themselves before God, and to beseech Him fervently and frequently through Jesus Christ our Lord, *to rule and govern His holy church in the right way.*

‘ Resolved, that the ministers and people of our Church in general, be requested to supplicate the Divine Mercy in behalf of an afflicted Church.

‘ Resolved, that a copy of these proceedings be transmitted by the secretary to the Right Rev. Bishop White, and also to the Rector and Vestry of every parish in this diocese, that it may be read in the respective churches in this diocese.’

The Convention of the Church in this Diocese, Feb. 18, 1818, unanimously adopted the following expression of their regard:

‘ It has pleased Divine Providence in His inscrutable wisdom, to take from this church its Bishop. *He was a burning and a shining light, and we rejoiced for a season in his light.* Talents of the first order, knowledge deep and extensive, virtue pure and exalted, zeal happily tempered by dis-

cretion,—in fine, the distinguishing excellencies of the sincere Christian, and the devoted minister, render his removal a signal calamity to the Church, and to society. Time has not weakened, in the smallest degree, the impression of his uncommon merit; and the recurrence of this meeting has opened anew the wounds of our Church. The members of this Convention would mingle their sorrows on this occasion, and in expressing their feelings, &c.

‘ Resolved, That this Convention retain a lively recollection of the invaluable life, and the distinguished services to this diocese, and the Church in general, of our late revered and beloved Diocesan.’

In addition to these marks of respect, we may further mention, that the body of the deceased Bishop was carried to its place of rest, beneath the altar of St. Michael’s Church, by his Clergy *, and the grave was filled up by the Vestry, and other respectable citizens. The three Episcopal Churches in the city, and the Chapel of the Orphans, were hung in mourning, and many of our most respectable citizens of both sexes put on black. On the Sunday after his interment, a funeral discourse was delivered from the pulpit of the deceased by the Rev. Dr. Dalcho †, and the melancholy event was introduced in their sermons by several preachers. Subsequently, a discourse was delivered by the Rev. Mr. Gadsden, Rector of St. Philip’s, at the request of the Vestry of St. Michael’s, and of the Protestant Episcopal Society ‡. The Society for the relief of the widows and orphans of the Episcopal clergy, and the Bible Society of Charleston, entered into resolutions expressive of their sorrow and regard.

* This remarkable instance of profound respect triumphing over the prejudice of custom, reminds us of the fact mentioned by Durand in his *Ritual of Divine Offices*, that at the funeral of Paula, his bier was carried by the highest order of the Clergy—‘*Paulam translata fuisse Episcoporum Manibus, cervicem Feretro subjicientibus.*’—ENGL. ED.

† The writer of this account.

‡ This Discourse, which is inserted at the end of the second volume, should be read by all who are desirous of obtaining a complete knowledge of the character of Bishop Dehon.

The writings of Dr. Dehon, published during his life, were A Sermon on the death of Gen. Geo. Washington, in 1799: a Discourse delivered in Trinity Church, Newport, on the death of George Gibbes, Esq.; a Discourse delivered and published at the request of the Female Orphan Society of Providence R. I. in 1804; a Discourse upon the importance of literature to our country, before the Society of *Phi Beta Kappa*, Aug. 27, 1807; and a Sermon on the Liturgy of the Church, preached before the General Convention, in Philadelphia, May 21, 1814, and published at their request. Since his death, the Protestant Episcopal Society have published two Sermons on Confirmation, and an address after administering that holy and apostolic rite, which he had promised for that purpose; his kind intention being fulfilled by his widow. And subsequently the ensuing two volumes of Sermons, were published for the benefit of the Society for the advancement of Christianity in South Carolina; in aid of whose funds two of them were preached.

Bishop Dehon married Sarah, daughter of Nathaniel Russell, Esq. of Charleston, by whom he had three children; one of whom was posthumous.

The following testimony to the merits of Bishop Dehon, and the flourishing condition of the American Church, is extracted from a Sermon preached in St. James's Church, Philadelphia, at the opening of the Gen. Convention of the Prot. Episc. Church, Wedn. May 17, 1820, by the Right Rev. R. Channing Moore, D.D. Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church for the diocese of Virginia.

‘ I have exhibited to your view some of the leading doctrines inculcated by St. Paul, and have shown you, that those doctrines are embraced by the Church of which we are members. Yes, in her Articles and Liturgy she breathes the language of the Apostle and proclaims the same truths which he delivered. Animated by that Spirit which warmed the bosom of St. Paul, let us, my brethren in the ministry, put on the whole armour of God, and exert our united energies in the cause of the Gospel of Christ. The Church looks

up to us as the guardians of her interests, and claims the fulfilment of our sacerdotal vows. Much has been done within a few years; hitherto hath the Lord helped us, and from the success with which Heaven hath blessed us, we have reason to rejoice. The grain of mustard seed is becoming a great tree—its fruitful branches are extending themselves throughout the vast continent we inhabit; its healing influences are felt from one extremity of our land to the other; the purity of our Doctrines and the beauties of our Liturgy, are acknowledged and respected; the tide of prejudice which we have to stem, has turned in our favour, and the smiles of the living God are upon us.

‘ Those of us who can look back some thirty or forty years, and compare our present situation with the gloom which surrounded us at that period, cannot but feel the most lively emotion of gratitude. In many of our districts the Church of our fathers appeared to have breathed the last breath. Our harps were hung upon the willows: the friends of Zion wept over her desolations, and trembled for the ark of God.

‘ The altars around which our fathers kneeled were destitute of sacerdotal aid; our baptismal fonts were levelled with the dust; there was no priest to receive our little innocents into covenant with God, or to break to their disconsolate parents the bread of life. But, glory be to God, the cloud which overshadowed us has been dispelled by the Sun of Righteousness, and the voice of mourning has been changed into the voice of joy. Yes, the wilderness and the solitary place, cultivated by our labours, and refreshed with the dew of heaven, is blossoming like the rose; temples are erected in those regions, which, till lately, formed the abode of the beasts of the forest. The Almighty is strengthening our hands, by the constant accession of zealous faithful Ministers; a general harmony pervades our Society, and the time of refreshing hath come from the presence of our Lord. Soon, my Brethren of the Ministry, soon will the active labours of some of us be terminated; soon must the Curtain of Life be dropped; soon will the work be finished.

‘ At the close of the last Convention—the thought must have occurred with peculiar force to some of the oldest of our Body—shall we ever meet upon a similar occasion? shall we again be permitted to aid in the Council of the Church? Heaven hath still spared us, and while those of us, whose heads are covered with the locks of age, again appear in your presence, we have to mourn with you the departure of some of the youngest of the Clergy, and also to bewail the loss of one of the youngest of our Bishops, DEHON, upon whom the Church was leaning with confidence; in whose talents she placed the greatest reliance. DEHON has been taken from our embrace, and removed into eternity: found, however, at his post, discharging the duties of his office with unshaken fidelity; and carrying to the mansions of distress and disease the consolations of Religion, he was arrested by the messenger of Death, and taken in the bloom of usefulness from a weeping diocese, and afflicted family, to the bosom of his God. Let us watch, as we know not the day nor the hour, when the Son of Man cometh; and what I say unto my brethren in the ministry, I say unto all—Watch.’

The remains of Bishop Dehon are deposited beneath the Altar of St. Michael’s Church, Charleston. A marble stone, on which is the following inscription, covers his grave.

Here Rest
The Remains of
The Right Reverend
THEODORE DEHON, D.D.
late Rector
Of this Church,
and Bishop
of the Diocese
of South Carolina.
He was born in Boston,
On the 8th of December, 1776,
And Departed
this Life,
On the 6th of August, 1817,
in the 41st year
of his Age.

An elegant monument has been erected to the memory of this exemplary Prelate, by the Subscriptions of his affectionate Congregation. It is placed against the East Wall, on the South side of the Chancel, and has the following Inscription.

Sacred

to the Memory of

The Right Rev. THEODORE DEHON, D.D.

Late Rector of this Church, and Bishop of the Diocese,

Who ceased to be mortal, on the 6th day of August, 1817,

In the 41st year of his Life, and the 20th of his Ministry.

Genius, Learning, and Eloquence,

added lustre

To a Character formed by Christian principles
and a constant study of the Christian's Model.

Meek: He was swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

Humble: He esteemed others better than himself.

Merciful: He sought out the poor and the afflicted.

Devoted to God: He counted his life, not dear to himself,
so that he might finish his course with joy, and the
Ministry, which he had received of the Lord Jesus,
to testify the Gospel of the Grace of God.

Zeal fortified by *Discretion,*

and *Firmness* by *Moderation,*

Sanctity united with *Urbanity,*

and *Goodness* with *Cheerfulness,*

Rendered him

The *delight* of his friends ;

The *admiration* of his country ;

The *Glory* and *Hope* of the Church.

His death was considered a public calamity.

The pious lamented him as a primitive Bishop,

 \ The Clergy as a Father.

And youth and age lingered at his grave.

He was buried under the Chancel, by direction of

the Vestry, who caused this Monument to be

erected in testimony of *their* Affection, and *his* Merit.

Quis desiderio sit pudor, aut modus

Tam chari capitis !

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And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights,
 he was afterwards an hungred430, 437

SERMON XXXVI.

ON THE TEMPTATION.

ST. MATTHEW, iv. 5—11.

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve 446

SERMON XXXVII.

ON THE TEMPTATION.

ST. MATTHEW, iv. 8—12.

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him 454

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ON REPENTANCE.

1 ST. JOHN, i. 8, 9.

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If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness..... 466

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ST. LUKE, xxiii. 48.

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SERMON XLIII.

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ISAIAH, liii. 5.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed 521

SERMON I.



ON THE SCRIPTURES.



2 TIMOTHY iii. 16, 17.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

IN this chapter, St. Paul, after warning Timothy of the errors and vices which should prevail in the last days, expresses his anxiety for the preservation of him, in the faith first delivered to the saints. “Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them^a.” He reminds him, “that from a child he had known the holy Scriptures^b ;” which, rightly understood, and faithfully applied, could not fail to become to him a source of wisdom and salvation. This led him to give that interesting account of the sacred writings, which I have selected for your present consideration—“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

These words call our attention to three things; the inspiration, the completeness, and the end or use of

^a 2 Tim. iii. 14.

^b Ibid. ver. 15.

the sacred writings. Topics these, which we should ponder with seriousness, with humility, and with sanctified affections. They have a strong bearing upon our faith, and may have a happy influence upon our practice.

I shall first speak to you of the inspiration of the sacred writings—"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." The high and Holy One who inhabiteth eternity, commiserating the ignorance, and anxious for the salvation of the wayward children of men, hath graciously condescended to give them instructions, by which they may attain to knowledge, to virtue, and to eternal life. These instructions are contained in the Bible, which is emphatically styled the word of God. The contents of this holy volume are not the offspring of reason, applying itself to the discovery of truth and duty. "The world by wisdom knew not God^c." They are not the devices of politic men, aiming to provide means for controlling and regulating mankind. A house divided against itself would not stand. But they are the dictates of the Spirit of the Almighty. They are the advices and lessons of our heavenly Father to His children tabernacling in the flesh. The sacred penmen wrote them under His guidance and direction. So far as their natural faculties could be useful to them in their work, these faculties, we may presume, were used. But His eye was constantly upon them. Wherever their judgment might have erred, He restrained them. Wherever the subjects were above the reach of their reason, He enlightened them. Wherever their recollection failed, or their knowledge was deficient, the Holy Ghost called all things to their remembrance, and guided them into all truth^d. They wrote what they have written, by

^c 1 Cor. i. 21.

^d John xiv. 26. xvi. 13.

the incitement, and under the superintendence, and with the assistance, whenever it was needed, of the Spirit of God. So that in the sacred volume, there is nothing but what is true and worthy of all men to be thankfully received, and devoutly considered. It is, as it has been emphatically styled, “the word of truth^e.”

Of this high character of the Scriptures, there are testimonials many, various, and very weighty; and I presume, you will attentively listen to some of the reasons for believing in the inspiration of the sacred writings.

In the first place, human ability has been inadequate to the production of any thing which would justify us in attributing to it the production of the Scriptures. In their account of the creation; of the origin of man; of his sinfulness and miseries, and of his future destiny; in their view of God, His nature, character, and government; in their revelation of the way in which God has provided for us pardon and deliverance, and by which we may acceptably approach and serve Him; in the prophecies they contain of events, developed, and to be developed, in all portions of time, even to the end of the world; in the purity, spirituality, and universal applicability of their moral instructions; in their exact and perfect adaptation to the condition and necessities of human nature, and their wonderful operation, when attentively perused, upon the heart and life; and I might add, in the transcendent sublimity of conception and expression, which is to be found in many parts of them, there is a height of wisdom and a degree of glory, to which no work of uninspired man has ever yet attained. If reason, in some of her most successful efforts, has disclosed some truths

^e 2 Tim. ii. 15.

of great worth and divine import, the best of her productions are, nevertheless, but as the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream^f. Though the head be of gold, the feet are of iron and clay. And the volume of inspiration, like the typical stone cut out of the mountain without hands, has overturned them, and broken them in pieces, and made them as the chaff of the summer threshing floors, and the most precious of their fragments is rendered by it of little value, or utility. Now human reason, it may safely be supposed, has, in the course of the ages since the creation, been excited by as powerful motives as can ever excite it, and has acted under as great advantages, as, in this present state, it can ever act under, without the special assistance of the Almighty. If, then, it have never arrived at such views of the Divine nature and character; if it have never attained to such knowledge of the means of salvation and eternal life; if it have never discovered such a perfect system of righteousness and holiness, as the Scriptures reveal; nay, if its best works do but betray its weakness, and its sincerest confessions acknowledge the necessity of such a revelation as these Scriptures contain, what can be more unreasonable, than to attribute to it a work, whose contents would oblige us to suppose, not only, that it had once surpassed itself and overleaped the limits of its former excursions, but also, that it had a foresight of the purposes of God, and a familiar acquaintance with the counsels of His mind? To me it appears, that there would hardly be more absurdity in supposing that frail man, with the little taper, wherewith in the shades of the evening he enlightens his own dark dwelling, had kindled the fires of that glorious body, which God hath set in

^f Dan. ii. 31, &c.

the heavens to enlighten and rule the day. All the productions of human ability with which we are acquainted, bear marks, that, like their authors, they are of the earth, earthy; but the contents of the holy Scriptures do manifest of themselves, that they are given by inspiration of God. X

Again. God having graciously resolved to recover the human race from the state into which they had fallen, and to this end having spoken in times long past to the Fathers by the Prophets, and in the latter days to the world, by His Son, it is reasonable to suppose, that, for the benefit of the generations to come for ever, He would cause a record to be made of the communications of His will. In all His revelations, the whole human race are interested; and there would be great danger of their receiving them impaired and corrupted, and without sufficient evidence of their authenticity, if they received them only by oral tradition. We may presume, that He would cause His instructions which concerned the world, as they were gradually completed, to be written in a table and noted in a book. But in this record there are some things, such as prophecies of events yet in the womb of time, explanations of the mystery of redemption hidden from ages and generations in the bosom of God, long and important discourses of our blessed Saviour, and of others, His servants, which the writers cannot be conceived capable of recording, without the immediate suggestions and aid of the Holy Spirit. And when we reflect upon the vast importance of the whole, that to it men were to recur and appeal, as the only rule of faith and life, it would be a just expectation, that the scribes, whom God vouchsafed to employ, would be constantly under His own inspection and guidance, in every part of their work. Accordingly we find, that Moses and the Prophets were full of the

Holy Ghost, and have recorded their instructions as the word of God; we find the Apostle of the Jews testifying, that “the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost^s ;” and we find also our blessed Lord, and the first preachers of His Gospel, referring to the books of the Old Testament as of infallible truth, and Divine authority. With regard to the New Testament, Christ promised to His Apostles, to send them power from on high to qualify them for their office of establishing His Church, and promulgating His religion. This power they received by the miraculous descent of the Holy Ghost upon them, to be to them, by His presence, instead of their Master, after His ascension to glory. By His inspiration they wrote as well as spake. In the consciousness of it, they deliver to the Church their several records, as the instructions of the Lord. And the favoured disciple, who closes the sacred code, leaves us impressed with an awful sense of our obligation, to reverence it as the hallowed Scripture of God, by uttering at its close the very solemn declaration, that “if any man shall add unto the words of the prophecy of this book, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life^h.”

Further: The connection and agreement of the several parts of the sacred volume, intimate strongly its Divine inspiration. That so many writers, in so many and distant ages, many of them without any knowledge of each other, should have written divers books, every one connected with the rest, and all tending, with wonderful combination, to introduce,

^s 2 Pet. i. 21.

^h Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

unfold, and establish one grand, supernatural system of religious truth, would, were it admitted as true, be a wonder, hardly surpassed by the Atheist's formation of a world, by the fortuitous concurrence of atoms. Though many hands be discernible in the sacred volume, there is evidently but one Mind. It is the work of that Being, who, by the gradual production of six successive days, completed the beautiful fabric and furniture of nature, and who, by adding revelation to revelation according to the counsel of His will, has raised in the moral world, this stupendous monument of His wisdom and mercy. We see one Spirit pervading the whole. It is the design of one Master, accomplished by many servants. Every book is perfect as a part; and all together form, if I may be allowed the figure, one temple of truth and salvation, into which the mind that enters with sanctified affections, feels sensible of the prence of the Deity.

Once more: Tradition has accompanied the holy volume in all ages and places of its being, testifying its claim to be considered as the word of God. The Jews, to whom were committed the most ancient oracles, esteemed and revered them as dictated by Jehovah. So great was their regard for their authenticity, that in every transcript they counted the letters, and compared the number with the original, that no part might be lost of the sacred word. In the earlier ages of the Christian Church, the canon of Scripture was adjusted with great care, and the acknowledged inspiration of any book, was its title to admission into the sacred code. This tradition of the inspiration of Scripture, undoubtedly had its origin in the holy writers themselves; men who were pre-eminent for all the qualities which should entitle them to credibility, and to whose veracity, in most cases, there were given super-

natural attestations ; God working with them, and endowing them with miraculous powers, and confirming their word with signs following. From them it has descended to us, strengthened with the consent of many generations. It is a consent in which is heard the voice of the primitive Fathers, who lived nearest to the Apostles' times, and whose evidence is amply given, that the holy writings were dictated by the Spirit of God. It is a consent in which is heard, in subsequent ages, the voice of Constantine and Alfred, of Newton and Locke, of Sages and Philosophers without number, men of piety and learning, of the most exalted characters, and loftiest attainments. It is a consent in which is heard, the voice of the universal Church in all ages, raising the sacred volume above all human improvements, exalting it to be the unerring standard of what men are to believe and do, and thus imparting to it, the only real seal of infallibility, the seal of the inspiration of God. This holy reverence, with which time and truth have clothed the Scriptures, what hand shall dare to tear away ! As of the common consent of all nations in acknowledging the existence of a Supreme Being, so also, of the common consent of the Christian world, in acknowledging the inspiration of the sacred writings, it may be well observed, that he who shall deny it, must have a most vain and perilous conceit of his own wisdom, and be ready to impute both ignorance and folly, to the wisest and most virtuous part of his race.

I would further observe, that the providential care of God over the holy Scriptures, may well lead us to believe that they are His offspring. When we consider the age of these writings, some of them being the most ancient in the world ; when we reflect to how many perils they have been formerly

exposed, by the captivities of the Jews, the persecutions of Christians, and the enmity of the world to the true faith; when we call to mind, into how many languages they have been translated, and how many copies of them have in later ages been multiplied; that they should every where have been preserved, and preserved the same, without any essential loss or variation, indicates that there is something in them, not in any other writings, which recommends them to the special protection of the Providence of God. The flood of time, which sweeps away every thing, has swept away all other writings of equal antiquity¹. But this holy volume, like the ark of Noah, upborne and protected by the invisible hand of the Almighty, has surmounted the waves, unchanged and entire; the shelter of the faithful, and the safe deposit of man's last hopes. If, indeed, the Scriptures have the Most High for their Author, and are the only sources of knowledge and salvation to the children of men, it were natural to believe that they should never be lost, but that He would specially provide for their preservation and safety. And from His actual care, and wonderful Providence over them, it is reasonable to infer, that they are in reality the oracles of truth to the inhabitants of this lower world, given by inspiration of God.

¹ "It cannot be denied," says Dr. Jenkin in his Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion, "that some books of the Scripture are much the ancientest books of religion in the world; for it were in vain to pretend that the works in this kind (or indeed in any other) of any heathen author, can be compared with the Pentateuch for antiquity.—It is a great argument for the truth of the Scriptures, that they have stood the test, and received the approbation of so many ages, and still retain their authority, though so many ill men, in all ages, have made it their endeavour to disprove them. But it is a still farther evidence in behalf of them, that God has been pleased to shew so remarkable a providence in their preservation."

I add, finally, that the inspiration of the sacred volume is to be believed, because there are difficulties attending any other supposition, which no sober mind can remove or surmount. To what a dilemma are we reduced, if we receive not the Scriptures as the word of God! We must not only suppose that reason has in one instance surpassed her powers, overleaped the limits of her excursions, and penetrated into the very cabinet and bosom of the Almighty; we must not only suppose that a number of men, unacquainted with each other, have acted together in all ages of time, in framing prophecies, and connecting them with events, and introducing one consistent, admirable, and wonderful scheme of religion; but we must also believe that the most perfect and virtuous characters with which we are acquainted, have, without any view to present or future benefit, with one consent been deceivers of mankind; we must believe, that the holy and unassuming Jesus has confirmed their fraud and promoted the delusion; we must believe, that by investing the Prophets and Apostles with miraculous and prophetic powers, the Almighty Himself has connived at, and befriended iniquity; and we must believe, what of all things it is most difficult to believe, that the kind and gracious Father of our race, who hath formed us to know and to serve Him, and to find happiness under the shadow of His wings, has left us without any certain knowledge of Himself; destitute of any instruction or advice from Him; exposed, continually, to uncertainty and error, to doubt and despair. For, let it be remembered, if the Scriptures are rejected, there is no other letter of love, no other paternal counsel and direction, from our heavenly Father, to be found in our world. If the sacred volume is not His word, there is no certain evidence, that between

the Creator and the creature, in this part of His dominion, there has been any communication of His will. A very gloomy consideration! Whoever soberly weighs it, and adds to it the other difficulties we have enumerated, and duly appreciates the evidences on the contrary part, which have been adduced, cannot but be persuaded, that the holy writings are inspired by God, and, like the faithful witness in heaven, shall stand fast for ever and ever, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be eventually the glory of His people Israel.

You see then, my brethren, the character of the sacred volume, that it is the sacred record of that chain of communications which from time to time the Almighty has made, to the inhabitants of this lower world; a record made by such scribes as He has pleased to choose, under His own inspection, and the guidance of His Spirit; and, consequently, containing nothing but what is true, and important, and worthy of all men to be most thankfully received.

The next head of discourse is the completeness of the sacred writings, whereby I mean, their sufficiency and perfection as a rule of faith and conduct; their adequateness to our necessities in this present state.

This, in the first place, we may clearly deduce from what has already been established. Being "given by inspiration of God," the Scriptures must be perfect for the purpose whereunto He sends them; and if they are finished, so that no further addition to them is to be expected, they must be perfect in all generations for ever, for the use of the children of men. The Old Testament was to them, to whom it was given, a complete rule of conduct; and had they given heed to it in simplicity and sincerity, it was able to have made them wise unto salvation. It had respect, however, to fuller

dispensations to come. God, in His great mercy, “having provided some better thing for us^k,” the devout mind under the Mosaic economy was filled by faith, with the certain expectation of more glorious revelations. But now that God hath sent into the world His chief, and dearest Messenger, His beloved Son, and hath disclosed by Him the whole scheme of redemption, to which all preceding dispensations had reference, and in which they are all explained, there is no reason to expect from Him any further general communications. The revelation of His will is finished. And the same reasons which would lead us to hope, that He would give any revelation to our race, would lead us, also, to believe, that such revelation, if He vouchsafed to bestow it, would, when finished, be fully adequate to our necessities in this present state. For what man is there among you, who, if he were counselling his son, would leave him ignorant of any thing which he wished him to understand or perform? How much less, then, shall your Heavenly Father, having condescended to instruct His children by His word, leave them uninformed of any thing which they are to believe or do! If the Scriptures are given by inspiration of God, as we have abundantly proved, and if, as we have remarked, there is no reason to expect any further addition to them, it would imply a strange idea of the Divine wisdom and goodness, not to be persuaded, that they are a sufficient and perfect rule, both of faith and conduct. The Most High, surely, does nothing imperfectly, and the word which He hath provided for the government of our lives, is unquestionably adapted, in every respect, to our nature and necessities.

And this, if we now, in the second place, advert

^k Heb. xi. 40.

to the sacred writings, will be found to be really the case. Upon every subject of a religious or moral nature, concerning which mankind have been inquisitive, we may here find ample information. And concerning the conduct which is proper, in every situation in which mankind may be placed, we may here find explicit instruction. No man who recurs to these holy oracles, with a docile mind and a sincere spirit, will find them silent upon any serious subject, about which his thoughts can be reasonably exercised.

It appears from the natural inquiries and desires of our own souls, and from what we discover to have been the desires and inquiries of thoughtful men among the heathens, in all ages, that nothing can be adequate to the religious and moral necessities of human nature, but knowledge of the being and character of God, assurance of a way in which He may be propitiated and the pardon of sins obtained, instruction in what is right and virtuous with respect to God, our fellow beings and ourselves, and certain information of eternal life. These points comprehend all the subjects about which the thoughts of considerate men may be anxious: and upon each of them, the instructions of Scripture are abundantly sufficient, for the fixing of our principles and the regulation of our lives.

Fundamental to all true virtue and durable happiness, are clear and right views of the Divine nature and government. For what thinking mind can be happy, what course of life can be satisfactory, without some certain knowledge of God? The light which the Scriptures diffuse upon this point, is clear and sufficient for all the purposes of life. The Supreme Being here assures us, that He is, that He is One, that He is Eternal, that He is infinitely Wise, infinitely Good, infinitely Powerful, and in-

finitely Holy, that He is Omnipresent, and that He is Unchangeable. Concerning His providence we are informed, that it never sleeps, and that it is extended every where, over the minutest works of His hands. Concerning His government, we are taught, that it is a moral government; that it embraces in its care all the affairs of all worlds, and that it is conducting all things, with an unerring hand, to the production of the greatest possible good of the universe. We are assured that we are His creatures, that He takes a perpetual interest in us, that we may approach Him in devotion, and that He notices our services and our iniquities. To assist our conceptions of Him, He hath given us in His word, a portrait of His Son, who is the brightness of His glory, and express image of His person; and we are hereby enabled, without having our understandings dazzled, or our hearts dismayed, to behold “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ¹.” These are such instructions concerning the Supreme Being our Creator, as can no where else be found; and I know not that there is any further information we can desire, which might not be shown to be unsuited to our condition, or beyond the capacity of our nature, in its present state. At any rate, I am sure, that these instructions are sufficient for all the purposes of duty and happiness, and that every man who recurs to the Scriptures, may have his mind satisfied with regard to the existence and character of the Being, whom no man can see, and who dwelleth in that light, unto which it is not wonderful that no mortal can approach.

All men are conscious of sinfulness; and we every where behold mankind endeavouring to ap-

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

pease and propitiate their deities, with such anxiety, and with so many devices, as plainly indicate, that assurance of the mercy and pardon of God is another thing essential to the happiness of our nature. And, indeed, when we look into our own bosoms, and review our own lives, what can be more desirable to us, than the knowledge of a way, in which all our unrighteousness may be forgiven, and our sin covered, and the great, and holy God reconciled to us, and made the Patron and Protector of our happiness. This assurance has been universally the object of man's most anxious concern. He has tasked himself with penances and pains, he has offered in sacrifice thousands of rams; he has poured out in libations ten thousands of rivers of oil; we may see him sacrificing his first-born; offering in the fear and anxiety of his soul, the fruit of his body, the offspring of his love: and all this, from a consciousness of his sinfulness, and an earnest desire to attain to an assurance of the remission of his sins, and the favour of his Maker. But this assurance he finds not, till he is brought to the foot of the cross. He returns from his sacrifice, and libation, and is still filled with uncertainty. It is in the word of God only that his fears are composed, and the peaceful confidence for which he seeks, is found. Here he is not only assured of the placability and mercy of the Deity, but also that God, foreseeing the fall and degeneracy of man, hath actually provided the means of expiating his sins, and securing his salvation. Here he beholds the Almighty superintending, in all ages of time, a stupendous apparatus of promise, prophecy and type, whereby is introduced, and explained, promulgated and confirmed, this scheme of His mercy for the redemption of man. Here the Everlasting Father declares His love for the world, and His pity for

the erring children of men; and His desire that all men should come to repentance, and be pardoned and saved through the intervention of His beloved Son, whom He sets forth, offered upon the cross, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for their transgressions. From the benefit of this sacrifice none are excluded. In its blood, sins of the deepest stain may be washed away. By its efficacy it hath restored to man the good will of God, and opened His arms to every returning offender. In the Scriptures, then, man finds that Mediator between him and his Maker that he needs; and the worthy and acceptable sacrifice, which he himself is unable to procure. That token for good, for which his soul longeth, is here attained, in the enlivening declaration, that "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is also the propitiation for our sins^m." How adapted to man's necessities is the knowledge of this salvation! How sufficient these overtures of mercy for his peace! He looks to the Son of God lifted up upon the cross, for his redemption, as the Israelites looked to the brazen serpent in the wildernessⁿ; and when he looks with faith and repentance, becomes presently conscious of the cessation of his pains, and the healing of his wounds.

There is in every human being, some sense of his moral nature and of his responsibility. This, together with the inquisitiveness and native tendency of reason, urges him to investigations concerning duty and virtue, concerning right and wrong. Every man who indulges himself in sober reflection, will find among the first of his enquiries, "What is good? and what doth the Lord require of me?" These are inquiries, upon which the Heathen Sages

^m 1 John ii. 1, 2.

ⁿ Numb. xxi. 8.

^o Mic. vi. 8.

appear to have employed the utmost exertions of their minds; and without a solution of them, there can be but little satisfaction, or merit, in the conduct of life. And here the Scriptures are the perfect and only source of indubitable instruction. I say perfect source, because they contain principles and rules, which are applicable to every case that can occur. I say only source, because the law of nature written in the heart, is defaced and weakened by corruption, and the fruits of the researches of human reason, are partial in their extent, and of little efficacy. It is to the sacred Scriptures we must look for complete instruction in the principles, and obligations of righteousness. Do we inquire what is right and virtuous conduct with respect to the Deity? They teach us to have faith in His word, and to obey His requisitions; to carry ourselves towards Him with love and reverence, with gratitude and humility, with confidence and filial fear; to worship Him in simplicity and sincerity, with our bodies and our souls, in spirit and in truth. Do we inquire what is right and virtuous conduct with respect to our fellow beings? They teach us to render to all their due; to be patient, and kind, and courteous towards all men; to forgive and bless our enemies; to be grateful to our friends; to hurt no person, either by injuring his right, or neglecting to promote his benefit; and, in one word, to do to others as we would wish, if they were in our situation, and we in theirs, that they should do to us. Do we inquire what is right and virtuous with respect to ourselves? They instruct us to keep our hearts with all diligence, as the sources of the issues of life; to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit; to be industrious and temperate, meek and gentle, honest and peaceable, and in short to keep ourselves pure habitations of God, through the Spirit. There is, indeed, not a vice to which human nature is

liable, that the word of God does not describe and denounce. There is not a virtue of which human nature is capable, that the word of God does not illustrate and commend. So complete is it as a rule of life, that it may be questioned, whether any situation can be supposed, in which a man can be placed, in which it would not furnish him with principles for determining, what ought to be his conduct. And its instructions are not complicate, but plain and explicit, adapted to every capacity. They are not arbitrary, but grounded upon the eternal distinction of things, and commend themselves to reason as soon as they are understood. They are not grievous in the practice of them, for they are made easy to the obedient heart, by the Spirit which ever accompanies them, and are productive of internal satisfaction and peace. They cannot mislead us, nor need any addition to their authority or certainty, for they came from God. Let a man govern his life by them, and he may have full assurance, that he will not fail to attain to the highest perfection of his nature, and to answer the true end of his existence.

But, though man be informed of the being and character of God ; though he have hope of the pardon of his sins ; though he have instruction in the way of righteousness, he yet must find himself mortal. Reflection tells him, that he must die. Existence is dear to him ; dissolution is terrible ; and it is essential to his happiness, and virtue, both under the loss of his friends, and under the consciousness of his own mortality, that he should have some certain information of a future being. He wishes eagerly for assurance of eternal life. But where shall this assurance be found ? Shall he ask it of the dead ? They, none of them return to disclose their fate. Shall he ask it of the living ? They, none of them have passed the grave to make any discovery. Shall he ask it of nature ?

Shall he ask it of reason? Alas! conscious, since the Fall, of their unworthiness, and forgetful of the power of God, they give, at best, but a dubious reply. Of this part of wisdom it may well be declared, “the depth saith, It is not in me; and the sea saith, It is not with me; it cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof^p.” It can be given us only by that Being who holds the keys of hell and of death. And nothing can more commend His Scriptures unto us, than the consideration, that in them we have the words of eternal life. God, upon whom our immortality or annihilation must depend, here teaches us, that He hath ransomed us from death, to which we became subject by transgression. He here gives us His immutable word, that we shall pass through the gate of the grave to another, and, if we are faithful and obedient, to a better existence. The declaration of this joyful doctrine, He hath ratified and confirmed, by raising up His Son Jesus from the dead, and making Him to sit in our nature in heavenly places, even at His own right hand, in His celestial kingdom. So that life and immortality are brought to light in the sacred volume; and we have, perhaps, the fullest evidence of it, which is compatible with the trial of our faith, and the continuance of the partition, by which, in His wisdom, He hath separated this world from the next.

Who now, that considers the clearness of the light, which the Scriptures give upon these several subjects, under one or other of which may be comprehended every moral topic, about which human nature is anxious and inquisitive, does not perceive their perfect adaptation to the necessities of man, and their adequateness to his wants, as a rule of faith and conduct?

But it may be objected, if the Scriptures are thus

^p Job xxviii. 14, 15.

complete, whence is it that so many to whom they are sent, are brought by them neither to right faith nor to right practice? And this brings me to observe, thirdly, in illustration of the completeness of the sacred volume, that if any who have access to it are deficient in knowledge or virtue, the cause of the deficiency is altogether in themselves. The law of the Lord is perfect; and His Spirit is ready to render His word efficacious to every attentive and humble mind. But we must approach it with docility; we must remove from our bosoms whatever is unfriendly to its influence; we must adhere to its precepts, and continue in the way which it points out to us, if we would have any experience of its sufficiency, for the necessities of our nature. It is owing to men's lusts and passions, to the pride of their minds, to the perverseness of their hearts, to the carnality and viciousness of their lives, that they do not all perceive the excellence and perfection of the word of God, and find it a savour of life unto life to their souls. "If our Gospel be hid," says an Apostle, "it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not⁹." But what disparagement is it to the orb of day, if any shut their eyes, or retire into the caves of the earth, and complain of darkness? Or what does it detract from the clearness and utility of its beams, if any, whose sight is jaundiced and diseased, see the objects on which they rest, in confused and false colours? In like manner, it diminishes not the excellence and sufficiency of the word of God, that men who refuse to open the eyes of their understanding, or who suffer their spiritual discernment to be weakened and vitiated by vice and folly, live in the full brightness of its beams, without any rectitude in their

⁹ 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

principles, or correctness in their lives. In the parable of the sower, our Lord hath taught us, that the seed of the word, to be fruitful, must fall upon good and honest hearts. It may fall upon careless and volatile minds, which are open to every idea that passes; but in them it will be like seed by the way side, the fowls of the air will devour it up. It may fall upon hearts stupid, and insensible, and hardened through the deceitfulness of sin; but in them it will be like seed upon a rock; as soon as it springs up, it withers. It may fall upon souls overrun with the cares, and pleasures, and passions of the world: but in them it will be like seed among thorns, the rank and noxious weeds will overtop and choke it. In order to be fruitful, it must fall upon hearts prepared with humility, and ready to retain and nourish it, being cleared of the passions and affections which would obstruct its growth. Let a man study the Scriptures with an inclination to be benefited by them; let him bring to them such reverence and attention, as he would carry into the presence of their Author; let him conform his life to their requisitions, and supplicate the Spirit to descend as the dew of heaven upon his soul, and then let him say, what doctrine there is essential to his faith, or virtue, which they do not illustrate; what vices or errors there are in his heart, which they do not reprove; what sorrow of a temporal, or a spiritual nature there is, which they do not console, and what peaceful or ennobling virtue there is, which they do not promote? Such a man, and such an one only, is qualified to judge of the merits of the sacred writings; for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”^r.

^r 1 Cor. ii. 14.

The grand principle upon which the Divine Spirit acts, is that laid down to us by our blessed Lord, “If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God^s,” or men. The inestimable treasure which He hath given us, in the volume of His word, contains, indeed, the medicine which will heal our sickness, and the food whereby our souls may live. But in order to the efficacy of the one and the other, the directions He hath prescribed must be obeyed. If any man depart from these prescriptions, or counteract them with contrary indulgences, the holy word, instead of being a savour of life unto life, may be a savour of death unto death, to him. And hence the solemn admonition of St. Paul, that we “be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our mind, if we would prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God^t.”

You see, then, my brethren, the completeness of the sacred volume; that it is now finished, and is perfect as a rule of faith and life, adapted, in all respects, to the wants of our nature in this present state. “When Thy word goeth forth, it giveth light and understanding unto the simple^u.” It is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”—“The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein^x.”

^s John vii. 17.

^t Rom. xii. 2.

^u Psalm cxix. 130.

^x Isaiah xxxv. 8.

SERMON II.

Trans:

ON THE SCRIPTURES.

2 TIMOTHY iii. 16, 17.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

IN a former discourse from these words, I called your attention, in the first place, to the inspiration of the Scriptures; and secondly, to their completeness.

You are now, therefore, prepared to consider, in the third place, what is the end for which God hath condescended, by inspired writings, to furnish us with this perfect rule of faith and conduct. We find ourselves in possession of a volume, wonderfully adapted to the necessities of our nature, and “given by inspiration of God.” It becomes us to inquire, what is the object for which it is given?

And let me, in the first place, observe, what is very necessary to our right estimation of this gift, that it is for no purpose of benefit to the Almighty, that the volume of His word is given to our world. Neither our faith nor our obedience can profit the Most High. It is, indeed, a declaration of His character and glory; but we should ever remember, that His character and glory are declared, not for

any exaltation of Himself, but for communication of happiness to the beings He has created. Were mankind wholly ignorant of His word; were they all extinct upon the earth; yea, were the globe itself, which He hath given them for an habitation, removed from amongst His works, there could be no diminution of His happiness or glory. He still would exist, the perfect God. It is not with any view to His own interest, that He hath given us the holy Scriptures.

I must also premise that, whether any other beings than ourselves are interested in them, and whether their contents will be of utility to us in the other world, are questions which need not be discussed, as essential to the inquiry we are about to consider. It is enough, in order to raise our estimation of them, to be assured, that into the mysteries revealed to us the angels desire to look, and that by the dispensations of God to the Church on earth, His manifold wisdom is made known to higher orders of beings. From the nature of things we may also be certain, that those general principles of duty and virtue, which have not respect to mutable stations and relations, are the principles, by which the conduct of perfect beings is regulated, in all parts of the universe, and by which our own conduct will be regulated, if we are among the ransomed, when our present condition shall have passed away, and we shall have entered upon the scenes of the eternal world. And this is a high motive to induce us to reverence these principles, and to form by them the habits of our hearts and lives.

But what I am now principally concerned to consider, is the end or uses of the sacred volume to us men, to whom it is given, in the present world. And this is nothing less, than our recovery from the state of ignorance, sinfulness, and misery into which

we are fallen, and our exaltation to the hope of eternal life. God, having by the sacrifice of His beloved Son, ransomed the world from destruction, hath also, with paternal care and unspeakable mercy, made us acquainted by His word with this redemption, and with the way, in which we may attain to all its blessed fruits and benefits. Our salvation, and the faith, repentance, and obedience which lead to it, are the burthens of the sacred volume. The law was a schoolmaster to bring them, to whom it was given, unto Christ; and the Gospel was written, that we might believe in Him, and “that believing we might have life through His name^a.” God hath given us His word for no other purpose than the recovery of our apostate race. The sacred writings are the means He hath appointed, to inform us of that capacity for everlasting salvation, into which we are brought by the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and also to train us up in that faith and holiness which are necessary, both as conditions and qualifications, for the enjoyments of His heavenly kingdom. The doctrines which these writings contain, we must embrace; to the reproofs which they administer, we must hearken; the reformation which they require, we must promote; the instructions in righteousness which they give, we must follow, if we would rise from the awful state of sin and ignorance in which we find ourselves, and attain to any tolerable degree of faith and holiness in this life, and to the hope of immortality and bliss, in the world to come. They are given by inspiration of God, for this end, that we may not doubt their certainty. They are made complete for this great and most gracious purpose, that we may be perfect in all the wisdom and knowledge and armour which is

^a John xx. 31.

necessary to salvation; and “thoroughly furnished unto all good works^b.”

That I may more distinctly set before you the gracious design of the Almighty, in giving us the volume of His word, allow me more particularly to observe, that it is the efficacious means of all those changes and graces, by which the Christian character is formed and perfected. We are told, you know, that we must be born again in order to the knowledge and enjoyment of the kingdom of God. It is through the instrumentality of the Scriptures that this regeneration is accomplished. They are the seed of this new birth. God’s Spirit always accompanying them as His institution, they are effectual in the heart of every one, who reads them with the dispositions they require, to enlighten his mind and reform his heart, to bring him “out of darkness into God’s marvellous light^c,” and to turn him “from the power of Satan unto God^d.” “In Christ Jesus,” says St. Paul to the Corinthians, “I have begotten you through the Gospel^e.” “Of His own will,” says St. James, “begat He us by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures^f.” We are “born again,” says St. Peter, “not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever^g.” Our regeneration, like all our blessings, is solely and entirely from God; but it is wrought and perfected through the instrumentality of His word.

Again. It is necessary that we should be sanctified, and made holy in heart and life, before we can enter into the kingdom of heaven. And the holy Scriptures are the means, by which the Spirit of

^b 2 Tim. iii. 17.

^c 1 Cor. iv. 15.

^e 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^f James i. 18.

^d Acts xxvi. 18.

^g 1 Pet. i. 23.

God accomplishes this important part of our salvation. They teach us what is virtuous, and praiseworthy, and required of us; they set before us, all the motives and encouragements which can influence us to forsake our sins, and they are mighty through the Spirit, which always accompanies them in the humble heart, to break down the strong holds of vice, and to lead us into all the paths of righteousness and holiness. "Sanctify them," says our Lord in His prayer for His disciples, "sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth^h." "I commend you," says the Apostle to the elders from Ephesus, "I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctifiedⁱ." Our sanctification is the work of the Holy Ghost, but it is wrought by means of that word of truth which He Himself hath inspired for this very purpose.

Further. It is required of us to grow in grace: and we have need to be constantly nourished in all goodness, if we would not relapse into our evil state, but advance to perfection in knowledge and virtue. The sacred writings are the granary, from which this daily sustenance of our souls is to be obtained. They reveal the truths, they contain the virtues, they give efficacy to the ordinances, by which we are nourished unto eternal life. They furnish milk for the infant Christian, and meat for those of maturer years. It is by constant, and deep attention to their sublime doctrines, that our spiritual strength is increased; it is by frequently impressing our hearts with their divine instructions, that we must counteract the tendency of our spirits to evil, and advance to greater, and greater maturity, in all vir-

^h John xvii. 17.

ⁱ Acts xx. 32.

tue and godliness. “The words that I speak unto you,” says our blessed Lord, “they are spirit, and they are life^k.” “Desire the sincere milk of the word,” says St. Peter to the youthful converts, “that ye may grow thereby^l.” And of the experienced Timothy, his spiritual father speaks, as “nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto he had attained^m.” For the sustenance of our spiritual, as of our animal life, we are dependent wholly upon the invisible power of the Most High; but this power is exerted in, and through, the means which He hath provided, and blessed for the purpose, namely, the revelations and persuasions, and promises, and ordinances which are contained in His holy word.

Finally; it is necessary to our comfort, and to the full accomplishment of our deliverance from the miseries of our natural state, that we should have joy and peace in believing. And the reservoir of all spiritual joy is the word of God. We must read its comfortable doctrines, to be relieved from the anxieties and sorrows of this sinful life. Its assurances of pardon and favour, through the blood of Jesus, cheer and compose the conscience. The examples of the worthies it has immortalized, illustrate to us the efficacy of faith, the safety of the righteous, and the fidelity of God. Its precious promises, and the glorious prospects which it opens, rejoice the heart, and enable the human pilgrim to pass on his way, wet, perhaps, with many a shower, and afflicted with the apprehension of many a danger, but happy in the hope, that his sins will be forgiven, and that his pilgrimage will terminate, in a rest from his cares, and an enjoyment of immortal felicity. The burthen of God’s word is styled by a

^k John vi. .63

^l 1 Pet. ii. 2.

^m 1 Tim. iv. 6.

prophet and angel, “ good tidings,” “ tidings of great joy, which shall be to all peopleⁿ.” And “ whatsoever things were written aforetime,” we are told by an Apostle, “ were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope^o.” The source, the well-spring of all joy, is in God, and from Him alone it must be derived to us ; but it hath pleased Him to communicate it to us, through the channel of His word ; which is therefore called, “ the Gospel of our salvation^p,” and “ the word of life^q.”

It appears, then, from the views we have taken, that the end and use of the sacred volume, is to recover us from the awful and unhappy state, into which our nature is fallen, to wisdom and righteousness, and the blessed hope of everlasting life. It is given to bring us to Christ ; to establish our faith, and order our goings : that we may be comforted with the knowledge, and fitted for the enjoyment, of immortality. By the instrumentality of the doctrines it reveals, God would rescue our understandings from the ignorance and blindness, with which they are encompassed. By means of the reproofs, corrections, and instruction in righteousness, which it furnishes, He would bring us from the servitude of sin, to the love and practice of virtue. And by the overtures of mercy which it contains, and the acts of faith and devotion which it dictates, He would draw us to Himself, and enable us, with peaceful hope, to pass through this probationary state ; looking for a final redemption, and glorious immortality, beyond the grave. So that the end of that faith in, and obedience to, His word, unto

ⁿ Isaiah lii. 7. Luke ii. 10.

^o Rom. xv. 4.

^p Eph. i. 13.

^q Phil. ii. 16.

which we are called, is nothing less than the salvation of our souls.

I am aware, that there are some persons to whom I may seem to have attributed too much efficacy to the sacred writings. Actuated by the occasional experience of devout fervour, and by the ardour of undisciplined imagination, they cherish in themselves, and encourage in others, the expectation of extraordinary internal illuminations, and supernatural assistances. Into this error they are led by certain expressions of Scripture, which they have not properly considered. We are said to be “born of God^r.” And this is, indeed, true. But it is, as you have seen, through the instrumentality of His word. We are said to be “born of the Spirit^s ;” but the Spirit is also God, and acts by the same means, the word of truth which He hath dictated. We are said to be “born of water^t ;” and this is indeed true; for baptism is the laver of our regeneration. But it is efficacious by the authority of the Scriptures. We are cleansed with the washing of water by the word. The word of God, is, indeed, the only seed, which His ministers can sow. From this seed, when it falls into good and honest hearts, will spring, through His blessing, that faith, and hope, and charity, which are the principles and characteristics of the new and divine life. Nothing can we teach, or inculcate, but what we derive from the Scriptures. Nowhere but to the sacred writings can we send you, for that knowledge which must remove your ignorance; for that light which may make the paths of duty, and virtue, plain before you, or for that assurance of salvation, and eternal life, which may fill you with hope and peace. In-

^r 1 John iii. 9.

^s John iii. 8.

^t John iii. 5.

deed, when the Almighty, with the most gracious condescension, hath spoken His will, in times past, by the Prophets, and, in these latter days, by His Son; when with great care He caused a record of His communication to be made, under the guidance and inspiration of His Spirit; when this volume of His word is perfect as a rule of faith and conduct, and adequate to all the necessities of our nature, it is not reasonable to suppose, that all this has been done in vain, and that we are to find the knowledge, and means of salvation, in supernatural interpretations. We are not to look out of the word for that which the word is given to furnish. The Spirit of God is indispensably necessary, to open our understandings to receive the Scriptures, and to assist the infirmities of our nature, in complying with their requisitions. But it operates by making no new revelation: it furnishes no new light; it acts in, and by, the word, which it accompanies and blesses, in the heart of every sincere inquirer.

It is true, that there have been some instances of men's being brought to the knowledge of salvation, without the intervention of the word. The penitent thief has been suddenly sealed upon the cross, unto redemption. And a Paul has been converted to the faith, by immediate revelation from heaven. But so, also, in the natural world, the shadow has gone back upon the dial, and the sun has stood still at noon day. But these were miraculous events for extraordinary purposes; and can only teach us, that though we are bound by God's laws, He Himself is not. *Generally* speaking, the course of nature, we may clearly perceive, is according to uniform laws. And from the analogy which pervades the ways of the Most High; from His essential love of order; and from express intimations of His word, we may also conclude, that His moral government is ordi-

narily conducted, by uniform and stated principles. Having given us His inspired word, to be to us a source of wisdom, and salvation, every way adapted to our nature, and adequate to our necessities, we are not to wander from it in search of other illuminations, nor to expect any illuminations without it. To this full and glorious light which He hath given us, we must recur, that we may see ourselves, and our condition; that by it, we may discern the paths of duty, and salvation; that in it, we may behold the glory, and loving-kindness of God; that through the beams of its promises, we may be cheered and strengthened; and that, conducting ourselves in the ways which it reveals, we may please our Creator, and attain to the enjoyment of Him in His Heavenly kingdom.

This appears to me, to be the doctrine of the Scriptures concerning the end, or uses, of the sacred volume. It is answerable to our nature, as reasonable beings, and moral agents. And in confirmation of it, I shall adduce to your notice a plain, but very instructive passage, from one of those admirable homilies, which were composed with pious care, in the morning of the reformation, and then set forth to be read in the Churches: ‘The Scripture of God is the heavenly meat of our souls. The hearing and keeping of it maketh us blessed, sanctifieth us, and maketh us holy. It is a light to our feet^u. It is a sure, stedfast, and everlasting instrument of salvation. It giveth wisdom to the humble, and lowly hearts. It comforteth, maketh glad, cheereth, and cherisheth our conscience. It hath in it everlasting comfort^x. The words of Holy Scripture be called, words of everlasting life; for they be God’s instrument, ordained for the same purpose. They have

^u Matth. iv. Luke iv. John xvii. Ps. xix. ^x Luke x. John vi.

power to turn, through God's promise; and they be effectual, through God's assistance; and being received in a faithful heart, they have ever a heavenly spiritual working in them. They are lively, quick, and mighty in operation; and sharper than any two-edged sword; and enter through, even to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit, of the joints and the marrow^y. Christ called him a wise builder, that buildeth upon His word; upon His sure and substantial foundation^z. By this word of God we shall be judged; for the word that I speak, saith Christ, is it that shall judge in the last day^a. He that keepeth this word, is promised the love and favour of God, and that he shall be the dwelling-place, or temple, of the blessed Trinity^b.

I have now pursued this important subject, according to the plan purposed, at the opening of these discourses; and have set before you, the inspiration, the completeness, and the end, or uses of the sacred writings. You have seen, from numerous and irrefragable evidences, that the Scriptures are the sacred record of a chain of communications made by the Almighty, from time to time, to the inhabitants of this lower world; a record, written by such scribes as He was pleased to choose, under His own inspection, and the guidance and assistance of His Spirit; and, consequently, containing nothing but what is true, and important, and worthy of all men to be thankfully received. You have seen, that these Scriptures are now finished, and are perfect, as a

^y Heb. iv.^z Matt. vii.^a John xii.

^b John xiv. See the 1st Homily of the Church of England. The publick Acts of the American Church, respecting the Formularies of the English Communion, are recorded in an interesting publication, entitled, 'Journals of the General Conventions of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America,' printed at Philadelphia, 1817.

rule of faith and conduct, furnishing light and instruction, upon all the points, about which the human mind is anxious and inquisitive; and adequate, in all respects, to the necessities of our nature, in this present state. And you have seen, that the great and gracious end, for which God hath vouchsafed to furnish us, by inspired writings, with this perfect rule of faith, and conduct, is nothing less than our recovery from the state of ignorance, sinfulness, and misery, into which we are fallen; and our exaltation to the hope of eternal life: and more particularly, that through its instrumentality, we are regenerated, and sanctified, and nourished in all goodness, and filled with joy and peace, in believing; being brought by it to the knowledge, and incited to the pursuit of holiness and immortality, and conducted by it, if we follow its directions, to the favour of God, and the salvation of our souls. From these truths, which we have so amply discussed, there are several inferences, of a very serious nature, and great practical importance, to which I must now ask your attentive consideration.

And, in the first place, from the views we have taken of the sacred volume, we may perceive its claim to our highest estimation. Imagine yourselves living in that age and state of the world, in which human nature is found unenlightened by revelation. Fancy yourselves, for a moment, encompassed with the darkness of heathenism, the paths of virtue and safety obscured; your Maker hidden from your view; your origin, your duty, your destination unknown; the way to the tomb, your inevitable course, haunted with spectres of doubt and dismay; your spirits turning, on every side, for light and direction; but finding, on every side, darkness and uncertainty. In the midst of this gloom, suppose the heavens opened, and there descended to you a messenger,

bringing to you a book, which informed you of your origin and destiny; which revealed to you the true God, and assured you of His love and favour; which made the path of every virtuous excellence, plain before you; and disclosed to you a title, an eternal title, to immortality. With what transports of delight would you receive the messenger! I see you, in imagination, falling prostrate at his feet. The book which he gives you, you would press to your lips; you would hold it to your bosom; you would drop on it the tears of excessive joy. As the messenger returned to the skies, you would follow him with benedictions, till he vanished from your view; and the precious volume, you would carry to your habitation, with care, and unspeakable exultation. Your wife, and your children, would be called to behold the gift. Your neighbours and friends would be shewn the treasure. And were the wealth of the world offered you, in exchange for it, you would again clasp it in your hands, and declare it above all price. But, my brethren, take away the Scriptures, and what is your condition, but the condition of unenlightened nature? Consider their inspiration of God, and their important contents, and what is their value less, than if they were brought to you immediately from the skies? and yet, how imperfectly are they appreciated! Who hath sufficiently regarded them? Of the worth of the sacred volume, no estimation would be too high. For the kindness and condescension of the Almighty in giving it to us, no measure of gratitude would be excessive. But because we have always been in the enjoyment of it, and its light and comfort are familiar to our minds, we behold it, as we behold the sun in the heavens, unmindful of the majesty and benignity of its Author, and almost unconscious of the importance of its beams. Surely, if the views we have taken of the

subject are remembered, this insensibility to the value of the best blessing of life, will be reprov'd by your consciences, and carefully corrected. When you think of the inspiration of the Scriptures, of their completeness, and of their end and uses, unless you are ungrateful to your Maker, and unjust to yourselves, you will be, like the Psalmist, “ as glad of God’s word, as one that findeth great spoils^c.”

But if we value the Scriptures, we shall also study them. And an obligation to do so is the second thing I would urge upon your notice, as peculiarly enforced by the account, which has been given, of the sacred volume. It is a deplorable fact, and too plain to be disguised, that the Scriptures are little read, and imperfectly understood. If we look into the natural world, we see every object guided and governed, by the laws of its Maker. Could we look upon the hosts of spiritual beings, who compose the court of the King of heaven, we should behold them, with eager and constant attention, “ hearkening unto the voice of His word^d.” But man, whom He hath condescended to furnish with an inspired Gospel, for the guidance of his life, possesses the treasure with heedless indifference, and rests satisfied, with a partial knowledge of its contents. In how many families does the sacred volume repose undisturbed upon the desk, from Sabbath to Sabbath ! And are there not many individuals, who never are induced, even by the solemnity and disengagedness of this holy day, to recur to its important pages ? Surely, its origin, and the design of the Almighty in bestowing it upon us, are forgotten, or it would not be thus neglected. What being, who should visit us from another sphere, would suppose, that these neglected Scriptures are given us by inspiration of God ? Who,

^c Ps. cxix. 162.

^d Ps. ciii. 20.

that should observe our indifference to them, would believe, that in them we have “the words of eternal life^e?” If habit had not bound us with a fatal spell; if we were not in a state, a dangerous state, of spiritual insensibility, we should not have in our houses such an oracle of truth and salvation, without recurring to it for instruction, every morning, and for consolation and benediction, every night.

The consequences of not reading the holy Scriptures are of a more serious nature, and greater in extent, than you may suppose. It is to this, I apprehend, that we are to attribute, in a great measure, the total ignorance of religion in some, and the decay of it in others. It is in this that we are to look for the cause of the instability of Christians, Here we may find the reason, why error prevails. Here we may discover the source of fanaticism, and of superstition. To this it is owing, that the best seem unconscious of the degree of holiness to which they are called; and that all rest easy under imperfections of knowledge, and deficiencies of virtue, which a thorough acquaintance with the Scriptures would both reprove and correct. Such were the consequences, when, in unhappy days, a spiritual tyranny locked up the sacred writings from the people in an unknown tongue. And the effects will not be greatly different, if, when these writings are easily accessible to you in your own language, you keep yourselves ignorant of them. Education may give you a respect for them; you may think of them with a kind of abstract reverence. But unless you study them; unless you enlighten your understandings with their doctrines, and impress your hearts with their spirit, they can be to you no more than the Koran of Mahomet, or the dialogues of

^e John vi. 68.

Plato. You will neither be well informed concerning your salvation, nor acquainted with the extent of your privileges or duties. "Ye do err," said our Lord to the Sadducees, "not knowing the Scriptures^f." And it is assigned as the cause, both of the faith and of the high commendation of the Bereans, "that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily^g."

Were it calling you to an unnecessary, an unprofitable task; were it merely to engage you in dubious speculations; were it only to fit you to be able disputants upon theological subjects; far, very far, would it be from me, to press upon you the importance of frequently, and attentively, perusing the holy volume. Unhappy they, who gather water from this sacred spring, only to sport with it in the fields of contention. But the Scriptures are the rule of faith and life. They are provided, with infinite condescension, by the care of God. His purpose in giving them to us, is the salvation of our souls. In them, if any where, we must seek the knowledge of "the truth as it is in Jesus^h." By them, if by any means, we must be "thoroughly furnished unto all good worksⁱ." But how shall their end be accomplished in you, if they be not known? In what way shall they be useful to you, if they be not read and applied? Will you trust to the portions of them which your spiritual pastors feebly bring to your notice? This would devolve more upon them than they can discharge; and expose you to imperfection in knowledge and holiness. Will you trust to your prayer; and expect that God will enlighten and save you, while you neglect His word? This would be like beseeching Him to sustain you in life, while

^f Matth. xxii. 39.

^h Eph. iv. 21.

^g Acts xvii. 11.

ⁱ 2 Tim. iii. 17.

you refused to use the bread which He hath provided for your sustenance. Having given us in His word, perfect instructions in wisdom and holiness, in the way and in the means of salvation, He requires that, as reasonable beings, we employ our faculties in apprehending these instructions, and applying them to the government of our lives. It is incumbent, therefore, upon every man to study the sacred writings. If he value the knowledge of God ; if he desire to have the paths of duty and virtue marked out to him ; if he would understand the mystery of redemption, and the terms upon which his Maker's favour is obtained ; if he would be consoled with the hope of immortality, and advance from strength to strength, in knowledge and virtue, he will study them assiduously and thoroughly ; he will meditate in them, day and night. When these fountains of divine truth are set open unto us, to neglect to recur to them, is to affront the Spirit who presides over them, and to merit perpetual subjection to darkness and delusion. It is saying to the Almighty in practice, what we should shudder to avow in words, that we desire not the knowledge of His ways.

Again. In the course of our observations upon the holy Scriptures, we have shown, that God hath a merciful purpose in conferring them upon us ; even to recover us from our ignorance, sinfulness and misery, and exalt us to the hope of everlasting life. It behoves us, therefore, to inquire, how far His desire, and gracious intention, have been accomplished in us ? And this inquiry you will most safely answer, not by adverting to your occasional feelings and transient fervours, but by looking to your principles and your lives. Are you brought to a clear knowledge of the only true God, and of Jesus Christ whom He hath sent ? Have you embraced God's

offer, and do you confide in His promise of mercy, in and through His beloved Son? Do you possess and cherish an enlightened reverence and a filial love, for your Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier? Have you renounced the hidden things of darkness; and the malevolent passions, the sinful appetites, the criminal pursuits, and the polluting indulgences, wherewith your God and Redeemer is grieved and displeased? Are those traits of excellence, which are distinctly exemplified in the lives of the Scripture worthies, and which are all combined and perfected in the example of our blessed Lord, are they imitated by you, in the several conditions and relations, in which the Most High hath placed you? Is your faith such as hath wrought by love, and purified the heart; so that in your affections and temper and conduct, as well as in the relations and hopes to which you have been begotten, through the Gospel, you are new creatures? These are important inquiries. And you owe it to God, who hath vouchsafed to give you a perfect rule of life; you owe it to yourselves, who have been ennobled and strengthened by such an inestimable gift, to see if these fruits of His word have been produced in you.

There is nothing, perhaps, which men so seldom ask themselves, as whether the end of God's instructions is accomplished in them? And yet there is nothing against which His indignation hath been more strikingly expressed, than against the frustration of the use of His word, by the heedlessness or perverseness of those, to whom it is given. Look at His peculiar people, to whom were once exclusively committed the oracles of truth. They became proud in the imaginations of their heart. They knew not the Scriptures. They despised the simplicity of truth, and made the word of God of none effect. And behold, they are scattered under the whole heavens;

their temple is demolished : their oracles are to them obscured ; and not till their minds are humbled, and they are ready to embrace the Messiah, whom their neglect of the Scriptures led them to reject, will they be gathered again to the favour of God. Look at those regions of the eastern world, which in the morning of Christianity, were blest with the first light of the Gospel. Unhappy countries ! The people became lukewarm and careless ; they held the truth in unrighteousness ; its end was not answered in them ; they loved the dominion of error and sin ; and behold, they are left, as they were threatened, to the delusions of darkness ; for the light of God's word hath been taken away. The absurdities of the Mosque have been substituted for the worship of the Christian Temple : and ignorance and imposture now revel on the spots, which were once hallowed by the presence of truth. These are dreadful tokens of the Almighty's indignation, when His word is unproductive of its proper effects.

It may be, that to such temporal vengeance we may never be exposed. Willingly would I persuade myself, that there never will be wanting among us, such fruits of faith and knowledge, of piety and virtue, as will induce the Father of all mercies, to continue to our country the light of His glorious word. But as individuals, we are fast hastening to the grave ; and after death is the judgment ! The most distinguishing privilege, the principal talent, for which we shall then be called to account, is the possession we have had of the Scriptures of truth. These are capable of exalting us to sublime attainments of divine wisdom and holiness ; and having furnished us with these, great are the improvements which our Maker may require at our hands. And if at His tribunal, in the day of retribution, we shall be found, notwithstanding our advantages, to have remained

unchanged and unrenewed, the very heathens will rise up in judgment and condemn us ; and we can only expect to be driven from the presence of God, as unprofitable servants, who have disregarded His instructions, and despised His reproofs.

On this solemn account, I cannot forbear adding, in the fourth place, what is powerfully enforced by our subject, the importance of bringing to the oracles of truth, whenever we recur to them, becoming dispositions and conduct. You have seen, that the Scriptures are completely adequate to the necessities of your nature, in the present state. They teach you fully, what you are to believe, and what you are to do ; and the Holy Spirit is ever present with them, to render them efficacious in the humble heart, to all the purposes of everlasting salvation. So that you can never plead either ignorance or inability, in extenuation of your errors, or vices. That you may not, therefore, through any default of your own, come short of the kingdom of God, let me exhort you to use the sacred volume in that way, which experience and its own directions commend to your observance. Having seen the evidences of its inspiration, recur to it, always, as the word of God. Carry to it inquiring and docile minds. Read it with a humble desire to be made wiser and better by it. Since nothing can be efficacious without the power of the Almighty, bow to Him your knees, and supplicate His blessing upon your use of it. Make a fair experiment of its principles. Whatever it denounces, as opposed to its efficacy, avoid. Whatever it recommends, as promotive of your good, pursue. Endeavour, if possible, to make it the standard, by which you would regulate, all your thoughts and actions. Such confidence, obedience, and good will, as you would repose in the physician for whom you had sent, to relieve you of bodily

disease or pain, repose also in the word, which the great spiritual Physician has provided, for the restoration of your souls. In this way, avail yourselves of the Scriptures of truth; and you will find by an experience, more satisfactory than many testimonies, that the ways it recommends to you, are ways of pleasantness, and the paths into which it hath brought you, are the paths of peace.

Lastly. The character of the sacred writings, and your privilege in possessing them, impose on you an obligation to extend the knowledge of them, as far as you are able, and, especially, to make them the source from which you furnish your children, with the principles and rules of life. "These words which I command thee," says the Almighty, "shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up^k." Pliant is the infant mind. Free from pride and prejudice, and the perversion of vice, it readily receives the instructions of the Bible, as the word of God. If a reverence for it be impressed, and a knowledge of its contents communicated, in early life, they will, in all probability, be carried through every stage of existence. It was the happiness of the distinguished young Bishop, to whom the text was addressed, "that from a child he had known the holy Scriptures^l:" and the pre-eminent Apostle who addressed it to him, was brought up piously, at the feet of Gamaliel, in all the knowledge of the law^m.

I know not, indeed, what there is, to which you should be so anxious to conduct your children, as to the fountains of divine wisdom and virtue, in the

^k Deut. vi. 6, 7.

^l 2 Tim. iii. 15.

^m Acts xxii. 3.

holy Scripture. You are careful to accomplish their bodies. You are solicitous to have them initiated in human sciences. You spare no pains to give them the graces and the knowledge, which are esteemed in the world. And we do not desire to denounce any innocent and rational attainments, which may soften the asperities of social intercourse, and give intelligence and usefulness to life. But the sphere of all these attainments is transient. The best temporal accomplishments are of short and uncertain utility. Your children are heirs of immortality. They are rapidly hastening to leave this state, and enter an eternal world. It is the highest wisdom, it is the tenderest affection, to imbue them with the principles, and furnish them with the graces, which will be esteemed and used in the company of heaven, when earthly accomplishments will have been left upon earth, and human knowledge will have vanished away. Train up the young, then, in the principles and spirit of the word of God. In so doing, you will be just to the Most High, who hath entrusted you with the sacred oracles; you will give to your children instructions and hopes, for which they may bless you at the bar of God; and you shall be instrumental in conveying to posterity those sacred records, which he, who considers their inspiration, their completeness, and their use, will esteem the most important blessing, that posterity can receive.†

I have now, my brethren, finished my remarks upon this all important subject. Persuaded that if ever you are made wise and good, it must be through the instrumentality of the Scriptures: believing that an acquaintance with them is the best preservative from irreligion on the one hand, and fanaticism on the other; and fearful that from the neglect of them proceed ignorance, indifference and vice, I

have essayed to set the subject before you, in a great extent, and under various aspects. It is highly probable, that many parts of it have been tedious, and that in all parts, I have fallen far short of the clearness, sublimity and ardour, which such a topic should have inspired. But such as my remarks have been, I know that God is able to bless them, and to render them productive in you, of an increased attachment to His holy word. To His blessing I commend them; and shall close all, with two passages from the sacred volume, which are peculiarly pertinent and impressive. The one is from the mouth of the ablest Minister of the Old Testament; and the other from the blessed Author of the New: "Set your hearts," says Moses, "unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law; for it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life."ⁿ—"If ye continue in My word," says our Lord, "then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free^o."

ⁿ Deut. xxxii. 46, 47.

^o John viii. 31, 32.

SERMON III.

ON RELIGIOUS ORDINANCES.

I SAMUEL ix. 13.

For the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice ; and afterwards they eat that he bidden.

THERE is a striking resemblance between the outlines of the Mosaic, and of the Christian Church. Each arose upon a divine basis. Each had its form of initiation and symbolic rites. Each had its three orders of Ministers in the sanctuary. And each boasts of a Divine Being at its head. As in the one, so in the other, the covenant is in the hands of a Mediator, and its principles and laws are deposited in a sacred code. In both, to explain the covenant, to bless the children of it, and to speak from the appeased Deity the remission of their sins, appertained to the Priesthood ; and this honour no man could take to himself, but it was received in a way of divine appointment. There is, indeed, in the Christian Church, a higher degree of spirituality than is found under any other dispensation. Here, the shadows of the law find their substance. Here, the types of antiquity meet their fulfilment. Here, the daily sacrifice and oblation cease, absorbed, in their significance, in that great sacrifice, of which, to the eye of faith, they all were figures. But in the constitution of this Church, our blessed Lord

did not overlook the ancient pattern of heavenly things, nor forget the nature of man. Under the protection and blessing of the Divine Spirit, the Church in her militant state, is now, as formerly, to be known and preserved, to be propagated and improved, by the word, the sacraments, and the ministry. It will not, therefore, be an uninteresting employment, nor foreign to the business for which we are here convened, to contemplate, my brethren, the propriety and utility of religious rites; the consequent necessity of an authorized order of men to administer them; and the obligations which are hence devolved upon both ministers and people.

The first point to which I would call your attention, is the fitness and utility of Religious Ordinances. When any number of men become associated into one body with peculiar principles, purposes, and advantages, there seems a propriety in their having some characteristic badges. It is necessary, in the induction of new members, that there be some form; how else shall the person introduced know his title, or those who were already of the community, ~~but~~ assured of their acquisition, and his claim? It is necessary that there should be some external properties, or rites, common to every one; how else can he always manifest his relation to the rest, and discover their relation to him; and the whole body, however various and scattered its parts, be kept distinct, pursue uniformly its purposes, and attract the notice of the world? Will it be said, that by the name of a community all its members may be known? But it is certainly expedient, that this name should be given, or taken, with some ceremony, in some established way; for, otherwise, it might be assumed and resigned at will; and it would be difficult to know to whom it regularly belonged. Will it be said, that their sentiments and

purposes are sufficient to distinguish any body of men? But the sentiments of every man are not always avowed; and the views of different members of the same community, are frequently various. My knowing that I have the same opinions which distinguish any society, may convince me that I am related to them, so far as similarity of principles can connect us; but they cannot know it till I declare my feeling; and when each knows the other, we cannot be associated without some mutual act; nor our relation be perceived by mankind, without some public demonstration of it. There are in truth, no such obvious, simple, and universal means of preserving communities distinct, and manifesting their members to the world and to each other, as characteristic rites and peculiar badges. Nature prompts to the use of them; for the savage of the woods has the song and the ceremonies of his ancestors, and by the gashings and daubings with which he disfigures his form, denotes his tribe. Reason and policy have discovered their utility; for the armies of the ambitious have their uniforms and their standards; and almost every nation has its mode of naturalizing subjects, its oaths of allegiance, and its arms. Indeed so fit and necessary are they, that few communities continue long without them, or survive the loss of them; and they who denounce all rites as useless, are obliged to recur to peculiarity of dress, of phrase, or of gesture, when they would be known to each other, and distinguished from the world.

Hitherto our observations have been of a general nature applicable to any community. What, then, shall we say of the propriety and importance of rites and ordinances, in the service of religion? If we had nothing more to add, the reasons which have already been adduced, would equally prove

the necessity of some proper forms in religious, as in other institutions. But if we consider the nature of man, and the design of religion, we shall find them requisite on other accounts. Composed of body and spirit, man is obliged to honour his Maker with both. The bended knee befits his homage, as well as the humbled soul. A worship suitable to his nature cannot be wholly spiritual in his present state, for then would many of his faculties be unemployed, which should bring praise to their Author, and that part of him which is specially adapted to his probationary residence, would be useless in his noblest, and most important work. There is, too, an aid derived by the mind from the co-operation of the body in religious services. Easily and strongly impressed by present objects, having his understanding, his imagination, and his affections closely connected with his senses, man's devotion is warmed and his spirit relieved, by symbolic representations of the truths he should feel, and sensible indications of the worship he would render. Accordingly, in almost all theories of religion which have been devised, some hallowed rites have found a place. The heathen had his feasts, his purgations, and his sacrifices. To the Jews, God appointed a system of ceremonies, to connect them together, and shadow forth the sublime subjects of faith to their understandings. And our adorable Redeemer instituted for His followers a baptism, which should represent their 'death unto sin, and new birth unto righteousness;' and a supper, in which they should commemorate the foundation of all their hopes and joys, His offering Himself in the body once for all.

But further. Religious ordinances are of unspeakable advantage, in uniting members of the same body, and attaching them affectionately to each other. They form a kind of visible chain con-

necting men together; the first and last links of which are connected with God. They open, as it were, a common resort for the same benefit, in which men perceive, affectingly, their mutual relation; and from the coincidence of their hopes, their interests, and pursuits, acquire a regard for each other's welfare. Whenever we perceive in another sentiments and feelings congenial with our own, we invariably feel a fondness for him. If we discover in him the same profession, name, country, or expectations with ours, the bond of attachment is strengthened. Community of interest begets confidence; and while we are pursuing the same objects, under consciousness of the same infirmities, but with reliance upon the same hopes, we are filled, involuntarily, with affection for each other. Analogous is the effect of sacred rites, in which one discovers in another the same holy badge which he himself wears; and all perceive in the unity of their object and care, a bond of fellowship which is pleasant and impressive. This is strikingly illustrated in the natural tendency, and no doubt was strong in our Redeemer's view at the gracious institution, of the Lord's Supper. How can the feelings of brotherly kindness and charity be more strongly excited, than when Christians are gathered around the same table, to recognize their relation to the same Head; to feed upon memorials of the same deliverance from a common destruction; and to receive, at the same hands, the pledges of a joint inheritance of everlasting life? Here, if Satan have not possession of the soul, strife will retire, and animosity be appeased. Here, if any where, revenge will abhor its purpose, and mankind will learn to have the same care one for another. For who, as he joins in his holy ordinance, can be insensible to the Apostle's beautiful appeal; "the cup of blessing which we bless, is it

not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and body: for we are all partakers of that one bread^a.”

On the accounts which have been mentioned, we see the fitness and utility of external rites and ordinances in religion. It is true, they may be ill chosen, or ill used, and thus be made instruments of superstition and folly. But it would lead to the greatest impoverishment of our nature, if we should infer, from the abuses of things, their absolute inutility. We may remark, too, in passing, that the ordinances of the Gospel are unexceptionable in their number and nature; being few, simple, pure and significant. By one baptism we are made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven; and by one eucharistic feast, we commemorate the sacrifice of the death of Christ, and the inestimable benefits which we receive thereby. If these pure and sublime ordinances have, at any time, been perverted to injurious purposes, we can only bewail the more the propensity of our nature to error. The melancholy fact would evince the necessity of restraining men by established rites, to a uniform worship and simple truths, instead of leaving them to the unlimited wandering of their own imaginations.

Having seen then the importance of religious ordinances, let us hasten to consider the necessity of a distinct and authorized Order of men, for the administration of them. A few words will set this point in a clear and convincing light. The very idea of a rite, or sacrament, supposes some one to administer it. Now, there is no other alternative,

^a 1 Cor. x. 16, 17.

than that every man administer to himself and others, or that particular men be set apart, authorized and obliged to “attend continually upon this very thing^b.” And who, after a moment’s reflection, perceives not, which of the two is most eligible? Who sees not, which must be most conducive to convenience, to regularity, to solemnity, and to the ends for which ordinances are instituted? What confusion would the indiscriminate exercise of sacred functions occasion! How would the solemnity of ordinances disappear, if they were in every man’s hand, like his common occupation, without uniformity or distinction! What debate and discord might arise, if every man’s will was his criterion for hallowing and applying sacraments and rites, and no one apprehended an appointed order to which he was accountable, and the community could appeal!

Independent of the difficulty of preserving ordinances the same, and without urging the improbability that they would, in this way, be preserved at all, it must be evident to every considerate mind, that the committing of them to the administration of a qualified Order of Men, must magnify their importance, add to their solemnity, be most likely to accomplish their design, and best preserve them from degeneracy and abuse. Would you know the common sentiment of mankind upon the subject? Look through the Pagan world, and observe every where a priest, where you find an altar; a sacred office, where you find a god. Would you know the Divine counsel in this particular? Behold the Deity in the dispensation to His chosen people, selecting a particular tribe for His service, and confining to them the right and the duty of ministering in holy things. Above all, it should satisfy our

^b Rom. xiii. 6.

minds upon this topic, that our Saviour did ordain selected men, authorizing them to send others as He sent them, to preach His Gospel, to administer His Ordinances, and to guide and govern His visible Church. "Go," said He, when about to leave our earth, to the Apostles, whom for this purpose He had chosen, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world^c."

There arises from the nature of the Christian ordinances, a peculiar necessity for an authorized Ministry. These sacraments are of high and holy import. Like the ark of the covenant, they are not to be carried by unhallowed hands. They are seals of an engagement between God and men. They are compacts between the Almighty Father and His repentant children, in which He pledges Himself, upon condition of their faith and obedience, to give them the pardon of their sins, the blessing of His Spirit, and the enjoyment of eternal life. And who can sign the covenant of such mercies unto men, but they who act in God's behalf? And who can act in God's behalf, but they who act by God's authority? Not, that in those to whom this ministry is committed, there is any elevation above the ordinary qualities of their fellow beings. Every priest, appointed to this service, must be taken from among men; and, consequently, be subject to like passions with the rest of their race. It is, indeed, infinite condescension in the great God to employ, in the accomplishment of His mighty and gracious purposes, beings frail as we are; but, perhaps, we may

^c Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

say, it is also wisdom. For hereby is secured to Him, to whom alone it belongs, all the honour, all the praise, all the glory, of the efficacy of the ministrations. "We have this treasure," says St. Paul, speaking of the great Christian behests entrusted to the ministry, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us^d." It is presumable from the nature of the thing, that there would be found in the world an established Priesthood, unto whom this ministry of reconciliation would be committed, for the edification of the Church. And blessed be our adorable Head, such a Priesthood there has been among His redeemed, from the first ministry of His Apostles, unto the present day! Nor can we doubt His will, that after the way of His appointment, it should be perpetuated in the world until His coming again. When under that strong image of endearment, by which the Holy Spirit reveals to us the love and unity of Christ with His Church, she addresses Him as her spouse, "Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where, Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon," what is His reply? "If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents^e."

There results from the nature of man, from the wants of a state of society, and from the very scope of our Redeemer's purposes, a reasonable expectation, that there should be appointed shepherds, around whose tents, pitched in the second Eden, which Himself hath planted, the kids should feed; and all His followers, to the end of time, moving in the same paths, by the footsteps of their predeces-

^d 2 Cor. iv. 7.

^e Cant. i. 7, 8.

sors, be gathered together to the same shades and fountains and pastures, to enjoy the same guidance and protection, and partake of the same sustenance and delights.

Here we are brought to notice the obligations, which the truths we have been considering devolve upon Ministers and people. The first and most obvious inference is, that it is incumbent upon us all to respect and observe the institutions of the Gospel. It is the duty of every person to keep the laws, to respect the rights, and to promote the interests, of every useful community to which he belongs. This common obligation upon members of any institution, is binding upon the Christian. As a follower of Christ, he owes it to his Lord, and to the reputation and interest of His Church, devoutly to observe the ordinances, which, for the edification of His people, He hath seen fit to appoint. Not that a mere outward and formal observance of the sacraments of Christianity, will accomplish in us the purposes of the mission of the Son of God. But in these sacraments are deposited the mercy, the gifts, the refreshments, the renewals, the hopes, which we need; of all which, they who resort to them, with the requisite qualifications, cannot fail to participate. On this account it was, that attendance upon them constituted so large a part of the religious business of the primitive Christians, and that they spake of them in such lofty terms, as the laver of regeneration, the seed of immortality, the earnest of a resurrection. Far different was the estimate of these ordinances in their days, from that which seems to prevail in ours. They were then the Christian Bethesdas, by which the penitent and believing waited, that when the angel moved the waters, they might wash in them from sin and uncleanness, and be restored to hope, and soundness, and vigour. And should we go

about to ascertain, why the Gospel is not now productive in so great a degree, as in the Apostolic times, of its proper peace, and joy, and holiness, we should probably find among the chief causes, the uninformed manner in which some go to its sacraments, and the entire disregard with which the many neglect them. For besides the general reasons to observe them, there are, to every individual, peculiar motives for this obedience. The Sacraments of Christianity are ordained, not only to be of general use, but also for his individual benefit. He, himself, is washed in its Baptism from the defilement of sin, and in its Supper he, himself, is nourished with the bread of immortality, which came down from heaven. These ordinances are, to every man, the channels of Divine mercy, the resort where the Church findeth her Lord. Here, He leadeth her by the still waters. Here, He causeth her to lie down in green pastures. Here, He maketh His flock to rest at noon. Enjoined by Divine authority, we may not question their necessity; crowned with the Divine praise, we cannot doubt their efficacy; but we do owe it to ourselves, as well as to the Redeemer who appointed them, and the Christian community to which we belong, to endeavour to walk after the footsteps of His ancient servants, “in all His commandments and ordinances blameless^f.”

But the truths we have been considering, press upon our observation the holiness, and importance, and duties, of the ministry. They are the keepers of the fountain, which is set open for mankind to wash in from sin and from uncleanness, and they are the dispensers of the word, by which we are instructed in righteousness, and begotten again to the blessed hope of everlasting life. If there be any

^f Luke i. 6.

ground upon which, more than all others, the distinct and solemn character, which we have been considering, of the Priesthood rests, it is perhaps this. The internal influences of grace, they are with the Holy Spirit. The written word, it is nigh unto every man, even in his mouth, and in his heart, and in his hand. But the signs and seals of grace and truth, they are confided to the faithfulness and discretion of the "Stewards of the mysteries of God^s." With the care of these ordinances are necessarily connected, the care of the principles of faith; the care of the duties of life; the care of men's souls, even of their salvation. It was, most probably, with respect to these, that our Lord said, when He breathed upon His first Ministers, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained^b." "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heavenⁱ." Having such high and momentous functions entrusted to them, great care should be used, as far as human agency is concerned, to commit the office only to such men, as will pitch their tents where the tents of the first shepherds stood, willingly and faithfully to feed Christ's sheep, and feed His lambs. For if the tents of the Shepherds are moveable, the grounds which they choose variable, how shall any go their way forth by the footsteps of the flock? and if they retire into their tents, and disregard what is done around them, and strengthen not the diseased, neither heal that which is sick, neither bind up that which is broken, neither bring again that which is driven away, neither seek that which is lost, but suffer them to wander through all the mountains,

^s 1 Cor. iv. 1.^b John xx. 23.ⁱ Matt. xviii. 18.

and to be scattered upon every hill, to what purpose do they occupy the tents ; how shall the flock be benefited, and the kids fed, and the Owner of the flock receive His increase ? Entrusted with the word and ordinances, whereby men are born again, and nourished unto eternal life, they should endeavour to imitate the Chief Shepherd, of whom prophecy, when she contemplated Him, said in her finest tone, “ He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young^k.” Ambassadors from the living God to a sinful and ignorant world, it is their duty, in simplicity and dignified sincerity, without listening to the speculations, or yielding to the innovations of restless men, to ‘ set forth His true and lively word, and rightly and duly to administer His holy sacraments.’ Impressed with the importance of the end, for which ordinances were instituted and a Priesthood ordained, for which God gave His Son, and Jesus died, the recovering of man from sin and destruction to wisdom, virtue, and immortality ; they should assiduously seek, and faithfully use, all those attainments of knowledge, powers of mind, influence of character, acquaintance with revelation, and assistances of the Spirit, which will qualify them to establish men truly in the faith, to instruct them clearly in righteousness, and to persuade them irresistibly to come into the paths, which will lead them to heaven. Community of office should in them, especially, who are set to watch and bear together the ark of God’s most precious mercies towards the human race, produce affection and brotherly love. Shall their hearts be at variance, when their hands carry for men, in behalf of God, the same treasure of reconciliation ? Like the Cheru-

^k Is. xl. 11.

him around the mercy-seat in the ancient temple, their faces should be always towards each other, and their wings should meet. Hereby all men would not only know them to be Christ's disciples, but admire them also as the Ministers of the Lord, if they have love one for another. Above all, they should preserve the purity, as well as the authority, which belongs to the mantle He has left them. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord¹." Under the Christian dispensation, much more than under the Jewish economy, should there be written upon the foreheads of the Priesthood, and upon all their sacred vestments, "Holiness unto the Lord^m."

But, finally, we must remark, that there arises from what has been said, an obligation upon the people to abide by, and co-operate with those, who are regularly appointed to minister in holy things. In vain will God have instituted ordinances in the Church, in vain will He have established in it pastors and teachers, if the body of Christians neglect, or profane, these sacred institutions, or with Gallio's temper, "care for none of these thingsⁿ." It is theirs to go their way by the footsteps of the flock, not forming for themselves new and various paths; but abiding with zealous attachment, by the appointments of God; contentedly following, in faith and practice, the examples of the saints, who have gone before, and entered into their rest. It is theirs to bring their lambs to the fold of their Redeemer, and to come with their kids, and accustom them to feed beside the shepherds' tents. It is theirs to make such provision for those, to whom Christ has committed the care of the Church, as will preserve them from temporal cares and perplexities, and

¹ Is. lii. 11.

^m Exod. xxviii. 36.

ⁿ Acts xviii. 17.

enable them to give themselves wholly to this very thing. It is theirs, by their attendance on sacred institutions to encourage the labours, by their prayers to aid the exertions, and with their charity to cover the imperfections, of those who are set as shepherds of the flock. In a word, they should be of one heart and one mind; and though they discountenance the promiscuous exercise of those functions, which reason, Scripture, and the practice of primitive Christians teach us, should be confined to a distinct and authorized Order of men, they should, nevertheless, be active in the cause of their Redeemer, by "letting their light so shine before men, that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father which is in heaven^o." Happy state! if ministers and people thus, in their distinct spheres, co-operated with each other! Happy state! if men thus hearkened to the solemn admonition, "stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein^p." Verily, we might then expect once more to realize that perfect condition of the visible Church, of which, as it existed in the days of Apostolic purity, the pencil of inspiration hath left us the picture. They, who "gladly received the word were baptized," and with one heart and one soul, "they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers^q."

Thus have I set before you the fitness and utility of established rites and ordinances in religion; the consequent necessity of a distinct and authorized Order of men, for the administration of them; and some of the obligations, which these truths devolve upon Ministers and people. What remains, but that we, my brethren, Clergy and Laity of the Episcopal

^o Matt. v. 16.

^p Jer. vi. 16.

^q Acts ii. 41, 42.

Church, should give to these considerations a practical effect? With our high privileges, correspondent duties are connected. It has pleased God to grant us our Christian vocation in a Church, whose rites and ordinances are of primitive origin, and the authority of whose ministry has never been questioned. Amongst a people, taking their position upon such elevated ground, and surrounded by so many advantages, it might justly be expected that Christianity would be seen in the full glory of its nature, and happiest influence of its power. Has this been the case? Are we conspicuously, a wise and pious, a devout and charitable people? During the rest which the Churches in this land have been permitted to enjoy, have they been found walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, and are they multiplied?

As parts of the Christian community, there is upon us a solemn and weighty responsibility. We have in our hands treasures of unspeakable importance to our country and posterity. I know not that there is promised to any people, a continuance of the Gospel among them, any longer than its authority is revered, and its institutions observed. Look at the regions which were first visited by the beams of the Sun of righteousness. What do we behold? Alas! the Turkish mosque now occupies the place of the Christian temple, and deluded Mussulmen now mumble their absurdities, where once the Ministers of the Redeemer of the world preached the glad tidings of peace! What has been the cause of this melancholy change? In some places, the Christians were luke-warm; in others, they were dissolute. In some Churches, the Ministers of the Gospel were negligent, or depraved; in others, its doctrines were corrupted, and its ordinances polluted. And should we fall into a similar

degeneracy, should we corrupt the faith, debase the ministry, neglect the ordinances, and trample upon the principles of our holy religion; what assurance have we, that the golden candlesticks will not be taken away, and our country, in time, instead of rejoicing in the light they once benignly shed, be left like unhappy Asia to the darkness, vices, and horrors, of spiritual night? It is a solemn consideration! On our conduct may depend the religious advantages of our posterity. We may be instrumental, by our zeal and fidelity, in preserving to our country, even for successive generations, the precious blessings of the Gospel; or by our coldness, corruptions, and depravity, may provoke the Almighty to take them away. My hearers, be induced by a regard for the souls of others, as well as by concern for your own, to cherish for the Church and its institutions, a holy affection and respect. To render us faithful in our several spheres, let us remember, that it is but a little while we shall have it in our power, to be thus useful in the cause of truth. Fast roll the hours that are bearing us to the tomb. On rapid, though noiseless feet the day is approaching, when the opportunity of promoting the interests of our Redeemer, will have passed away. Let us “work the works of Him that sent us, while it is day^r.” Let us shelter the fountains by which the shepherds have pitched their tents. Let us seek the peace and prosperity of the Church, and by our individual and joint exertions endeavour that the whole “building fitly framed together,” “and compacted by that which every joint supplieth,” may grow up into a durable and extensive temple unto the Lord^s. Then will the Holy Spirit dwell amongst us. Then will the Son of man walk

^r John ix. 4.

^s Eph. ii. 21. and iv. 16.

in the midst of us. And when the militancy of the Church is accomplished, we shall be taken to the triumphant company, which shall eternally surround the throne of heaven, clothed with white robes, and having palms in their hands. Thither, O adorable Redeemer, vouchsafe to bring us! There, when Thou comest unto judgment, make all Thy saints partakers of Thy glory. But especially, O Christ, enable us thy ministering servants to say to Thee in that day, without any abatement of our joy, Behold, here are we and the people whom Thou hast given us!

SERMON IV.



ON BAPTISM.



ACTS xxii. 16.

And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

HAVING, in a former discourse, set before you the necessity and utility of Ordinances in religion, I come now to treat of the first Christian sacrament, Baptism. In approaching this ordinance, I am struck, brethren, by one thing; that under a form so simple, as almost to want hold upon attention, are contained the sublimest truths, and most important interests. There is little in it that meets the eye; little that excites curiosity, engages investigation, or produces astonishment; and yet, Baptism is the most solemn, and momentous transaction respecting individuals, that takes place upon our globe. In this there is an analogy with the other works of God; whose peculiar character it is, to produce the most important effects by the fewest causes, the sublimest results by the simplest operations.

Simple, however, as is this ordinance in its form, and great as is its significance, there is no subject upon which more indefinite opinions prevail, or more erroneous ones have been propagated. There are many, who consider it as nothing more than a decent formality of the Christian world. Others view it as

of so tremendous and exclusive a nature, that a large part of our race, and that the most innocent part, are incapable of receiving it. Others seem to think it the mysterious charm which does all that needs to be done for their salvation, leaving them to advance towards heaven on the wings of inconsideration, through the polluted paths of vice and folly. And of those upon whom the ordinance hath been bestowed, the number, it is to be feared, is comparatively small, who preserve an adequate sense of the magnitude of the benefits it conveys to them, or of the sacredness of the obligation it devolves upon them.

On these accounts, you perceive, that neither to an uninteresting, nor unprofitable subject, is your attention invited. Christians, surely, should understand the first rite of Christianity. And it is to Christians I speak. To others, indeed, who reject the Gospel, disquisitions upon its sacraments will not have much interest, and can be of little utility. In endeavouring to explain to you this ordinance of our religion, I purpose to adopt the simplest arrangement, and to use the most unadorned illustrations. You will not here look for flowers of rhetoric, nor for flights of eloquence, but, as becomes the subject, for truth in its plainest form. This, then, is the method. We will consider why mankind should be baptized; when they should be baptized; how they should be baptized; and where they should be baptized. Under these inquiries may be comprehended all, which it is important for you to know, concerning this leading ordinance of the Gospel.

We are first to consider, Why mankind should be baptized. And the reasons to be adduced shall be drawn from the authority of the Institutor, and the benefits to be derived from the institution; the one involving its nature, the other its obligation.

All positive institutions rest upon the authority of him by whom they are ordained. The highest authority in the Christian world is that of Christ. It is not left optional with us, whether we will do what He has commanded, or not, if we would enjoy His favour. Now baptism is the ordinance which He hath appointed for the purposes, to which He hath consecrated it. “Go ye,” said He to His eleven disciples, and in them to their successors unto the end of the world, “Go ye, and teach,” or disciple “all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost^a.” Do you ask, whether He meant to have this rite considered as of *essential* importance, where the other graces and virtues of Christianity are not wanting? Hear Him declaring to the stewards of His mysteries, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved^b.” Hear them proclaiming to the anxious multitude inquiring what they should do, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost^c.” Do you ask whether the ordinance may not be dispensed with, where it may be had, but is to be considered as generally necessary to salvation? Hear Him saying to the wavering Nicodemus, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God^d.” If, then, there be any respect for the authority of God; nay, if we may not claim His mercies in any other way than that, in which He chooses to bestow them; this ordinance is of the highest and most solemn obligation, in every case, where there are proper subjects of it. If children are among the proper subjects of it, as we shall by and by show that they are, what Chris-

^a Matt. xxviii. 19.

^b Mark xvi. 16.

^c Acts ii. 38.

^d John iii. 5.

tian parent can safely neglect to procure it for his offspring? And what adult, who believes the Scriptures, and desires to partake of the salvation that is in Christ, can allow himself to remain unbaptized? That it is the will of the Being, who is our God and Guide, our Redeemer and Sanctifier, from whom, alone, we can receive pardon of our sins and eternal life; is a sufficient reason why this ordinance should be observed, even if we knew not its utility, and there were no other considerations to entitle it to our devout regard.

But we shall better understand this ordinance, its use and importance will be seen in a strong light, if we proceed from the authority of the Institutor, to the benefits to be derived from the institution. And what are these? It does nothing less than seal to us, visibly, the conveyance on the part of God, of all the infinite treasures of the Gospel; its precious salvation; its enlivening promises; its glorious privileges; its blessed hopes.

Mankind are, 'by nature, born in sin and the children of wrath.' Under the holy law of God they cannot live. But it hath pleased their compassionate Creator, in consideration of His own tender mercy, and of the mediation for them by His beloved Son, to place them under a new and lenient covenant of grace; in which are provided, a covering for their sins, sanctification for their spirits, and redemption from death to everlasting life. This covenant is most mercifully adapted to their situation since the Fall. Without it their condition had been hopeless; in the sight of the Almighty no flesh living could have been justified. With a condescension as great as the mercy, God was pleased, when He communicated this covenant to His faithful servant Abraham, to adapt the dispensation of it to the nature of man. He stipulated with His creature,

and for his better assurance, added signs to His word. He gave him circumcision to be to him a sensible and significant seal of the righteousness which is by faith ; a visible and sure token, pledge and remembrancer, of the mercies and promises to which he had adopted him. When the ever-blessed Mediator of this new covenant in the fulness of time appeared in the flesh ; that He might conform all things to the tender character of the dispensation by Him, He substituted, instead of that painful rite, the easier and not less significant ordinance of baptism. And this is now to us, what circumcision was to God's ancient people, a token and means of our birth to new life ; a seal of the pardoning mercy and covenanted favour of God ; and a pledge of salvation unto eternal life, if we forfeit not, by a neglect of the condition of the covenant, our title to the inheritance. Whoever, therefore, would have an interest assured to him, in that covenant of grace under which, alone, mankind can hope for forgiveness and immortality, it is needful he should be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

That you may the better apprehend the greatness of the benefits which baptism confers upon us, by bringing us under the covenant of grace, let us descend to a more particular consideration of some of the leading ones ; adducing, as we pass, the evidences from Scripture of their certainty ; and from the articles and liturgy of our Church, that they are embraced in our belief. In the choice and order of them, we will be guided by the Church ; than whom, upon this subject, we can have no better human instructor. She teacheth us that in baptism we are made ' members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.'

We are by baptism made members of Christ ; that is, united to Him ; made parts of the body of which

He is the Head, and so long as we continue living members of the same, to partake of His life, of His care, and of His glory. For, saith the Apostle, “the Church is His body^e ;” and ‘Baptism,’ as it is expressed with much precision in the 27th Article, ‘is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not christened ; but it is also a sign of regeneration, or new birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive baptism rightly, are grafted into the Church.’

In this union with the Church, we become entitled to its instruction and prayers, to a participation of that light, with which God hath illumined it ; to access to the fountains of living water which are set open to the members of it ; to the bread of life which is provided for our sustenance at its holy table, and to the aids of the Spirit which proceedeth from the Father and the Son. For from the head all the body hath nourishment ministered, and being knit together by joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God^f. It is on account of the inestimable value of this union with Christ, that we are instructed, whenever baptism is conferred upon any one, ‘with one accord’ to give thanks to Almighty God, ‘that it hath pleased Him to regenerate’ such person, ‘and graft him into the body of Christ’s Church.’

Again. By Baptism we are made, in a peculiar manner, children of God. Man was by nature the offspring of the Almighty. But by the Fall, he lost his resemblance to his Maker, and forfeited all claim to His favour. Yet God, in the greatness of His mercy and pity, hath devised a way of adopting him again to Himself, and restoring unto him his

^e Eph. i. 22, 23.

^f Col. ii. 19.

forfeited possessions. By the precious blood of His Son, he is freed from the guilt, and by the purifying influences of His Spirit, is cleansed from the dominion of sin; and in baptism receives, as it were, in symbol, this inestimable grace, being washed in its waters from the stain of the original transgression, and all past offences, and blessed with the gift of the Holy Ghost. “Arise,” said Ananias to the converted Paul, “and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord^ε.” “Repent,” said St. Peter, “and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost^h.” “Because ye are sons,” saith the great Apostle of the Gentiles, “God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Fatherⁱ.” Pardoning their sins, and renewing them by the Holy Ghost, the Almighty in this ordinance formally receives them anew into His family, and conveys to them visibly, as by a deed authenticated with His seal, a provisional title to all the privileges and expectations, which He hath revealed, as belonging to the children of adoption. By baptism, says the Article of the Church upon the subject, ‘the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed^k.’

‘I suppose,’ says the profoundly learned and eminently pious Mede, ‘that in the baptism of our Saviour the mystery of all our baptisms was visibly acted, and that God says to every one, truly baptized, as He said to Him, (in a proportionable sense) Thou art My son, in whom I am well pleased.’

But this leads me to observe, further, that in this

^ε Acts xxii. 16.

^h Acts ii. 38.

ⁱ Gal. iv. 6.

^k Twenty-seventh Article of the Church of England.

ordinance we are made inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. It is the title and pledge, to those who truly receive it, of immortality and eternal life. God, as it were, puts into our hands the charter of our interests in a better world, sealed with His sacramental seal; that we may be assured of the immutability of His counsel, and “have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us¹” in the Gospel. Thus, according to the Scripture, we are made, not only children, but also, “heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ^m.” Being “buried with Him in baptismⁿ,” and therein also risen with Him, we are “begotten by His resurrection unto a lively hope, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us^o.”

In short, in the gracious covenant that is in Christ Jesus, are provided for mankind, the pardon of their sins, the promise of God’s Spirit and eternal life. In the ordinance which He hath most graciously appointed for the purpose, God meets us with this covenant, He puts it into our hands and says, Be faithful to the conditions therein contained, and I add My oath to My word, that the mercies thereof shall never fail.

There are two objections to what has been said, which may arise in your minds; but which, it is incumbent upon you, if you would not be spoiled through philosophy and vain deceit, instantly to repel. The first reproaches the simplicity of the ordinance. Can it be, it may be asked, can it be, that on the simple ceremony of washing with water, so great and important interests depend? Ah, my hearers, dare not to question the sufficiency of the

¹ Heb. vi. 18.

ⁿ Col. ii. 12.

^m Rom. viii. 17.

^o 1 Pct. i. 3, 4.

means, which the Almighty hath chosen, for the accomplishment of any of His purposes. Reverence, humbly, the institutions of God; and allow not yourselves to be drawn to doubt, that He will render them effectual to the ends, for which He hath ordained them. The objection proceeds from not considering, that where the word and power of God are engaged, the result does not depend upon human perception of the efficacy of the means. Cannot He, whose healing power rendered the waters of Jordan effectual, by the word of His servant, to recover the Syrian from his leprosy, accompany the waters of baptism by the power of His grace, and render them effectual, to cleanse His redeemed from the guilt and consequences of sin? Cannot He, who at the baptism of His beloved Son, caused the Spirit to descend like a dove and rest upon Him, in every administration of baptism, cause the same Spirit, in as significant character, though not in visible form, to descend upon the souls of those, whom He is receiving to the adoption of sons? What, though no cloud overshadow them, and no voice be heard from the cloud, cannot He, who has as easy access to the spirits, as to the bodies, of men, in a still majesty move upon the chaos of their affections, and in due time, restore order and harmony and beauty to their nature? To those, who make the objection, we would give the reasonable reply of Naaman's servants to their cavilling lord, "If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean ^P."

But there is another objection of a more melancholy aspect. It reproaches the consequences of this ordinance. How is it possible, it may be

^P 2 Kings v. 13.

asked, if baptism is thus efficacious, that so many who have received it, are destitute of all faith, and live in trespasses and sins? We are obliged to concede the truth of the afflicting fact; but this, with some qualifications. There are persons, (and blessed be God, the number of them is not small,) in whom the seeds, which were sown in the infancy of their new life, after having been choked for years by weeds, which have had their growth and withered, do spring up and produce their proper fruits, holiness and everlasting life. This is, doubtless, many times the result of the mercies, which were sealed to them in baptism; for though man may depart from his stipulations, “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance¹.” It must, however, be confessed, that there are many who have tasted of the heavenly gift, and been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, that seem to fall away, and go on still in iniquity, and die, as well as live, without God or holiness. But this only teaches, that there is nothing irresistible in the moral operations of God; that the covenant of His grace and mercy in Christ Jesus, is conditional; and that in the performance of the conditions, we are left perfectly free. Will it be said, that on such persons remains the burthen of the original guilt of their nature? No. From this, in their baptism, they were entirely delivered; they perish by their own transgressions. Will it be said, that to them the Holy Spirit was not given? No. It hath moved many times in the heart of every one of them. It hath often called to them, and in a tone of anxious concern, “This is the way, walk ye in it²,” when they have turned to the right hand, and when they have turned to the left. But its movements they have stifled; to its voice they

¹ Rom. xi. 29.

² Is. xxx. 21.

have been “like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ears^s ;” they have resisted and grieved it, and turned it away. Will it be said then, that for them there was proffered no glorious inheritance? No. Heaven was within their reach. And it is this, which, in the day of retribution, will aggravate their condemnation, and vindicate the justice of their Judge, that when a title to the joys and honours of God’s kingdom was put into their hands, they preferred the dominion and pleasures of sin. The objection does not affect the doctrine which has been delivered, concerning this important ordinance. It teaches us, rather, when God hath in Baptism lifted us from the mire, “and set our feet upon the rock, and ordered our goings^t,” to take heed lest we fall^u. Whatever in the covenant which is signed and sealed by this rite, our merciful Creator hath vouchsafed to promise, ‘He for His part will most surely keep and perform.’ But if, when He hath set open the prison in which we were captive, and broken the fetters with which we were bound, and bidden us go forth to the joys of freedom, and the light of day, any prefer to remain in their prison, or go forth to such life as must bring them thither again, does it set at nought the acts of the Almighty; if, persisting in their perverseness, they die in the pit, after their bread has failed? The case of such was foreseen by the Spirit of God; and it is by a humbling figure, that He hath illustrated their state. “It is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that washed to her wallowing in the mire^x.”

The next inquiry in the order of treating this subject is, When mankind should be baptized? in

^s Psalm lviii. 4.

^u 1 Cor. x. 12.

^t Psalm xlii. 2.

^x 2 Pet. ii. 22.

which is embraced the question concerning infant baptism. But I must defer this inquiry to another opportunity. Meanwhile, my Christian hearers, who in your infancy or adult state have been admitted to baptism, consider soberly, how unspeakable are the blessings, how momentous the interests, how solemn the duties, which were involved in that transaction.

Under the Captain of our salvation, we have been delivered from the bondage of sin. In the waters of baptism, we have passed through the sea. This probationary life is the wilderness before us. The grave is as the river between us, and our inheritance. Heaven is the Canaan of our rest and felicity. While we sojourn in the wilderness, we shall encounter difficulties, be surrounded with temptations, and many times be in danger of having our faith fail. If we are entangled in these dangers, and by these trials are overcome, we shall not enter into the rest which remaineth for the people of God. But have faith in Him; resist the temptations to murmur, or to doubt; avoid the sins, which on every side beset you; bear up patiently under your privations and sorrows, follow stedfastly the steps of your Leader, and joy unspeakable awaits you in the world to come.

SERMON V.



ON BAPTISM.



ST. MARK X. 14.

Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not.

IN a former discourse we have considered, why mankind should be baptized; and have adduced the reasons of it from the authority of the Institutor, God in Christ, and from the benefits received in the institution. Under this latter head, we have shown, that it doth nothing less than seal to us, visibly, on the part of God, the conveyance of all the infinite treasures of His Gospel; its precious redemption; its merciful conditions; its enlivening promises; its glorious privileges; its blessed hopes: particularly that in it 'we are made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.' And let me here add, before I proceed further, that this high view of the importance of baptism is authorized; this account of its interesting nature confirmed, by the language of the first Christian writers, who style it, with impressive eloquence, the sacrament of absolution, the regeneration of the soul, the robe of light, the communication of the passion and resurrection of Christ, the garment of immortality, the seal of God.

If such be the importance of this ordinance, it becomes an interesting inquiry, when mankind should

be baptized? which was the second thing proposed in the order of treating this subject. And what Christian parent, that looks upon his children, and considers their exposures in this life, and their liability to be snatched away by death, is not ready to meet me with his little ones, at the threshold of the inquiry, and say, May I not obtain for these this blessed initiation into the school of Christ; this remission of sin, and protection of the Holy Spirit; this adoption by a new birth into the family and favour of God; this title and pledge of eternal life? Yes, Christian parents, this is not only your privilege, but your duty. The Church teaches you not to doubt, that our heavenly Father favourably alloweth the charitable work of bringing infants to His holy baptism; and instructs her ministers, in every parish, to ‘admonish the people, that they defer not the baptism of their children longer, than the first or second Sunday next after their birth, or other holy-day falling between, unless upon a great and reasonable cause.’

In answer then to the inquiry, when mankind should be baptized? we say, in the first place, as soon after they are born as it can conveniently be done. But there are those, who, for some cause or other, have not been so happy as to receive baptism in their infancy. To their case we shall, in the second place, give a separate consideration.

Obvious upon the first reflection it is, that benefits, so unspeakably momentous as those conferred in baptism have been shewn to be, should be secured to every human person, as soon as it can with propriety be done. Now, if there be nothing in the nature of the thing; nor in the instructions of Christ; nor in what we know of the practice of the Apostles and primitive Christians, to exclude infants from this ordinance; but on the contrary, many reasons and

strong evidences, that from the beginning they were admitted to a participation of it; and, moreover, difficulties, which are awful and insuperable, attend any other supposition, who will not perceive that it is the right and duty, the privilege and obligation of every Christian, to claim early for his offspring the benefits of this sacrament? These several points I hope, my hearers, through the assistance of God, to establish to your satisfaction.

We are first to inquire, if there be any reason arising from the nature of the thing to exclude children from this important ordinance? Now it is to be remembered, that in baptism, the subject of it is altogether a recipient of favours. He does nothing in the act to merit the gifts he receives. There are, indeed, qualities requisite to bring them into a condition for the application of these favours; but this requisition supposes him in a state, in which these qualities are needed and attainable. If his state be such, as not to admit of their existence, they cannot be necessary; and it would be unreasonable to suppose that God, in such cases, requires them, or will withhold those benefits of the ordinance, which are absolute and applicable, on account of the absence of qualities, for which, in fact, there was no place. God hath graciously given to mankind in the Gospel, a charter of redemption and eternal life. He hath, too, given them baptism, to be, as it were, His visible seal of that charter, a means of enabling them to realize its grace, ‘and a pledge to assure them thereof.’ Repentance and faith are, indeed, required of adult persons, before they are received to baptism; and with great fitness: for it could neither honour God, nor benefit themselves, to be baptized into that, which they believed to be false, or to seek remission of sins which they were willing to retain. But this requisition supposes in the very

making of it, that they, of whom it is made, have occasion and power to repent, and opportunity and capacity to believe. And I cannot see how, without instructions to that effect, it can be inferred from such exactions of such persons, that others, who are incapable of the qualities required, are cut off, on that account, from the mercies of the covenant, as far as they are capable of them, or from the benefits of its use. Repentance was a condition of the baptism which John preached. Our blessed Lord knew no sin, and therefore could exercise no repentance. Yet for the sake of other advantages appertaining to the act, Jesus was baptized of John in Jordan. Now of active faith infants are incapable. And unless we suppose they may, at this initiation into the school of Christ, have faith, as it were, in the seed; which if it be not suffered to perish, will spring up in due time, and produce fruit; I do not know how they can have any faith. Having, moreover, committed no actual sin, they are not capable of repentance. The stain of the original transgression is their misfortune, not their crime. And surely, the innocence which they bring to the waters of baptism, cannot render them less acceptable to God, than the most penitent sinner, for actual transgressions, is rendered by his repentance. They are, therefore, to be baptized for those advantages of baptism which they need, and of which they are susceptible. And do they not need to be relieved from the doom of the original transgression, to be adopted anew into the family of God, and to have the renewing influences of His Holy Spirit? That repentance, faith, and obedience, which afterwards become necessary, and by which the Christian life is not only begun, but continued and perfected; may, as will presently appear, be stipulated for them, in their unknowing and helpless state, by

those, whom God has made the guardians of their interests.

Shall I be told, that under the Gospel dispensation, repentance and faith are qualifications, without which there can be enjoyed no spiritual blessing? Look back to the conduct of our Redeemer. In the days of His flesh, “they brought young children to Christ, that He should touch them. And He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them^a.” What but spiritual blessings could our poor and despised Lord have then bestowed? And if, by the imposition of His hands, they could receive spiritual blessing, why not by the application to them of those waters of baptism, by His ministers, which He hath ordained as the means of conveying His grace, and the ‘pledge to assure us thereof.’

Shall I be told, that baptism is, as we have stated, the seal of a covenant; and that children are incapable of entering into a covenant? I ask, whether it is not the right, nay, I go further and say, the duty of every parent, to make, in behalf of his yet unconscious child, such temporal contracts as will be for its advantage? how much rather, then, such contracts, as will be for its spiritual and eternal benefit; especially if the good contracted for, and the conditions stipulated be such, as it would have been, not only his interest, but his duty, to have pursued, whether any covenant binding him thereto had been made for him or not? But the objection, that children are incapable of entering into covenant, is overturned by sacred fact and the authority of God. “Ye stand this day,” said Moses to the people of Israel in the plains of Moab, “ye stand this day, all of you before the Lord your God, your

^a Mark x. 13. 16.

little ones and your wives, that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into His oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day, that He may establish thee to day for a people unto Himself^b." And above all this, was not circumcision the seal of a covenant? Was it not the seal of a covenant which involved spiritual blessings, and religious obligations? Was it not a covenant, the same in substance with that in which we rejoice, having Christ for its Mediator, and for its end, the acceptance of the righteousness which is by faith? Yet, were not children subjects of the seal of this covenant? Was it not the command of God to the parent, to give to his infant offspring this seal, and His solemn declaration that the man child, who had not received it, should be cut off from his people^c?

What reasons, then, arise from the nature of the thing, to exclude infants from the baptism of the Gospel? Surely, it is a consistent and most excellent charity; surely it is not only the right but the duty of those, whom Providence has made the guardians of the welfare of any infant, to think and act for him in those important concerns, in which he is unable to think, or act for himself; and, especially, to obtain for him the unspeakable benefits of the Christian baptism, by promising those things in his name, which, unless they disbelieve the Christian religion, they must know, such infant, when he comes to age, would, whether they had stipulated for him or not, be bound to perform.

I have dwelt thus long, on the difficulties arising from the nature of the thing, because these are most frequently urged. You have seen that they are without foundation. Is there then, secondly, any

^b Deut. xxix. 10—13.

^c Gen. xvii. 14.

reason arising out of the instructions of Christ upon the subject, to exclude infants from His holy baptism? Let us advert to the commission which, when about to return to the Father, He left with His Apostles. "Go ye and make disciples in all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost^d." Children are a part, and no small part, of every nation. They are a part, for the welfare of which, God, in the transactions concerning Nineveh, hath declared Himself to be tenderly careful. They are a part, of which Jesus always manifested Himself to be a fond and zealous friend. Unless then, there were any customs, or circumstances, prevailing at the time, to have led them to the opinion; what was there in the instructions given to His Apostles, to induce them to suppose, that children might not be received as pupils to be taught of Him, and have in this ordinance the seal and means of His grace? Were there, then, any such customs or circumstances? On the contrary, there were prevalent ideas and usages, which sufficiently explain, why our Lord gave no express instructions upon the point; and must have left His Apostles without such instructions to infer, that to infants as well as adults, the sign of the covenant was to be given. It was matter of notoriety to them, that circumcision, which this rite superseded, was conferred generally upon its subjects in childhood. And, moreover, baptism was not to the Apostles a new ceremony. The Jews, from the first sanctification of their ancestors by water, had used it. And to whom were they in the habit of applying it? Not only to every adult proselyte, but to all his children; and, as would appear from their best writers, to their own

^d Matt. xxviii. 19.

infant offspring. Certain, however, it is, that they received no convert to their religion, without washing him with water; that they baptized, at the same time, all his offspring; and that they considered them, after the application of this ordinance, as new born, and the ordinance as the instrument of their regeneration. This explains our Lord's surprise, that Nicodemus, "a master of Israel," understood Him not, when He said, in allusion to His holy baptism, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God^e." This was probably the reason, which induced our blessed Lord, who seems to have avoided doing any unnecessary violence to the customs of His nation, to adopt the washing with water to be the token of initiation into His Church. It is this alone, which can satisfactorily explain to us, why He did not deem it necessary, to give any express instructions upon this important question. Yea, this is sufficient to induce us to believe, that as no exceptions were made in the command to baptize, the Apostles would naturally, I had almost said, unavoidably, be led to apply the ordinance to all such, as they had been accustomed to consider subjects of circumcision and of baptism.

This we shall find to have been actually the case, if we proceed to consider, thirdly, what we know of the Apostles' practice. There is no mention, upon record, of the reception, or rejection of children as such, in the administration of this ordinance, by the first Apostles of our Lord. To him, who knows that there was in their nation an established usage, this silence will afford a presumptive evidence, that they introduced no innovation. The silence of their enemies affords a similar presumption. When we consider the tenacity with which

^e John iii. 3.

men cleave to their religious rights, when they are invaded, and especially, the horror and indignation with which they would meet an attempt to deprive their offspring of religious blessings, to which they had been accustomed; it is a strong ground for presuming, that the first Christians did not cut off children from such benefits as they were used to receive, that the adversaries of the Gospel, who were sufficiently eager to disparage it in the estimation of the populace, did never charge it with what would have been a very popular objection, the diminishing of the privileges and blessings, which had before been enjoyed by their children.

But though we have no positive record; as indeed, if the thing were done by no new command, but in conformity with a prevalent usage, we should expect none; yet have we strong intimations, and these, such as upon the supposition are most naturally given, that the Apostles received children into the Church by this ordinance of their Lord. St. Peter exhorted the multitude to be baptized, because “the promise was, unto them and to their children^f,” and if the children were heirs of the promise, is it probable he refused to them the seal; especially, when he knew that the ancient sign of it was given to the little ones, and had heard his Lord say, “that of such was the kingdom of God^g?” All the members of a family also, in more instances than one, received this ordinance, on the conversion of a parent, by the Apostles’ hands. Of the pious woman of Thyatira, it is recorded, that when the preaching of Paul brought her to the knowledge of the truth, “she was baptized, and her household^h.” And the astonished Jailor, who was converted at midnight, by a miracle, “was straightway

Acts ii. 39.

g Mark x. 14.

h Acts xvi. 15.

baptized," we are told, " he and all his ⁱ." Under this head it is to be added, that St. Paul, in his epistle to the Corinthians, tells them, as an advantage of a believing parent's abiding with an unbelieving one, that thereby their children became " holy ^k;" that is, according to the meaning of the phrase in the sacred dialect, and particularly in the writings of the same Apostle, were devoted to God, which could only be done by baptism. And accordingly, the most pious commentators of the first ages, and the most learned ones of modern times, in interpreting this singular passage, consider it as a declaration that, by the right and influence of the pious parent, the children were baptized.

Still, it may be, you ask for more certain demonstration of the Apostolic practice. It is to be obtained ; for we have full and unequivocal testimonies how they conducted themselves, who succeeded the Apostles, and from them derived their instructions. If it would not be considered as an affected display of learning, unbecoming this holy place, I might adduce to you Justin Martyr, who lived only forty years after the age of the Apostles, testifying, that in his time, there were many persons living, sixty and seventy years old, who were regenerated and made disciples of Christ, in their infancy. I might adduce a work of the same age with this writer, in which it is stated, that children are allowed to enjoy the good things that come by baptism, by the faith of them that bring them to the ordinance. I might adduce to you Irenæus, who lived among those that had seen the Apostles, and received his instruction under Polycarp, the venerable disciple of St. John; saying, that the Redeemer makes infants holy, and saves infants and little ones, and children and youths,

ⁱ Acts xvi. 33.

^k 1 Cor. vii. 14.

and elder persons, all who, through Him, are born anew; or baptized, unto God. I might adduce, not long after him, the learned Tertullian, representing the children of a Christian, as sanctified by the discipline of the institution, whereby it is manifest, from the context, he intended baptism. I might adduce to you, from the next age, the renowned Origen of Tyre, whose father and grandfather were Christians, and who demands, as concerning a thing which had always been established, why, if they are not encumbered with original sin, infants are baptized? nay, and declares, that the Church had received from the Apostles a tradition, to give baptism to little ones; for they, says he, to whom the divine mysteries were committed, knew, that there is in all persons the natural pollution of sin, which must be removed by water and the Spirit. Not far after him, I might adduce to you the zealous Cyprian, relating, that in his time a question was started, not whether baptism might be administered to infants, but whether it should not be deferred till the eighth day. This most credible witness would testify to you, that he sat in a convention of sixty-six bishops, who were unanimously of opinion, that from baptism and the grace of God, who is benignant to all, none ought by us to be prohibited, and as this is to be observed with respect to all, so, especially, is it to be observed and retained with respect to infants, and those who are just born, who by their tears with which they begin the world, might in reason obtain more from our help, and the Divine mercy. In the fourth century, I might adduce Gregory Nazianzen, replying in an oration upon the subject, to the question, whether children, who can neither know the loss, nor be sensible of the grace of this ordinance, should be baptized; that it is better for them to be sanctified, when they have no sense of it, than that

they should die unsealed. I might go on to adduce to you witnesses, increasing with the years, till I brought you to the active and elaborate Augustin, who, after declaring that the baptism of infants rests upon the authority of the universal Church, delivered by the Lord, and by the Apostles, says, 'Let no man whisper to us other doctrines: this the Church hath always had; this it hath received upon the faith of the predecessors; this it keeps perseveringly to the end.'

Such, my brethren, are the grounds upon which we maintain the doctrine of the Church, that baptism is to be administered as soon after birth, as it can conveniently be done. They are grounds which she can never leave. Upon any other, she is surrounded with difficulties, awful and insuperable. Take from her the right of admitting your children to the benefits of baptism, and she must believe, that the tender and liberal dispensation of her Lord is less indulgent to them, than the rigorous dispensation of the law. She must believe, that the sweet innocence of the new-born babe is less acceptable to God, than the penitence of a hoary offender. She must believe, that while they who are mature are required to become as little children, before they can enter the kingdom of God, little children are excluded from being initiated into that kingdom, because they are such. Yea, she must stand by the graves of the infant offspring of her members, and have no covenanted assurance of their salvation and immortality. For if they are cut off from admission into the Church militant on earth, what certainty can she have, of their admission into the Church triumphant in heaven? She shrinks from the difficulties: and rejoices that the grounds are so clear, so strong, and so extensive, upon which she can perpetuate her Master's tender words, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not."

SERMON VI.



ON BAPTISM.



ACTS viii. 36, 37.

See, here is water ; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.

HAVING in a previous discourse shown at large, why mankind should be baptized, deducing from the authority of the Institutor, and the benefits of the institution, its solemn obligations and unspeakable importance, we, the last Lord's day, entered upon the second inquiry proposed, at the opening of these discourses, in the order of treating this subject, namely when they should be baptized? At the threshold of this inquiry, I could not forbear fancying myself met by the Christian parent, bringing with him his beloved children, and under the consciousness of their exposure in life, and liability to death, demanding of me eagerly, May I not obtain for these this blessed initiation into the school of Christ; this remission of sin, and protection of the Holy Spirit; this adoption by a new birth into the family and favour of God; this title and pledge of eternal life? Having shown, that there is nothing in the nature of the thing; nor in the instructions of Christ; nor in what we know of the practice of the Apostles and primitive Christians, to exclude infants from this ordinance; but that, on the contrary, there are many

reasons, and strong evidences for believing, that from the beginning they were admitted to a participation of it ; and moreover, that there are difficulties, which are awful and insuperable, attending any other supposition, we arrived at the conclusion, than which there is no doctrine of the Church established upon a broader basis, that it is not only the right, but also the duty, of every Christian parent, to obtain early for his offspring the benefits of this sacrament. After a very full investigation of the question, it appeared most clearly evident, in the first place, in answer to the inquiry when mankind should be baptized, that his ordinance should be administered, where sureties for the child can be found, as soon after birth as it can conveniently be done. As there are many persons, who, for some cause or other, have not been so happy as to receive baptism in their infancy, it was proposed to give to their case, in the second place, a separate consideration. An attention, as brief as it well may be, to the inquiry with respect to them, now asks your indulgence : and this, with some inferences from the interesting truths, to which the inquiry will have conducted us, shall close our observations upon the second part of the general division of the subject.

At the first promulgation of the Gospel, a large part of those, to whom the Apostles and Evangelists administered baptism were necessarily adults. From among the Jews and Gentiles, they came to the Church as doves to the windows ; and in admitting them, the ministers of the Church were wont to require those qualifications, which arose out of the nature of the thing, or were suggested to them, in the instructions of their Lord.

It is evident, the case of infants is very different from that of adults. The latter bring with them to the waters of baptism, as well the inherent corruption

of their nature, which is their misfortune, as actual sins, which are their crime, and from which God gives no remission but upon repentance. They bring also matured understandings, capable of hearing and weighing and embracing the Gospel; and God requires that they, to whom it is preached, should believe if they would be saved by it. They, moreover, are capable of making for themselves any stipulations which are necessary; and God in great wisdom and mercy, has annexed to the covenant of His grace conditions, to be fulfilled by the subjects of it, to which it is meet and right that they, who are of age to do it, should, when they are receiving the seal of the covenant, in their proper person, manifest their assent. It was, probably, with such persons in his view, that St. Peter said, “Baptism doth now save us, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God^a.”

It would seem, then, upon a very little reflection, that until they possess and are able to profess, “repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ^b,” persons of mature age should not receive Christian baptism. For, as we have already intimated, it can neither honour the Deity nor benefit themselves, to be baptized into a faith which they believe to be false, or to seek remission of sins which they are willing to retain. Accordingly, if we advert to the proceedings of the Apostles and primitive Christians, we shall find, that these qualifications were required, before admission to baptism, of all those in whom they could exist. When the multitude, upon the powerful preaching of St. Peter, were pricked at the heart, and demanded of him and the rest of the Apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” he replied

^a 1 Pet. iii. 21.

^b Acts xx. 21.

and said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost^c." And when the devout treasurer of the queen of Ethiopia, to whom Philip had showed, from the wonderful prophecies of Isaiah, that Jesus is the Son of God, said to the messenger of the Most High, "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" the holy Deacon answered, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest^d." Indeed, the necessity of these qualities seems implied in the commission to baptize, first given to the Apostles; for it is difficult to perceive, how any person can be made a disciple of Christ, who neither believes His authority as a teacher, nor desires His instructions and grace. On this necessity, arising from the nature of the thing, and the words of the commission, were founded those solemn renunciations and promises, which the Church hath required to be made, at every administration of baptism, from the earliest age to the present day. To renounce the Devil and every evil work, to believe the doctrines revealed by Christ, and to be obedient to the will of God, are conditions upon which the mercies of the Gospel are to be inherited, and without specifying them, and requiring from every adult candidate for baptism a promise to observe them, I know not that the seal of the conveyance of those mercies, was ever in the earlier ages of Christianity permitted to be given. These renunciations and promises are retained by our Church in the baptismal office; and she hath expressed her sense of the necessity of the substance of them, when to the question, 'What is required of persons to be baptized?' she replies in her Catechism, 'Repent-

^c Acts ii. 37, 38.

^d Acts viii. 36, 37.

ance, whereby they forsake sin; and faith, whereby they stedfastly believe the promises of God made to them in that sacrament.'

But though without repentance and faith, there is no baptism for those who are capable of repenting and believing, yet where these qualifications are possessed, the ordinance should not be delayed. As soon as the heart is turned from sin unto God, and unto Jesus Christ whom He hath sent, and the mind is sufficiently instructed in the great doctrines of His Gospel, to know what it embraces; the person should hasten to this holy fount, that in its waters he may 'die from sin and rise again unto righteousness;' prepared for the holy and exalted duties, and invested with all the glorious privileges, and immortal hopes unto which, by this new birth, the children of adoption are begotten. It is not necessary, I conceive, that he should tarry till the Christian life is perfected in him. It is sufficient that he is prepared and ready to begin it. There are many truths to be learned, and many excellencies to be acquired, in the teaching which follows the ordinance, yea, even unto the end of the Christian's career. In the Apostolic Church, the interval was not long between conversion and baptism. "Why tarriest thou?" said Ananias to the newly converted Paul: "Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord^e." The pious treasurer of Candace, who came from far to Jerusalem to worship, and, as he returned, read in his chariot the word of God, had but just become acquainted with the wonderful character, and sufferings, and mediation of our Redeemer, when he desired to be sealed as one of His; and going down with Philip into the water, received, in baptism, the

^e Acts xxii. 16.

token and pledge of the mercies that are in Christ Jesus^f. And though in subsequent ages, a discipline was assigned to candidates for the ordinance, this was rather a matter of prudence than necessity; as appears from the considerations, that the term of preparation was of various duration in different places, and that the ordinance was immediately administered upon a profession of faith and penitence, whenever the circumstances of the case required it. When Arintheus, a Roman consul, was, on his sick bed, converted to Christianity by his pious wife, he was immediately baptized: and the sentiment is established among the earlier Christian writers, that unto those who are brought to the first principles of the truth, baptism, if they are in danger of death, should be immediately given, in hopes of the resurrection. It is at the entrance of the Christian life, when the soul has turned to its Creator, and is willing to be led by his Son to righteousness and peace, that God, if I may so speak, meets us with this animating and efficacious ordinance. And in this, He is seen the true Father of the returning prodigal. While yet he is a great way off, in his rags and poverty, the Father goes to meet him. He brings him to His house, the Church. He commands His servants, the ministers of His Church, to bring forth the best robe, the robe of His Son's righteousness, and, by baptism, to put it on His recovered child: at the same time they put, as it were, a ring, the signet of favour, the token of affection upon his hand, and shoes upon his feet, when they have washed them, that he may walk pleasantly in the paths of holiness. In the holy eucharist, the banquet of reconciliation and gladness is prepared for him; and the members of the family, whether mili-

^f Acts viii. 27—38.

tant on earth, or triumphant in heaven, partake of the Father's joy, that a child who was dead, is alive again, that one who was lost, is found^g.

We have now considered the question of infant baptism, and have shown, that children are not excluded from this important ordinance: but that it should be administered as soon after birth, as it can conveniently be done. We have also considered the case of those, who from any cause whatever, have not been so happy as to receive baptism in their infancy; and have shown, that they should obtain for themselves this ordinance, as soon as their hearts are turned from sin unto God, and they find themselves desirous to embrace the truths and partake of the mercies, which are revealed in Christ Jesus. These two inductions, are sufficient to satisfy the second inquiry upon this important subject, namely, When mankind should be baptized?

And in looking back upon them, some inferences press themselves upon my view, without a notice of which I cannot dismiss this head of my discourse.

In the first place—Parents! how great is your felicity in having for your offspring, the benefits of this sacred ordinance! How consoling, as that babe slumbers by your side, to know that from the guilt of the nature, in which it was born, it hath been washed in a fountain set open by God! How blissful, as its little mind begins to expand, to reflect, that it shall endure and expand for ever; having a charter of immortality sealed with the seal of God; and being destined, if it forfeit not its inheritance, to flourish among nobler beings in regions of eternal day! How happy, when thinking of the temptations and sorrows, to which it must be exposed in this evil world, to be able to plead for it with the

^g Luke xv. 24.

Father, the promise of His protecting Spirit; and to say, I have caused it to be entered in the school of our Redeemer, where, if I keep it there, and it be diligent, it shall find wisdom, and safety, and consolation! What a fund of joy, then, with respect to the present condition of his offspring, is this simple ordinance to the truly Christian parent!

But there is lifted up to me a countenance overspread with gloom. It seems to say, I had a child. I brought it to be washed in the waters of baptism. It was just beginning to learn its duty and to lisp its love. But death came. He tore from my arms my struggling babe. I shall see my child no more!—Afflicted mother! learn a new motive to rejoice in God your Saviour. Your child, in its baptism, had been washed from sin, and adopted of God; and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than its little spirit shall fail. Its lot is happy. It has escaped the hazards of a probationary life, in which, though it had been washed, it might have become again defiled; perhaps defiled beyond reclaiming, and thus, have forfeited its heavenly inheritance. A seraph now, it is the care of angels. Amidst the spirits of the just, it “follows the Lamb, whithersoever He goeth^h.” Be patient. Be holy. Be innocent and humble, like your child. And you shall one day find it in a situation—Oh! how shall I express its bliss? It will greet you with smiles, reposing on the bosom of its God.

Again. How tender is the care, how condescending the mercy, of our heavenly Father; that though by committing many actual sins, we have most grievously offended Him, He hath, for our encouragement, provided a visible seal, a sensible pledge, of His pardon and favour, if we will turn

^h Rev. xiv. 4.

unto Him and live! Penitent offender, in this laver of regeneration, "though your sins have been as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow; though they have been red like crimson, they shall be as woolⁱ." Hast thou been washed therein? Remember thy obligations. How shalt thou claim the love of the Almighty, if, having renounced the pollutions that are in the world, and promised to believe and do, what He hath commanded thee, thou again givest thyself up to work iniquity, and departest from the living God? Art thou yet unwashed with baptism? Come to the waters. Repent, and be baptized for the remission of sins. Dost thou fear, that thou art destitute of that faith and repentance which must be brought to the ordinance? Ah! remember that without the qualities which are necessary to fit thee for the Church upon earth, thou canst have no admission into the kingdom of heaven.

Once more. It is plain from what has been said, that infants are admitted to baptism, on the faith of those who bring them, and the stipulations which are made for their Christian education. How solemn, then, the responsibility which rests upon their parents and sponsors! The Church, indeed, is in some degree their guardian. And she does for them what she can. When she offers, in her Litany, the tender petition for young children, she has them in her thoughts. She has provided her catechism for their instruction, and commanded, very solemnly, her ministers to feed these lambs. In all the ministrations of the sanctuary, she furnishes means for their growth in grace, and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. But, for the better securing of their Christian education, she hath from

ⁱ Is. i. 18.

the beginning required Sponsors, at their baptism, to pledge themselves for the same. And to their arms she returns them, as soon as they have been washed, to be their peculiar charge, till, in Confirmation, they take upon themselves the promises and vows, which, when they were helpless and unconscious, the charity of their friends made in their behalf.

SERMON VII.



ON BAPTISM.



ST. MATTHEW xxviii. 19, 20.

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost : teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you : and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

SOME of you, my brethren, may remember, that in order to embrace all the interesting and important views of baptism, it was proposed, when we first turned our attention to this subject, to consider why mankind should be baptized, when they should be baptized, how they should be baptized, and where they should be baptized. To the first and second of these heads, we have given a very full consideration; a consideration, necessarily rendered long by the greatness of the consequences involved in the enquiries, and the investigations which were necessary to clear and satisfy them. We come, now, in the third place, to consider how baptism should be administered. And upon this head of discourse, I need not, in this audience, be very diffuse; but shall content myself with stating only such particulars, as will explain and vindicate our mode, and furnish us with an answer to give

to every man, who asketh, a reason of the practice of the Church, to which we belong.

We observe, first, that baptism is always to be administered with water. There is represented, in the ordinance, the purifying and sanctifying of the whole man, by the pardoning mercy of God, and the gracious influences of His Holy Spirit. Of this change, the action of water upon the body affords a most significant representation. This cleansing and refreshing element has indeed been used in all religions, to express in figure the state of purity, in which man, when he would have the love and favour of his Maker, must endeavour to be found. Ablution with water was a part of the Pagan's worship : and the Jew had his holy washings appointed by the Most High. With great propriety, therefore, and condescension to our nature, did the blessed Institutor of the Christian baptism consecrate this element, to be the emblem of His blood and Spirit to His Church ; these by their purifying, sanctifying, and invigorating influence, doing that to the spirit, which water, by its cleansing and refreshing power, does to the bodies of men. And as we cannot admit of baptism as valid, if administered with any *other* substance, neither can we conceive of any true, and sufficient baptism, without *this*. If the visions of men have led any to rely upon internal baptisms by the Word, or Spirit, to the neglect of the external rite, we have no such doctrine, in the Church of Christ. His declaration is, " Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God ^a." And when the devout Cornelius and his friends had been filled with faith and the Holy Ghost, the Apostle demands, " Can any man forbid water, that these

^a John iii. 5.

should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we ^b?"

But though water is indispensably necessary, in every Christian baptism; so much so, that no man, be his other religious attainments what they may, can without it be said, to have put on Christ, in the way of His appointment, yet the mode of applying the element, whether by immersion or affusion, seems not essential to the validity or efficacy of the sacrament. Had it been so, the Scriptures would not have been silent upon the subject. They leave us unable to gather, either from express instructions, or from the import of the terms used, or from analogous cases, or from recorded facts, that it is of essential consequence, or was of universal practice, to apply the waters of baptism, in either manner, to the exclusion of the other. It is highly probable, that under different circumstances each was used. And indeed, if no command upon the subject was given by our Lord, it would appear reasonable, upon reflection, that the certainty and efficacy of the ordinance, does not depend upon the quantity of water which is used: but that it is sufficient, that there be preserved in the mode, that emblematical representation of the inward and spiritual grace, for which the outward visible sign is chiefly instituted. The mode of affusion is generally practised in our Church; and the grace which is represented by the rite, is frequently expressed in Scripture, with manifest allusion to the cleansing, sanctifying, and blessing of beings and things under the law, by such phrases, as pouring water upon the subjects of it; sprinkling them with pure water; and shedding upon them that which they receive. In climates, indeed, in which total

^b Acts x. 47.

immersion in water would not be safe or pleasant, or would not be so consistent with decency and order, as another mode; or in which the cleansing power of water is daily applied to a part only of the body; it is evident, that the significance of the symbol is preserved with as great force, and with greater propriety, by the use of affusion or sprinkling in baptism, than of immersion.

But it may be asked, Does not the term, by which this ordinance is named, intimate the necessity of immersion? I answer, no. The passages are numerous in the sacred volume, in which partial washings and applications of water, or blood, by sprinkling, are expressed in the original language by the word, from which we derive the term baptism. Thus when St. Paul in his epistle to the Hebrews, speaking of the ceremonial law, says, it “ stood only in meats, and drinks, and divers washings^c,” the word rendered in our translation, “ washings,” signifies in the original, and is elsewhere translated, baptisms. What were these baptisms? Unquestionably those legal purifications and sanctifications, which were most of them, as the Apostle himself witnesses, made by sprinkling. Thus also when the Pharisee, with whom our blessed Lord condescended to dine, is said to have “ marvelled that He had not first washed before dinner^d,” the word rendered in our Bible “ washed,” in the original signifies baptized. But this customary baptism of the Jews, which Jesus had on this occasion omitted, was a partial application of water to the body; as you may learn by express declaration of holy writ, and by the account and use of the water pots, which stood “ after the manner of the purifying of the Jews^e,” in that house in Cana of Galilee, where the marriage was celebrated, which was ho-

^c Heb. ix. 10.

^d Luke xi. 38.

^e John ii. 6.

noured with the presence and first miracle of our Lord. Numerous other passages might be adduced to show you that baptism often signifies in the sacred volume a partial, as well as total washing; and sometimes, by fair inference, a sprinkling of the object of it.

But it may further be inquired, Did not the Apostles administer this ordinance by immersion? I answer, we know not that they uniformly did; we believe that they never did to the exclusion of the other mode. When the Jailor and his family were baptized at midnight by St. Paul, in the chambers of the prison, who can doubt that it was with “affusion of water^f?” And when that great Apostle himself was, after his conversion, baptized by Ananias in Damascus, it would appear from the face of the narrative, that in the house in which the minister found him, he stood up and received baptism^g. There is nothing in the account of the baptism of Cornelius^h, or the Treasurer of Candaceⁱ, or of the three thousand who were baptized in the after part of the day of pentecost^k, which assures us that the ceremony of immersion was used in their respective cases. And though, in subsequent times, this mode of administering the ordinance appears to have become general, it was never exclusively so, nor considered as necessary to the perfection of the sacrament. For in every age and country, the sick and the feeble received baptism by affusion; which, if any particular mode had been derived from the Apostles, as essential to the validity of the ordinance, they could not have done; and from which we may at least infer, that in this as in other matters upon which He had given no express instructions, Christ left it with His Apostles, and their successors in the Church, to

^f Acts xvi. 33. ^g Ibid. xxii. 16. ^h Ibid. x. 48.

ⁱ Ibid. viii. 38, 39.

^k Ibid. ii. 41.

exercise their discretion as circumstances should require.

But it has been objected, and to the disquietude of many who were educated in correct principles, was not Jesus Himself baptized by immersion, and should we not follow His example? I know not whence it is learned, that John the Baptist used this mode. We are told, that he came baptizing “*with water*,” not *in water*: and it is difficult to conceive, unless he dwelt continually in the river, how he could have immersed the great multitudes, who went forth to his baptism. With regard to our blessed Lord, as He had no sin unto which in baptism He could die, and needed no new birth unto righteousness; it is with great reason supposed, that His baptism was preparatory to His entrance upon the offices of His ministry, and that in submitting Himself to it, He had respect unto that law of God, which required that every Levite should be set apart to his office by washing with water, before he entered upon the sacred functions of the Priesthood. This was, most probably, the righteousness that our blessed Lord, at this eventful period, when He was about to enter upon the great work of His Priesthood, was anxious to fulfil^m. Do you ask how that washing of the Levites, in order to their consecration to their office, was performed? Not by immersion. No. “Thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them;” said the Almighty to Moses; “Sprinkle water of purifying upon themⁿ.” After this manner, therefore, if this law was in the view of Christ, it is reasonable to believe He was baptized. His holy feet stood probably in Jordan; and the venerable Baptist standing there with Him, sprinkled its waters upon His sacred form; and as He came up from the river,

^l Matt. iii. 11.

^m Ibid. iii. 15.

ⁿ Numb. viii. 7.

the voice of God was heard from heaven, proclaiming His character, and accepting His ministry. Is it said, that the sacred writers speak of a going into, and coming up out of the waters? It does not necessarily follow therefrom that those, of whom they speak, had undergone a submersion; for the same thing is said of him who gave, as well as of Him who received baptism. And if it did, the original phrases which are thus rendered in our Bible, might with equal correctness have been translated by *going to*, and *coming up from* the waters, and in fact are so translated in many places of the New Testament. If, however, it were indubitable that John administered baptism only by immersion, to his disciples and to our Lord, we could not infer from this, the necessity of the same mode, under the Christian dispensation, in every climate and in all circumstances. For this would suppose a close analogy between cases, differing essentially in those very points, by which, we contend, the question concerning the mode of baptism has by the Church been generally decided.

Upon the whole then it appears, that the manner of applying the water of baptism, is not essential to the efficacy of the sacrament, provided it be always so applied, as to express the spiritual sanctification, of which it is the symbol and pledge. If we consider, moreover, that the benefits, which this ordinance represents and conveys, are more frequently expressed in the types and language of Scripture, by sprinkling, than in any other way, we shall have ample reason to be satisfied with the mode, used by the Church, in which we have received this holy ordinance.


But though the manner of applying the element be not essential, nor established in the Gospel, the words which accompany the application are. It would

seem, my brethren, that our Lord foresaw, to what assaults and exposures the peculiar, and fundamental doctrines of His religion would be exposed; and endeavoured to secure it, by introducing it into the very seal of the covenant which, at their initiation into His Church, His disciples should receive. "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost". The faith of the Trinity is fundamental to Christianity. Take His Divinity from the Son, and you destroy the value and efficacy of His blood. Take His Being from the Holy Ghost, and you bereave yourselves of the Comforter, whose abode in the bosoms of the faithful is the best, the only safeguard of their virtue and peace. To establish this faith, therefore, and perpetuate the recollection and reverence of it, Christ commanded His baptism to be administered in the name of the Trinity, and wherever this is omitted, the baptism which He instituted is not given. The use of this "form of sound words" is of inestimable importance. It is a rampart round the Christian faith, which the power of its adversaries cannot penetrate, nor their subtilty undermine. For who that shall recollect, under what authority, and in what name he was baptized, shall be able to believe, that Jesus, if a creature, exalted Himself in an ordinance to a participation of equal honour with the Father, or commanded His followers to be baptized in the name of a Spirit, which hath no personal existence?


ⁿ Matt. xxviii. 19.

^o 2 Tim. i. 13.

S E R M O N V I I I .



O N B A P T I S M .



S T . L U K E i i . 2 2 .

They brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord.

AFTER some intermission, my Christian friends, we resume the subject of baptism: and come now to treat of the last of the inquiries, proposed at the commencement of the discourses upon this ordinance, viz. : Where it should be administered? The question is interesting, and I am aware of the difficulties to be encountered in treating of it. Should I seem to be the advocate of a new practice, I must beg you to suspend your judgment, as I doubt not, I shall evidence to you, that the practice advocated is the ancient usage, and most conformable to the nature and promotive of the utility, of this holy institution. I purpose to show you, that baptism should be administered publicly, in the Church; and this, by reasons drawn from the authority of the Church, from the nature of the sacrament, and from the great and peculiar advantages attending the public administration of it.

There is no express command given in the Gospel, concerning the place in which baptism should be administered. It is, therefore, left to wisdom to ascertain and fix upon the places, which are most suitable and advantageous, but not to the wisdom of every

individual ; for the opinions of men are so various, that in this way there could exist no order nor uniformity ; but to the wisdom of the Church, with which there cannot but have been left discretionary powers to be applied to the ordering of all matters not regulated by positive instructions ; and whose authority, therefore, in such cases must be observed, if we would keep the “ unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace^a.” In proportion as you release men from the obligation, to be bound by the rules of the society to which they belong, you loosen the bands of that society ; you destroy the preservatives of its unity, its identity, its perpetuity, its health, perhaps of its very existence.

The primitive Christians had no churches.— Watched and persecuted by their adversaries, they met, sequestered from notice, in those places where they could do it with the greatest safety. An upper room in the mansion of some Christian family, the convenient apartment of some pious believer, was the sanctuary in which the first disciples of our Lord assembled, for the purposes of communion and social worship. They, therefore, had no temples to which the subjects of baptism could be brought ; but in the waters of some neighbouring spring, or river, or in water brought to the place where they were assembled, or wherever it was most convenient they administered the holy rite. But even then the solemnity was public. The renunciations were made in the presence of a congregation. It was done, generally, before the faithful, that they might witness the deed.

When Christianity, under the protection and blessing of Almighty God, became established, and churches were erected for the use of Christians, these

^a Eph. iv. 3.

churches were furnished with baptisteries, or fonts, to which the candidates for baptism were brought, that with due solemnity, in His holy temples, they might be presented unto the Lord. In some cities, in which there were many churches, the ordinance was administered only in the mother church; chiefly to cherish the better the important doctrine, that they who are baptized are born again, and become heirs of all the instructions, hopes, and privileges of the Church; whom, to express the tenderness and indissolubleness of His union with her, our Redeemer had condescended to represent, as espoused to Himself. In subsequent times, wherever we find Christian temples, we find fonts, for the public administration of baptism: and the Church to which we belong, while with great tenderness for the welfare of little infants, she permits this holy sacrament to be administered in private, whenever they are dangerously sick, with equal care for the sacredness of the office, and the most solemn and useful performance of it, requires her ministers, as you may read in the rubric at the head of the office for the 'ministration of private baptism,' that they warn the people, 'that without great cause and necessity they procure not their children to be baptized at home in their houses.' This her order is grounded, not only in the ancient usage, but also, as we shall presently show, in the nature of the thing, and with a regard to special advantages to be derived from the observance of it. And here, let me be allowed, in passing, to state, that for the preservation, in its integrity, of her holy and beautiful system, and the more certain accomplishment of the spiritual benefits, which this system is designed to promote, there is required of her ministers, before they are clothed with holy orders, a very solemn vow, that to the laws of her worship, as well as to the doctrines

of her creed, they will religiously conform themselves. This to your consciences will excuse your clergy, if at any time they find themselves obliged to ask of you the gratification of having your children brought to the Church, when you wish to have them baptized.

This you will the more readily do, if we now proceed to consider, in the second place, that this method of administering baptism, publicly in the Church, is suited to the nature and end of the ordinance. Baptism is a public rite. It is, as you have heard in a former discourse, the initiation of the subjects of it into the school of our Redeemer; and the sealing to them, on the part of God, of an interest in that redemption and those precious promises, of which every believer is a partaker. And shall this transaction, the most solemn, the most momentous in its import, which takes place upon our globe, be done in secret? Shall it be performed lightly in some private chamber; or gaily in some festive hall? Should not an initiation so interesting take place in the presence of the congregation, who are parties in this business, receiving hereby an accession to their number, and a new occasion for their praise and prayers? Should not the sealing visibly to a child of man of the mercies of the Almighty, take place in the temple set apart to His service, the place which He hath chosen to set His name there? Where but to His house should the children be brought, who are to be dedicated unto Him? Where but in the places, in which the followers of our Redeemer are assembled, should *their* names be named, who are to be enlisted under His banners, and embodied with those who are to “fight the good fight of faith^b?” Consider, I pray you, what is done for your chil-

^b 1 Tim. vi. 12.

dren in baptism, that therein ‘ they are made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven ;’ and then say, if this thing should not be done publicly, both for the glory of God and the information of the Church, and with all the circumstances of place and manner, which can give sanctity to the deed.

But it is objected, What interest can the congregation take in the baptism of a child, of whom they know nothing ? Ah, my hearers ! at every rescue of one of our race from the dominion of evil, and translation of him into the kingdom of our Redeemer, “ there is joy in the presence of the angels of God ^c !” And do you, partakers of his nature, ask, What interest have I in this ? At every administration of baptism, our Redeemer in His high state of glory “ sees of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied ^d .” And do you, professed followers of Him, ask, What interest have I in this ? Oh ! Christian, a celebrated Roman could say, I myself am a man, and think nothing foreign to me, which concerns the welfare of man ; and do you ask, when by the ordinance and seal of the Almighty, an infant of your species is taken from under the dominion of sin and death, to the glorious liberty and exalted expectations of the children of God, do you then ask, What interest have I in this ? Ah ! were we sufficiently alive to the mercies of God, the honour of our Redeemer, and the salvation of our fellow beings, there could not to be to us a scene more interesting, than the new birth even of the humblest offspring of Adam to the life and relations, and privileges and hopes, unto which we are begotten in baptism by Christ Jesus. Evident it is, that the pious compilers of our Liturgy supposed, that all the faithful are deeply interested

^c Luke xv. 10.

^d Is. liii. 11.

in every administration of this ordinance. For to whom is the earnest address at the commencement of the office made? Who are called upon to supplicate the Almighty in behalf of the present child? To whom are the appropriate Gospel, and the affecting exhortation which follows it, addressed? To whom is it declared, that we receive the 'child into the congregation of Christ's flock?' And who are called upon to give 'thanks unto Almighty God,' for the mercies we have witnessed? The congregation. Whereby is intimated to us, the absurdity of performing this service in private; and that every Christian is concerned in the matter, when a new member is grafted into the body of the Church, and a new heir born to the kingdom of heaven. Nay when it is said to the Sponsors, 'Ye have brought this child here to be baptized,' who sees not that it is supposed to be in the Church? And the reason, why the ordinance is required to be administered immediately after reading the second lesson, is that then the greatest number of the faithful are usually present, to witness the interesting work, and unite in the devotions with which it is solemnized.

This brings me to notice, in the third place, some special advantages attending thereon, which recommend the public administration of baptism. And in the first place, Sponsors may hereby be more deeply impressed with the sacred obligations of their holy and important office. Here, where the eye of God is felt more immediately upon them, in His house, at His holy altar, they pledge themselves to see to the religious education of those, whom, with a charity which is doubtless highly acceptable to the Most High, they are careful to bring to His holy baptism. Is not our nature such, that under circumstances like these, they will more soberly undertake the duties of their office, and be more solemnly

impressed with the importance of faithfully discharging them ?

Again. Who can estimate the benefits, which may be derived to the child, from this public consecration of him to religion and virtue ? It cannot be considered by the serious as a mere superstition, to view it as a felicity, that an infant should be first blessed in the sanctuary. Samuel, whose piety and integrity we all may well emulate, was carried to the temple in his childhood, and devoted to God. Jesus Himself, who, as He increased in stature, increased also “ in favour with God and man^e,” was brought in His infancy to Jerusalem, by His pious parents, to be presented in the temple unto the Lord^f. And it is at the places of His worship that the Almighty has been pleased, specially, to promise His blessing. Nor, further, can it be believed, that in the lips of a pious parent it would always be an inefficacious appeal to his rising offspring, My child, in your infancy you were carried to the altar of God and there with prayers and tears devoted to a virtuous life. Least of all can it be doubted, when all is performed with sincerity, that blessing should result to the infant, who is offered to God in His house, from the combined prayers of all His faithful people. An advantage this, of which it is difficult to conceive, how any thoughtful person can be willing his child should be deprived, unless he contemn the institutions of religion, and disbelieve the efficacy of all prayer. For surely, if ever, it is on this occasion, we may hope the voice of sincere supplication will be heard. When asking only spiritual blessings, when asking them for the helpless babe, who as yet has done no sin, when asking them with one accord for Jesus’ sake, we have the strongest

^e Luke ii. 52.

^f Luke ii. 22.

encouragement to believe, that the prayers of the faithful will reach unto the throne, and that nothing but the perverseness of the creature will turn away the blessings which they implore.

I add, once more, that from the administration of this ordinance in the Church, benefit may accrue to the whole congregation. Upon each one of us who has been baptized there rests, unless to the perdition of our souls we have abjured them, 'a solemn vow, promise, and profession.' On our observance and fulfilment of these depend the pardon of our sins, our participation of the influences of the Holy Spirit, and our enjoyment of eternal life. By the attrition of the business, the pleasures, and the vices of the world, our remembrance of the import of this profession, and solemnity of this vow, is perpetually exposed to be worn away. We need to have it often renewed. And among the best means of renewing it, may be reckoned the public administration of baptism, in which we see that acted for others, which was once acted for us; and the mercies of the covenant, and the conditions of inheriting them, are brought to our view explicitly, solemnly, and in all their importance.

Finally, the influence and reputation of religion are involved, more than at first thought might be supposed, in the public and solemn administration of this ordinance. The respect of the mass of mankind for the doctrines and precepts of religion, will very much depend upon their respect for its institutions. Their respect for its institutions will, perhaps, not less depend upon the manner in which they are performed, than upon the reasons on which they are grounded. On this account, it is of unspeakable importance, that the sacraments of Christianity should be generally administered in a holy place, and when it is practicable on a holy day, and

always in a holy manner. Nor is it easy to conceive a sufficient reason, why one of them should with suitable awe be celebrated in the sanctuary, and the equal reverence, which is due to the other, be exposed to hazard by stripping it of the solemnities of time, and place, and manner, with which it is wise it should be protected, and meet it should be adorned.

You see then how many and how weighty are the reasons for the administration of baptism publicly in the Church. Suffer then the little children to come unto their Redeemer, where He is present with the congregation of His saints. Christian parent, when you consider the contagion and sorrows of the world, into which you have brought your offspring, where would you that they should make their first appearance, but in the temple of God? Pious woman, who art grateful to the Almighty for thy preservation in the peril of childbirth, and art filled with joy that a man is born into the world, what offering of gratitude so significant and acceptable canst thou send to His house, as thy new born babe to be dedicated to His name? Holy mother, wouldst thou not choose that that should be done for thy little one, which in the days of His infancy was done for thy Lord? Behold then His parents with religious fidelity, taking Him to the temple “to do for Him after the custom of the law^s.” See the child Jesus, in the morning of His being, presented at the altar for redemption and a blessing; and with thy little ones do thou likewise. And God grant, ‘that whosoever is here dedicated’ to Him ‘by our office and ministry, may also be endued with heavenly virtues, and everlastingly rewarded, through’ His ‘mercy,’ ‘who doth live and govern all things, world without end.’

^s Luke ii. 27.

SERMON IX.



ON CONFIRMATION.



HEBREWS vi. 2.

The doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands.

IN nothing has our heavenly Father more affectingly commended His love to us, than in His care *to assure* us of it. The whole Christian economy is calculated to *manifest* to the children of men, the solicitude of their Creator for their happiness and salvation. The mission of His Son to instruct them and die for them; the institution of a Church, in which they may be brought near to Him, and nurtured as His children by adoption; the waters of baptism, in which they may be washed from their sins and their fears; the banquet of His holy table, at which they may feast upon *tokens* of forgiveness and *pledges* of eternal life; the accommodation of His gracious promises to the capacity, yea, to the weakness of our nature, are so many *demonstrations* of His care to beget in us a confidence in His goodness, and to fill us thereby with love, and peace, and joy. This is signally true with respect to the rite of Confirmation

—a rite in which the Deity, as it were, takes His adopted children by the hand, to put them in possession of the estate which He had purchased for them with His blood, and in the contemplation of which, we may take from the *body* the beautiful apostrophe with which its wonderful *formation* inspired the Psalmist, and apply it to the *soul*; “Thou hast fashioned me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me ^a.”

The rite of Confirmation is held by our Church, as it is also represented by St. Paul in the text and context, to be a first principle of the doctrine of Christ. For the due administration of it, she has provided a very instructive and solemn office, and enjoined it upon the officers to whom the administration of it belongs, to endeavour that all her children have opportunity to receive it. It is made my duty, beloved brethren, as your parish minister, to bring this rite to your consideration; and, in another relation to you, to afford you, at a convenient time, occasion to partake of its benefits. Purposing soon, with God’s permission, to discharge this latter obligation, I would, as preparatory thereto, endeavour to discharge the former, by setting before you what I think will comprise all you may be anxious to know upon the subject; the antiquity and authority of it, its import, and the propriety and utility of it; attempting to obviate such objections, and such only, as may seem to have any foundation, or to be of any weight.

The import of this ordinance is the point of greatest consequence. But to have you more seriously interested in it, its antiquity is first named. Were it a novelty sprung up in this age of innovation, it would be less worthy of your consideration; for

^a Ps. cxxxix. 4.

concerning doctrines, or precepts, or rites, it will, in all cases, hold good, that, wanting age, they want that which is now *essential* to the foundation, or first principles of the Christian religion. But when this rite is shown to be ancient as the Apostles' days, and to have been observed in the Church in every age since, it will present itself to you in its proper venerable form, pointing to *inspiration* for its *origin*, and adducing *time* as its *advocate*.

“Laying on of hands” was a ceremony used on *divers* occasions in the first years of Christianity. Upon the sick, the Apostles laid their hands when they would recover them. In the ordination of any one to either of the three orders of the ministry, imposition of hands was used. And sometimes in simple benediction, or in sending out Evangelists upon their work, recourse was had to this ancient and significant ceremony. But “laying on of hands” is mentioned in the text with “baptism,” and faith, and three other things as fundamentals; that is, as elementary principles in the Christian life. Now in the elements, or first principles of any scheme of religion, all, who would be proficient therein, are interested. But the “laying on of hands” in ordinations, or in benedictions, or in healing the sick, concerned but a few, and those exclusively. There must, therefore, have been some occasion of using this rite, in which all Christians partook of it. Let us see if we can find, in the sacred record, mention of any such occasion. It is stated in the eighth chapter of the Acts, that Philip, one of the first Deacons, preached the Gospel to the Samaritans, and baptized those by whom it was embraced. The Apostles were then remaining at Jerusalem. When they “heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John; who, when they were come down, prayed for them,

that they might receive the Holy Ghost. (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them; only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost^b.” We read, moreover, in the nineteenth chapter of the same book, that when St. Paul, having journeyed through the upper coasts of Asia, came to Ephesus, he found there certain disciples who had been baptized into John’s baptism, and who told him, upon his asking them whether they had received the Holy Ghost since they believed, that they had not so much as heard whether there was any Holy Ghost. The great Apostle preached unto them Jesus, in whose name they were presently baptized. “ And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them^c.” These acts are mentioned as if they were done of course, in conformity with a usage of the Apostles, for signifying and conveying to the recipients their interest in that gift which Christ had purchased, and having ascended up on high, had received, for men, the gift of the Holy Spirit^d. Here, then, is a proper confirmation; and the question arises, whether all Christians partook of this rite? From the nature of the thing, and the testimony and usages of the Fathers of the first centuries, it is reasonable to infer that they did. Of the gift of the Spirit, which it signified, they all had need; being all heirs of that infirmity and corruption which unfitted them to do, or to think, that which was good, without the help of God. It was declared to be prepared for them all. “ Repent, and be baptized,” said St. Peter to the multitude, “ and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are

^b Acts viii. 14—17.

^c Acts xix. 6.

^d Ps. lxxviii. 18.

afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call ^e.”

Of the graces and comforts which are the fruits of the Spirit, our blessed Lord prayed that not only His chosen disciples should partake, but all who, through their word, should believe on His name ^f. And there are facts which evidence that, of the thing signified by Confirmation, all Christians did participate. The Apostles, in writing to them assert, that they had received the Spirit; and the unity and strength, the patience and perseverance which they had collectively, and the peace, and love, and joy, which pervaded their bosoms individually, cannot, consistently with Christian doctrine, be attributed to any other source. As, therefore, all needed and received the thing signified, and must equally have needed to be assured of their interest in it by the sign, it is probable they all obtained it after the same manner in which it was conveyed in the particular cases which are recorded, namely, by laying on of the Apostles' hands. These holy men, who were the first Bishops of the Church, as far superior in holiness as in zeal, to all who have succeeded them, journeyed continually from place to place, planting and “confirming the Churches ^g.” The gifts and graces of the Spirit appear to have abounded in those Churches which they personally visited. And when St. Paul expresses his affectionate wish to visit the Christians at Rome, that he might impart to them some spiritual gift, it is difficult to conceive, unless he would do it by some bodily act, why the gift might not have been communicated by message or by letter. It should seem, then, that that was done generally to all Christians which was done to the Samaritan converts; they

^e Acts ii. 38, 39.

^f John xvii. 20.

^g Acts xv. 41.

received, from the proper minister, when they had been baptized, an imposition of hands, to signify and convey to them their strength and comfort in the Holy Ghost. Without this supposition it will be impossible to find in the Sacred Volume any trace of a laying on of hands, such as the text, and the words connected with it describe; for unless it were participated by all Christians, it could not sustain the character of a foundation or first principle of the doctrine of Christ: and what other laying on of hands is mentioned in the Gospel which could have been so participated? The Fathers of the earliest centuries, who, living near the Apostles' times, are most likely to have known the practice of the first Christians, confirm this opinion. In their day the ceremony of laying on of hands was applied to all Christians after their baptism; and they declare this use of it to be derived from the usage of the Apostles. 'Do you ask,' says St. Jerome, 'where it is written? It is written in the Acts of the Apostles.' Indeed, it is not easy to conceive how a rite should, at so early a period, have been so universally received, if it had not come to those who received it with the authority of an apostolic institution. Confirmation, then, was the "laying on of hands," of which all partook after the reception of baptism; and the only use of this ceremony, which could be styled an element of the Christian economy, and, consequently, that alluded to in the text; where we find it having St. Paul's reverence and support, and placed on the same ground, in the same rank with repentance, and faith, and baptism, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. This has been the most ancient and general exposition of this celebrated passage of the Sacred Writings. The learned Grotius could find no other satisfactory explanation of it; and the reforming

Calvin, in his commentary upon the passage, confesses that this one place evidently shows that Confirmation was instituted by the Apostles.

The only difficulty in this part of the subject arises out of the supposition, that the "laying on of hands," in the apostolic age, was for the communication of the *miraculous* powers which had been received from the Holy Ghost. It is certainly true, that by imposition of the Apostles' hands were conveyed to others those supernatural powers with which the Apostles were endowed by the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. And this was an operation of the Comforter, adapted to the exigencies of Christians at that particular juncture; a surprising attestation to the truth of the Gospel, without which it probably would not so successfully have spread itself in the world; certainly not with such wonderful rapidity. But I know not on what ground it is assumed that none but the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were conveyed by this rite. The ordinary influences of the Spirit were then equally necessary to the formation and display of the perfection of the Christian character; and those fruits of goodness which can be brought to maturity only by His power, were, in that age, produced in Christians in extraordinary perfection. And he who had been instrumental in conveying, more frequently than any other of the Apostles, the Holy Ghost, informs us, that "to one is given by the Spirit, the word of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge, by the same Spirit; to another, faith by the same Spirit; to another, the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another, the working of miracles; to another, prophecy; to another, discerning of spirits; to another, divers kinds of tongues; to another, the interpretation of tongues. But all these worketh that one and

the self same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will^h." After Christianity became established, and the props of miraculous powers were unnecessary to its support, the ordinary and secret influences of the Spirit of God rose in the comparative estimate to the greater importance; and these are now essential requisites to the accomplishment of His gracious will concerning us in Christ Jesus. And can we doubt that He, who adapts the productions of the earth to the season, and the pleasures and dispositions of man to his age, will adapt the operation of the ordinances which He hath approved, to the necessities of those for whose benefit they were instituted? That the miraculous powers of the Holy Ghost were not the only fruit of Confirmation, in the view of those who lived nearer to the age of Christian simplicity than ourselves; yea, that these powers were not to be expected when they were no longer needed, but more useful benefits sought, is evidently the decision of reason, and was the declaration of the most eminent of the ancient theologians. 'Does any man,' says the celebrated St. Augustin, 'does any man now expect to hear them speak with new tongues, who receive imposition of hands, as a means to convey the Holy Spirit? Or when we laid our hands on these infants, did any of you expect that they should speak with tongues? And when they did not, were any of you so perverse in heart as to say they have not received the Holy Ghost?' By the Holy Ghost, which is given only in the Catholic Church by imposition of hands, our forefathers would have us to understand what the Apostle says, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto usⁱ." Other gifts and graces

^h 1 Cor. xii. 8—11.

ⁱ Rom. v. 5.

than miraculous powers, may surely manifest the presence of God's Spirit with men; and why they may not be the fruits of an observance of this ordinance, it will not be easy to say.

It may, however, be thought that this rite was efficacious only in the hands of the Apostles, who were so extraordinarily endowed, and was designed to be used only in their day. The passage of which the text is a part, is irreconcilable with this opinion. For if the doctrine of "laying on of hands" be a foundation in the fabric of the Christian religion, it must last as long as the religion itself; if it be a first principle of the doctrine of Christ, it can never cease, but must be received and found important to the latest day, by all who embrace the Gospel. They who lived near to the Apostles doubtless knew their sense of this matter. They did not suffer the rite to be laid aside. They assert, that it *descended* to the Church from the Apostles; and we find it in fact continued universally in the Church from their day to the period of the Reformation. It may be agreeable to you to hear some of the testimonies to this effect. Tertullian, writing upon baptism, says, 'after baptism succeeds "laying on of hands," by benediction, calling for and invoking the Holy Spirit.' St. Cyprian, speaking of the Confirmation of the Samaritan converts, says, 'the same custom is now observed among us, that they who are baptized in the Church may be presented to the Governors of it, that by our prayer and imposition of hands they may obtain the Holy Ghost, and be perfected with the seal of Christ.' St. Jerome demands, 'are you ignorant that now this is the custom of the Churches upon those who have been baptized, afterwards to lay hands and thus invoke the Holy Spirit? Do you ask where it is written? In the Acts of the Apostles. Although if there were no authority of Scripture for

it, the consent of the whole world in this particular has the force of command." St. Augustin, writing upon the Trinity, observes, 'the Apostles prayed that the Holy Spirit would come upon those on whom they laid their hands. They themselves did not give Him. Which custom, after their example, deriving it from them, the Church observes to this day.' St. Ambrose, commenting upon the words of my text, says, 'it means the imposition of hands, by which the Holy Spirit is supposed to be received; which after baptism, is wont to be done by the chief priests, for the confirmation of men in the unity of the Church of Christ.' We have parts of an office for the administration of Confirmation, which was used near fourteen hundred years ago; and it would be difficult to find, before the Reformation, a Church in which Confirmation was not retained. At the Reformation it was preserved by all the Protestant Churches, which kept the Episcopal office. The Lutheran Church, which did not hold that office essential, nevertheless retained Confirmation as of Apostolic origin, committing the administration of it to the priests; and in Calvin's Church, the Church of Geneva, which at first renounced it, it has been restored, and an office provided for the administration of it. To us it has come through a very ancient Church, which never was without it. And our Church, you know, hath set forth her excellent Catechism for the very purpose of preparing her children for this ordinance; and at baptism gives it in special charge to sponsors to take care that at a suitable time their wards receive it.

Now, concerning the authority of this rite, after the account which has been given of it, it is not necessary for me to utter many words. There is an obligation upon all men to observe the institutions of the community to which they belong, that have been established by proper authority, and are of public

utility; and this obligation has a peculiar force in the Church of Christ. For an ordinance of our religion which comes to us clothed with such venerable antiquity, nature, moreover, dictates, that we manifest a sacred respect. But when we rise to the Apostolic age, and behold it provided for and practised by the twelve, we find it supported by the authority of God. Our Lord passed with His Apostles forty days after His resurrection, “ speaking of the thing pertaining to the kingdom of God^k.” During this time He doubtless gave them many instructions how they were to proceed in all things which concerned His Church. The beloved disciple tells us, that very many things were spoken which are not recorded. They are not written, because they concerned those only to whom they were addressed. Enough is written, that we may believe, and “ believing, may have life through His name^l.” When about to leave them and return to His Father, He moreover promised to send the Holy Ghost to them, that He might “ bring all things to their remembrance^m,” and “ guide them into all truthⁿ.” This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, and we may be sure that the things concerning doctrine, or government, or worship, which the Apostles established in the Church as of universal obligation, they established according to the instructions of their Master, or by the inspiration of this Spirit of Truth: Whatever they placed in the foundations of Christianity, as they have “ the laying on of hands,” had Divine approbation. Whatever they ranked among the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, had the authority of God.

Could any thing add to the obligation of that which has the authority of God, there will be found, when

^k Acts i. 3.

^m John xiv. 26.

^l John xx. 31.

ⁿ Ibid. xvi. 13.

we come to treat of the utility of this rite, some considerations which cannot fail to attract to it our regard. It will then be seen to have had its correspondent in the Jewish Church, and its analogy in the heathen world; to have been prefigured by the great visible descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, and to be commended to our observance by some instructive circumstances of the baptism of our blessed Lord. But, before we proceed to the propriety and utility of the rite, its import should have our attention. Of this it is proposed in the next place to treat.

Confirmation, you have seen, is the “laying on of hands,” alluded to in the text. This rite was, indeed, anciently called the “laying on of hands.” Confirmation is a name given it in later ages. But how came the ceremony of “laying on of hands” to be used in this business? What does it imply? Wherein consists its significance and value?

Let it be observed, that this is the most natural and ancient way of indicating the blessing of any person, and designation of him to any honour, trust, favour, and protection. Thus Jacob, when, with parental affection and prophetic authority, he would bestow a benediction upon the two sons of Joseph, and declare the favours and distinctions which awaited them, laid his hands upon their heads^o. Thus Moses, when he would impart to Joshua a portion of his honour according to God’s command, did it by this ceremony. “And Joshua,” says the record, “was full of the Spirit of Wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him^p.” Thus when a part of the same Spirit which was in the great ruler of Israel, was to be taken by God, and put into the seventy elders who were to share with him his cares and honours,

^o Gen. xlviii. 9. &c.

^p Deut. xxxiv. 9.

it was done, the Jewish writers tell us, "by laying on of hands." 'Moses, our master,' saith Maimonides, 'created the seventy elders by imposition of hands, and the Divine Majesty rested on them; and these elders imposed hands on others, and others on others. And they were found created unto the house of judgment, of Joshua and of Moses. Thus the Priests and Levites under the Jewish dispensation, extended their hands over the whole congregation, when they pronounced upon them the blessing of God. And thus our Divine Master, the pattern of all that is wise and becoming in human conduct, when He would declare His good will towards the young children whom the people had brought unto Him, "laid His hands on them, and blessed them."⁹ This ceremony is, indeed, the natural expression of affectionate or authoritative benediction. The father, the priest, the friend lifts his hands to heaven in supplication of a blessing, and then, causing them to descend and rest upon the head of the object for whom he supplicates, consigns him thereby to the enjoyment of the blessing sought, and certifies to him his faith that it will come upon him.

Now our heavenly Father deals with us as with men. He has graciously accommodated Himself to our nature in all His transactions concerning our salvation. A religion without forms, proposing inward spiritual graces without any outward visible signs or expressions of them, would not be adapted to us in our present condition, if, indeed, such a religion would be suited to the condition of any created beings in the universe. Man has a body as well as a spirit; senses as well as a soul. And in nothing has God more commended His care and condescension to us, than in His regard to this constitution of our

⁹ Mark x. 13—16.

nature, in the revelation He has given us of our interests and duties. By outward signs He manifests and certifies, even to our senses, the wonders of His mercy; and these signs are taken from usages of our natural life, which furnish instructive analogies, and are, in their spiritual application, both simple and impressive. The waters of baptism are but a visible representation and assurance of the cleansing of our nature from the guilt of original sin, through the mercies that are in Christ Jesus. In the Lord's Supper there is a sensible representation of the sacrifice by which our sins are taken away, and sensible pledges of the favour of God, and of our sustenance to everlasting life. Yea, the preaching of the Gospel is a representation, by artificial methods, of the truths it reveals; for words are but signs of the things expressed by them, fit and necessary to be used by beings to whom the ear is an avenue of knowledge, and speech an instrument for conveying it. And it is difficult to conceive why men may not be instructed by the hand as well as the tongue; why the gestures of the former, as well as the motions of the latter, may not be rendered by Him who made them both, significant of His mercy, and promotive of His praise. If there be any spiritual blessings which "laying on of hands" might happily signify or convey, there will be found, in the account which has been given of the ancient and natural use of this ceremony, impressive reasons why the adoption of it by our heavenly Father, in expressing to us His mercies, would be very instructive and full of comfort. Let us see whether there are any such blessings.

What are the benefits which man seeks in recurring to the Gospel? They are all its merciful proffers; the pardon of sins; adoption anew into the favour of God; the promise of eternal life; but chiefly after he has been by baptism 'regenerate

and grafted into the body of Christ's Church; the protecting and strengthening, the sanctifying and comforting influences of the Holy Spirit. Reason, in the wisest of the heathens, taught them the necessity of Divine assistance in the pursuit of goodness. The Scriptures tell us that we are not "sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God^r." The experience of every considerate man shows him, alas! the frailty of his nature when he is left to himself; his dependance for faith and holiness upon the help of God. The presence, indeed, and efficacious influences of the Holy Spirit, are that without which man sinks, the victim of his infirmities, into ignorance, and corruption, and spiritual death; and with which he rises, in proportion to his measure of it, and the constancy of its operation, to a nearer and nearer resemblance to the God who created him. This important gift, with the other mercies of the Gospel, the Almighty covenants with Christians, when they are baptized, to bestow upon them; and no outward rite, more affecting, could He have approved 'as a means whereby' to convey 'the same;' no ceremony more significant can be imagined as 'a pledge to assure us thereof,' than the "laying on of hands." How naturally this ceremony may be applied to a use like this; how adapted to it, it is in the view of God Himself, is impressively shown us in two occurrences upon sacred record. The first is an event in the life of Moses. When the glory of the Divine Nature was to pass this ancient servant of the Almighty, to protect and comfort him, lest he should be consumed in all his infirmities by the display of the face of God, we are told that He placed him first in the clift of a rock, which may not unaptly repre-

! 2 Cor. iii. 5.

sent baptism, whose waters were typified by the waters which flowed from the clift of the rock which Moses smote; and afterwards, for his greater security, covered him with His hand while He passed by^s. The other is an occurrence in the life of the beloved disciple, on that interesting Lord's day which he passed in the isle of Patmos. There appeared to him "one like unto the Son of Man." "And when he saw Him," overwhelmed, doubtless, by His greatness, and the consciousness of his own imperfections, he "fell at His feet as dead." And Jesus, for it was He, who had come to His disciple in exile, "laid His right hand upon him, saying unto him, Fear not^t." So natural and significant is it even with God, to express the bestowal of protection, benediction and favour, by the "laying on of hands." And what can man more earnestly desire than such a sensible benediction from his Father in heaven? How should the gift of the Holy Ghost be more suitably conveyed than by such an imposition of hands?

But what do I say? "Will God in very deed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him^u." And shall He appear in every instance to certify to every man this His gift? To us, sinful beings, shall the God of heaven come to lay on us, individually, His hands? Ah! beloved brethren, who could stand if He thus appeared? Before him the angels bow, and the archangels veil their faces. At His presence the earth trembleth, and the mountains quake at His appearance. He looketh unto "the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in His sight^x." His people hear His voice in Sinai, and they ex-

^s Exod. xxxiii. 22.

^u 2 Chron. vi. 18.

^t Rev. i. 13. 16, 17.

^x Job xxv. 5.

claim, "Let not God speak with us, lest we die^y." Even Moses says, "I exceedingly fear and quake^z." At the naked display of the face of our Creator, we should, unquestionably, in this life, be consumed. We must wait till we have put off these simple bodies, and all the imperfections of this earthly state; we must wait, till the Son, our Mediator, shall present us to the eternal glory of the Father, covering us even then with His own "right hand," before we can sustain the sight of Almighty God. "No man shall see Me, and live^a."

How, then, shall our Father in heaven signify to us, and convey this inestimable gift? Should He send His angels on this errand of love; should these "ministering spirits^b" of His kingdom descend in His behalf, to lay on us their hands, to assure us of His favour and help, there are evil consequences from which it would not be easy to secure our feeble nature. Man is prone to be led by his senses, The idolatry of the world shows how apt he is to offer his homage to the sensible sources of his benefits, to rest his spirit upon representations of the invisible God. Should angels bestow visibly upon every man, the benediction of the Almighty, there would be great danger that our admiration, and gratitude, and even our worship, would be confined to these glorious benefactors; and thus we might be led to render to creatures the honour which is due to the Being who hath declared Himself "a jealous God^c," and suffers not His honour to be given with impunity to any other.

Yet that which the great King of heaven does not descend to do Himself to every person, He may do effectually by instruments and agents; and with

^y Exod. xx. 19. ^z Heb. xii. 21. ^a Exod. xxxiii. 20.

^b Heb. i. 14.

^c Exod. xx. 5.

wonderful condescension, He takes of the frail children of men, to minister among men in things pertaining to His kingdom. He hath appointed a Priesthood in His Church; and to those who successively are ordained to it, He hath committed “the ministry of reconciliation^d,” the dispensing of His word and sacraments, and the performance, in His name, of all visible acts concerning our salvation. To them it appertains to seal to every Christian in baptism his participation of all the mercies revealed in Christ, and especially of the promise of the Holy Spirit; and when he comes of age to need more particularly this portion of his inheritance, by “laying on of hands,” to certify him of God’s favour and gracious goodness towards him; to signify and convey to him his strength and joy in the Holy Ghost. Not that in them there is any extraordinary virtue. Ah! no. To use the language of St. Paul, they, too, are men subject to like passions with yourselves^e. It is the office, brethren, and not the mortal man, that we would have in your view in all our holy functions. In taking from among men the agents whom He employs in the works of your salvation, God has graciously accommodated Himself to the infirmities and convenience of your nature; wisely guarding you against the peril of having your attention turned from Him to any other beings as sources of your blessings. The “treasure” of confirmation, as an inspired Apostle hath said of all the benefits of the Christian ministry, you “have in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us^f.”

You see, then, that in the ordinance of “laying on of hands,” they who minister therein, do, in God’s behalf, by this significant act, confirm to

^d 2 Cor. v. 18.

^e Acts xiv. 15.

^f 2 Cor. iv. 7.

Christians the mercies of the baptismal covenant ; and more especially, as what they have then most need to receive and be assured of, His heavenly benediction, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Accordingly, in the excellent office provided by our Church for the due administration of this rite, they first pray that the Almighty would ‘ strengthen’ those who are to receive it ‘ with the Holy Ghost the Comforter ; and daily increase in them His manifold gifts of grace ;’ and when they lay their hands severally upon the heads of the recipients, they do it, supplicating for each, that ‘ God would defend them with His heavenly grace, that they may continue His for ever, and daily increase in His Holy Spirit more and more, until they come unto His everlasting kingdom.’

But the gift of this, and of all the mercies of the Gospel, is suspended by the Author of them upon certain conditions. Evident it is, in the nature of the thing, that they who desire and seek the Holy Spirit, must have repentance towards God, and faith in Jesus Christ, and a sincere wish to walk in newness of life. And these qualifications are required by God, in Scripture, of all those who would be partakers of His salvation. While, therefore, in the ordinance of “ laying on of hands” there is a confirmation to those who receive it, of the precious mercies which were obtained for them in baptism, and a fulfilment of the promise of the Holy Spirit, there is also by the recipients a profession of Christianity ; a taking upon themselves the obligations of the Christian life ; a confirmation, on their part, of the promises and vows which were made in their names when they were baptized. On this account it is, that the ministers of Confirmation, in the office provided for the administration of it, first demand of those who are to receive it, whether they ‘ do, in

the presence of God and of the congregation, renew the solemn promise and vow that they made, or that was made in their name, at their baptism ; ratifying and confirming the same ; and acknowledging themselves bound to believe and to do all those things which they then undertook, or their sponsors then undertook for them ?' And to this inquiry they every one answer audibly, ' I do.' An answer, worthy to be pondered well before it is given ; as upon the sincerity and intelligence with which it is given, much of the satisfaction must depend, which may be had in observing this ordinance.

It appears, then, that Confirmation is administered for the supply of the grace of God in a way adapted to the present condition of our nature. On the part of the recipients there is a profession of the Christian faith, by a public and formal ratification, in their own names, of the baptismal covenant ; and an application for the help and benediction of God. God meets them by His minister, who, by the significant ceremony of " laying on of hands," confirms to them, on God's part, all the covenant of His mercies ; assuring them especially of His Spirit and benediction, to help them to " fight," under their Redeemer's banner, " the good fight of faith," and to attain " eternal life ^s."

Not that they, to whom is committed the administration of this rite, have power to convey, arbitrarily, to whom they will, the graces of the Holy Spirit. God only gives. They are but instruments, by whom He acts. And while, as ministers, they give you His benediction, as men they need your prayers.

Neither are you to expect upon your reception of this rite, any sudden change in your nature, or extraordinary operation upon your spirits. For " so

^s 1 Tim. vi. 12.

in the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear^h." Our duty is to be in the use of the means of grace which God hath provided for us, and leave to Him the accomplishment of His purposes. We may not immediately perceive, upon receiving Confirmation, any change in our knowledge or virtue. We may, after the reception of it, fall, perhaps, into transgression, and not be uniform in our growth in grace. We may wonder, in the spirit of the Syrian leper, how, by the instrumentality of such unlikely means, the help of the Spirit of God should be communicated. But in those who, with right dispositions, observe this ordinance, and faithfully endeavour afterwards to fulfil its conditions, it is the part of faith to believe that He will cause its design to be accomplished in them who receive it, vanquishing by His power and goodness the obstacles to their salvation; and in us who administer it, 'not having regard to our unworthiness, but to the purposes of mercy which He hath appointed us to serve*.'

^h Mark iv. 26—28.

* Archbishop Secker.

SERMON X.



ON CONFIRMATION.



HEBREWS vi. 2.

The doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands.

IN discoursing from these words when they were first introduced to your consideration, it was proposed to set before you, in the first place, the antiquity and authority of *Confirmation*; secondly, its import; and, thirdly, the propriety and utility of it. Under the first head it has been shown, that Confirmation is the “laying on of hands” alluded to in the text, and, consequently, as ancient as the Apostles’ days, from whom it has descended to the Church in every age since; and being reckoned by them among the first principles of the Gospel of Christ, must be considered as having the approbation and authority of God. In treating under the second head of the import of this rite, it appeared that confirmation is administered for the supply of the grace of God in a way adapted to the present condition of our nature; implying, on the part of the recipients, a profession of the Christian faith, by a public and formal ratification, in their own names, of the baptismal covenant, and an application for the help and benediction of God; and, on the part of God, a confirming to them, by the significant ceremony of “laying on of hands,” all the covenant of His mercies, assuring them espe-

cially of His Spirit and benediction, to help them to “fight,” under their Redeemer’s banner, “the good fight of faith,” and to attain “eternal life^a.”

We are now to consider, in the last place, the propriety and utility of this ordinance.

In the first place, its utility is very great in bringing to our view the nature and obligations of our baptism. Ah! who hath pondered sufficiently the great things which were done for him when he was baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost^b?” In that sacrament we were made ‘members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.’ It was the most momentous transaction which could be done for us, individually, in this lower world. And yet how many Christians grow up and pass through life without consciousness of these great behests! Though heirs, if they will be so, of immortality and bliss in heavenly regions, they live as if their only inheritance was the few short years they pass upon the earth, and the unsatisfying pursuits and fleeting pleasures in which they spend them. Though made by baptism “little lower than the angels^c” in their endowments and relations, they choose their portion, and expend their lives, as if God had made them little higher than the brutes. This often proceeds, in all probability, from their not taking sufficiently impressive views of what was done for them when they were baptized. They are unacquainted with the greatness of their vocation, with the treasures which belong to them, with the glories which are within their reach. Confirmation brings baptism back to their notice. It engages their attention to the great things which God hath done for them, whereof they should be glad; and the solemn things

^a 1 Tim. vi. 12.

^b Matt. xxviii. 19.

^c Ps. viii. 5.

He requires of them, whereof they should be mindful; and thus is calculated to make them early acquainted with their privileges and duties as Christians, of which, without this rite to point to the waters in which they were washed, and the mercies which have been sealed to them, they might pass through many stages of life, and even descend into the grave, with vague apprehensions, or in utter ignorance. But of such an ignorance, the consequences in the world to come may be eternally lamented. Even in this world it subjects men to the greatest privations in their most important concerns. Without a knowledge of the value of their baptism, they must be destitute of the true spring of Christian exertion, and the highest source of human joy. Their life will want the Christian character, their happiness the Christian foundation, their devotion the Christian spirit. They cannot, with understanding, apply to themselves the grateful strain in which the Psalmist describes the condition of the redeemed; "He brought me out of the horrible pit, out of the mire and clay, and set my feet upon the rock, and ordered my goings^d;" nor join in spirit and in truth with the Church, in her hymn to the Author of her salvation, 'Day by day we magnify Thee, and we worship Thy Name ever world without end.'

Again, this rite is very proper and useful in affording young persons an opportunity to make, publicly, a profession of the Christian religion. So becoming and desirable, so reasonable and beneficial is such a profession, that nature dictated a correspondent practice in the most cultivated nations of the heathen world. In Persia their youths were required, when they came to man's estate, to take a solemn oath

^d Ps. xl. 2.

that they would despise all filthy lucre, bodily pleasure, and vain glory, that they would be emulous of virtue, worship God, and honour their parents; that they would speak truth, do good, and never wilfully violate any of these things. Among the Athenians, when their young men were enrolled, according to the usage of their nation, they bound themselves, by a solemn obligation, to observe the perpetual solemnities and received customs of their country, and to defend and reverence the religion in which they were born.

What appeared so proper to enlightened reason, seems also to have had the sanction of Divine approbation. Among the Jews, that people so highly favoured and so fully instructed of God, we find a similar practice. ‘When the Jewish children came to be thirteen years of age, and had learnt the Law and their prayers, they were presented by their father before a holy assembly, and there solemnly took upon themselves the observation of the Law, and were thenceforth to answer for their own faults. All which was concluded with prayer for their increase in good works.’ To this custom our blessed Lord, who for our example was careful “to fulfil all righteousness^e,” is supposed to have submitted Himself, when at twelve years of age, having, by His rare attainments, according to a Jewish phrase, run before the command, He was found at Jerusalem, “in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions^f.” And did the youthful Jew study assiduously the shadowy religion and voluminous law of his fathers, and rejoice publicly to take upon himself that yoke which it was so laborious and painful to bear? Yea, did the heathens, by a formal act, profess the dark, unsatisfying reli-

^e Matt. iii. 15.

^f Luke ii. 46.

gions of their country, and promise to reverence and defend them? And shall Christians not openly avow their attachment to the religion which bringeth unto them salvation, and sheds a clear and benign light upon all the paths of life? Shall they, to whom the Son of God has come to instruct them, who have been redeemed by His blood, and are taught the way to eternal life by the words of His mouth; shall they neglect to choose Him for their Lord, and to devote themselves openly to His service? In them who have been baptized, it is not only reasonable and becoming to do so—it is required of them. They owe it to the Church which applied to them, in their infancy, the benefits of the baptismal covenant, in the confident belief that when they grew up they would acknowledge its obligations. They owe it to their sponsors, who, when they were unable to act for themselves, charitably took upon them these obligations in their names, in the just expectation that ‘when they come of age they would take them upon themselves.’ They owe it to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who demands that all men should enlist openly under the banners of Christ, and not be ashamed of Him before men, if they would partake of His triumphs over sin and death; and not have Him ashamed of them, when He “shall come in the glory of His Father with the holy angels^s.” “The righteousness which is of faith,—what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salva-

^s Mark viii. 38.

tion^h." It was probably to some such act by the excellent Timothy that St. Paul alludes, when he reminds him with such powerful effect, in his first Epistle to him, that he had "professed a good profession before many witnessesⁱ;" and among the advantages of Confirmation it is not the least, that it affords a suitable, and, to the young, a very seasonable opportunity of publicly declaring their faith in, and devotedness to, the religion in which they were baptized; the religion of their fathers; the religion of their Redeemer, who alone hath "the words of eternal life^k;" the religion by which, if at all, mankind must be reformed, and saved, and made happy; and to the knowledge of which it is a distinguishing mercy that God hath vouchsafed to call them. Happy state of the Christian world, if all its offspring, its sons and its daughters, were seen at their entrance upon the career of active life making this profession.

For, I add, in the third place, that it is highly useful, at the period when men's habits are beginning to be formed, to have their minds and hearts prepossessed by the instructions of religion. Man is a religious being; his interests and destinies are not confined to this present world; he is to exist through eternity. Yet the things of this life seize fast upon his attention, and have a powerful influence upon his passions and conduct. He passes the first years of his existence in a state in which there is every thing to mislead his opinions and endanger his virtue.

The world is infectious. Few bring back at eve immaculate the manners of the morn. Ah! how many thoughts become rooted in the mind; how many habits are given to the affections; how many biasses are put upon the conduct, in the years of youth, which it is the most painful labour, the

^h Rom. x. 6—10.

ⁱ 1 Tim. vi. 12.

^k John vi. 68.

most difficult duty of the Christian, in after life, to correct or destroy! These evils proceed from want of better knowledge or holier impressions. They would hardly find place if the ground in which they appear were occupied with plants of religious setting, and warmed with the light of celestial wisdom, and watered with the dews of Heaven; at least they would not strike their roots so deep, and have so strong a growth, as to become so difficult to guide, so hard to extirpate. Confirmation calls the attention to religion: it sets before the youthful mind what God hath forbidden as evil; what He has revealed as true, and of highest importance to them; and what He hath enjoined as good; it excites inquiry; inquiry begets knowledge; knowledge obtained and professed under such solemn auspices can hardly fail to produce an increase of piety; and thus there is placed early in the hearts of the young a light by which they may discern the character and tendency of their desires; thus they are furnished with defence, as far as knowledge will go, against the errors and immoralities to which they cannot but be exposed, by the corruption of their sinful nature, and the pollutions which are in the world.

Once more; the comfort and encouragement, the peace and animation, afforded by this rite, are evidences of its utility. To be assured that a thing is attainable is a powerful incentive to pursuit. To have success guaranteed to us is the greatest encouragement to exertion. How animating is it, when undertaking a difficult work, to have the good wishes of our friends, the benediction of our parents, and assurance of the prayers and assistance of those who are able to help us. The course of virtue is an arduous one. The objects which the Christian pursues are great and glorious; but between him and

the attainment of them, there are distance, and many obstacles. *Confirmation* brings to him all those encouragements. It assures him that eternal life is attainable by him, and guarantees the attainment of it to his faithful pursuit, with the oath of God. It gives him the benediction of his heavenly Father, and the good wishes of all the blessed Trinity in his undertaking; and promises the help of One, “who is mighty to save¹.” In it the Almighty says to him in effect, at his entrance upon the service to which he is called, “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest^m.” At any stage of his journeying, he may look back to this covenant and benediction; and if he have endeavoured to observe his vows, “though an host should encamp against him, his heart will not fear; though” spiritual “war should rise against him, in them will he be confidentⁿ.” If he be ready to say of his adversaries, the evil passions of his heart and the ‘crafts and assaults of the devil,’ the temptations and sorrows of life, and the terrors of death, These enemies are greater and mightier than I, how shall I dispossess them? the voice of the Almighty may be heard in this rite, saying, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God^o.” As in any undertaking, so in the outset of the Christian life nothing can be more valuable than the knowledge of the favour and benediction of the Most High. He cheerfully pursues his object who knows that the Almighty is his helper and friend in the pursuit. This is especially the case in approaching the Lord’s Supper. As on the one hand it is proper, that before Christians partake of that heavenly food, they should submit to the orders and rules of the family, for whose sustenance and refreshment that

¹ Isa. lxiii. 1.^m Exod. xxxiii. 14.ⁿ Ps. xxvii. 3.^o Isa. xli. 10.

food is provided; so, on the other hand, it is very desirable that a portion of that Spirit which actuates the family should be transfused unto their bosoms, and they be assured of their welcome, by being certified of their participation in that favour which the great Head of the family extends to all the household. The usefulness and propriety of this rite, in preparing Christians to go to the holy table with those indispensable requisites, a full trust in God's mercy, and a quiet conscience, are so great, that the Church has seen fit to order, that 'there shall none be admitted to the Holy Communion until such time as he be confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be confirmed.' This instance of the utility of this ordinance, whether it be considered with respect to the good order and reputation of the Church, or to the peace and comfort of the Christian, at that trying and timid period of his life, when he is about to perform for the first time, his highest and most solemn duty, it is not possible to estimate too highly.

But what is knowledge, what is animation, without strength? It is a difficult warfare in which the Christian is engaged. It is not enough that he has been enlisted to 'fight manfully under the banner of his Redeemer;' he must be furnished with arms and strength for the contest. It is not enough that he has been separated and devoted in baptism to the service of his Lord; he needs the Holy Spirit, of whose union with him *Confirmation* is the sign and means to strengthen and protect, to help and defend him. And the utility of this ordinance is in no respect greater than in furnishing you with the weapons of your warfare, at a time when your enemies are most numerous, your danger greatest, and your own strength least tried and immature. This utility of the rite was prefigured in the case of the Apostles.

They had been called to be His disciples by our Lord Himself; they had professed faith, and repentance, and devotion to their Master; they had partaken of the symbols of His body and blood, at the first celebration of His Holy Supper; He had said unto them, “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean^p.” “Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you^q.” Yet were they “slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken^r.” Their understandings were dull in comprehending the plan of salvation which their Master was accomplishing. They were ambitious and emulous; and when Jesus fell into the hands of His enemies, they all “forsook Him, and fled^s.” Their Master knew their need of the Comforter to open their understandings, and “abide with them for ever^t;” and He instructed them not to go forth to their Christian work till they were “endued with power from on high^u.” On the day of Pentecost they received their large portions of this gift, which, having ascended up on high, their Lord had received for men^x; and, behold, they who before understood none of His sayings, now comprehended clearly the great doctrines of His salvation; they who were timid and perplexed, became courageous and happy in His cause; exhibiting, through the aid of the Spirit, not only miraculous deeds, but such attainments also of faith and holiness, as have been adduced, and with great power, as evidences of the divine origin of the religion which they embraced. Let me turn your attention to a higher example:—It is that of our blessed Lord Himself. Worthy to be remembered by all His disciples is the fact that

^p John xii. 10. ^q Ibid. xv. 3. ^r Luke xxiv. 25.

^s Matt. xxvi. 56. ^t John xiv. 16.

^u Luke xxiv. 49. ^x Ps. lxxviii. 18.

He entered not upon the labours and trials of His life, and especially that He went not forth to the temptation, to which, for the full triumph of our nature over the devil, and for the instruction of us all, He condescended to submit Himself, till He had been baptized, and had received, after His baptism, the Holy Ghost; which, when He had come up out of the water, and was praying on the shore, “descended like a dove upon Him^y ;” visibly, for the satisfaction of others; really, for his own *Confirmation*, in His human nature. Herein, in the opinion of some ancient Fathers, was represented to us “the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands.” ‘When He was washed by the hands of John,’ says one of them, ‘the order of the mystery was settled.’ The Father fulfilled what the Son had asked, and what the Holy Ghost had foretold. The spiritual oil immediately descended in the image of a dove, and sat upon His head, and anointed Him, from whence He began to be called Christ, because He was anointed of God the Father. And that imposition of hands might not seem to be wanting, the voice of God was heard from the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased^z.” And, blessed Lord, if Thou wentest not into the wilderness to Thy conflicts with the enemy, and to the sufferings of Thy unparalleled life, till Thou wast fortified with the Spirit, what are we “to fight our fight, to finish our course, to keep the faith^a,” without the Holy Ghost? Happy, surely, are the youths upon whom, at the period when their passions are strong, the allurements to pleasure enticing, and all the devious paths of life opening before them, Thou vouchsafest to bestow the restraining and protecting, the strengthening

^y Luke iii. 2.

^z Matth. iii. 17. ^a 2 Tim. iv. 7.

and consoling influences of the Spirit, the Comforter. It was expedient for us that Thou shouldest go away, that Thou mightest send Him unto us^b. And useful to the young Christian, yea to all men, is the rite of Thy Church, by which Thou assurest them, if they perform their vows, of their participation of this important part of Thy Father's favour and gracious goodness towards Thy people.

Again; this ordinance of the Church is useful to remove the objections which many persons have to the charitable office of sponsors, and to facilitate the discharge of the sponsors' duties. It is, indeed, an office of great responsibility. In general its duties are too heedlessly assumed, too negligently performed. Sponsors, whose wards are no more in this life, are they reaping in the other world fruits of your care? Are they bearing testimony before the throne of God to your pious fidelity? Sponsors, whose wards are living, and ye who shall hereafter be called upon to appear as sponsors, let the prospect of frequent opportunities of fulfilling the charge which is given you at the close of the baptismal office, invite and animate you to a faithful attention to the duties you owe to those little ones, whom you took at the font from the arms of Christ's ministers, and bring them up for His kingdom. Do you say it is a difficult work? and are any deterred on account of the responsibility from undertaking this most kind, and in the ancient Church, most useful office? Where *Confirmation* is stately administered, it will be for a shorter time, yea, only for the years in which the wards cannot act for themselves, that the obligations will rest upon you. Of the bodies of the helpless infants, for whom there were in reserve large estates, great honours and

^b John xvi. 7.

high destinies, would any of you refuse to take care, for a few years, till they might enter upon their possessions? How much rather, then, of the souls of the little ones, for years as few; whose destinies are immortality; whose inheritance, if they are fitted for it, is the kingdom of heaven. Surely, the magnitude of the interests of children which are involved in the discharge of a sponsor's duties, and the prospect of being under the responsibility only for those years in which the young are not of age to take care of their own souls, will diminish the aversion of Christians to sustain this important office, and increase their anxiety to discharge its obligations. And this leads me to mention, as another benefit which this rite is calculated to promote, the diligent use of that valuable means of religious instruction—the catechising of children. In the Catechism of the Church, they must be sufficiently instructed before they are brought to be *confirmed*. For the purpose of preparing them for *Confirmation*, this incomparable compendium of Christian instruction is said to be set forth. And the young who are taught to understand, as well as repeat it, cannot be ignorant of any of the essential principles of our holy religion. The expected returns, at stated times, of opportunities to bring the young to be *confirmed*, will, it may be hoped, excite and encourage ministers, and sponsors, and parents, to a full and faithful use of this excellent means of promoting the knowledge and virtues of the rising generation; and will also, by presenting an object of importance to their mind, engage the young more intensely and assiduously in this instruction. Of the importance of this influence of the rite, it is impossible to give a full expression. “Whom,” says the prophet, “shall He teach knowledge? and whom shall He make to understand doctrine? Them

that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts ^c.”

Further, this ordinance is eminently calculated to promote the comfort and edification of the Church. The soundness of her faith will be most likely to be preserved, when her young members, as they advance to her highest privileges, are well instructed therein; and all professing the same principles, promise to be its supporters. By gathering them together, in their earlier years, under the same wing of the Almighty, unity of spirit may happily be promoted, and the bond of peace and charity strengthened. More of our Redeemer's family, it may be expected, will be induced by this ordinance to go to His table with a full trust in God's mercy, and a quiet conscience; and while the good order and reputation of the Church will be promoted by the satisfactory evidence which will be hereby obtained, of the sufficiency of their knowledge and good intentions, who are received to her holy communion, they who are about to sit down, for the first time, at the sacrament of the Lord's supper, will, at this timid and anxious period of the Christian's life, be encouraged and strengthened by the previous reception of God's benediction and grace. The Pastors of the Church will be comforted when they behold those whom they themselves, or their predecessors, baptized when they were infants, taking, with competent knowledge and devout intentions, their privileges and their duties upon themselves. Those who have long been guests at the sacred board will have a holy consolation, when they see young communicants rising, many of them from among their own children, in successive steps, to take their places at the table of the Lord, when

^c Isa. xxviii. 9.

they shall be called to His table in heaven. They that are without, will observe with admiration in our Church, what the good Psalmist so earnestly desired to have seen in the Church to which he belonged—its “sons growing up as the young plants, and its daughters being as the polished corners of the temple^d.” The efforts of the elder to prepare the younger for this ordinance, by instructing them in the Gospel; and the readiness of the younger to devote themselves in it to the honour and obedience of God, would, in all probability, bring down upon the community, larger portions of the blessing of Heaven; and in the Churches in which many were found thus “walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost^e,” it could hardly fail but that there should be a goodly increase of Christian knowledge, piety, and virtue. Upon this point I have the testimony of the Bishops of our Church, in those parts of it in which it is most flourishing—that they have found nothing more useful in promoting its growth and prosperity, than the administration of this rite. It is, indeed, a remarkable testimony to the utility of *Confirmation*, that when the Ministry and Liturgy of the Church from which we have received it, were, in a time of unhappy ferment, abolished, many of those who succeeded to places without the office of those who were removed, took upon them the administration of this ordinance.

I add, lastly, that this rite is reasonable and proper, as a becoming service to God. He has a claim to the first devotion of our hearts. Right and becoming it is, before we enter on the world, to acknowledge Him. And especially when we have been made His children by adoption and grace, He may expect us to seek His help and benediction, that we

^d Psalm cxliv. 12.

^e Acts ix. 31.

may glorify Him with our bodies and with our spirits, which are His ^f. We may believe that this service is pleasant and acceptable to God; that our Father in heaven is happy when we seek His Spirit and favour. For what man is there among you who is not gratified when his children come to him asking his blessing, and desiring his direction and aid, that they may do him good and honourable service? If ye, then, are gratified by the devotion of your offspring, is He who implanted the paternal affections in your bosom less affectionate to His children than you? Of His readiness to bestow the blessings which are sought in this rite, He hath given us assurance, and affecting illustration, in this beautiful appeal, by the mouth of His Son: “What man is there among you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him ^g?” to them that ask it when they are setting out on their journey through this perilous world? to them that ask it at His altar, in “the place which He hath chosen to put His name there ^h?” to them that ask it with an unreserved devotion of themselves to His service and glory? to them that ask it in union with His ministers and “the congregation of the saints ⁱ?” to them that “ask it in his Son’s name,” at the moment when they are *confirming* their enlistment under His Son’s banner, to fight against the enemies, whom He would have them overcome? If there be upon earth a scene upon which “the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity ^k,” looks down with pleasure, He

^f 1 Cor. vi. 20.

Matt. vii. 9—11; Luke xi. 13.

^h Deut. xii. 21.

ⁱ Psalm lxxxix. 5.

^k Isaiah lvii. 15.

surely does upon the companies of the young, when they are gathered together to place themselves obediently under the shadow of His wings, anxious to be defended by Him from every thing which is displeasing to Him ; and looking to Him, meekly, for assistance, that they may be enabled to do His will, and become fitted for that Heaven which He wishes them to enjoy. As He beholds them in their adoption and devotion of themselves to His service, I doubt not, to use a sentiment of one of the most learned and pious divines of the English Church, ‘ He says of each of them, in a proportionate degree, as He said of Jesus at the moment when the Spirit like a dove descended on Him, This is My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.’

ADDRESS

DELIVERED IMMEDIATELY AFTER ADMINISTERING
THE HOLY AND APOSTOLIC RITE OF
CONFIRMATION.

My Young Friends,

THERE will be few occasions in the course of your lives so interesting and important as the present one. You have this day devoted yourselves to the most High God, your Redeemer; and He hath confirmed to you the assurance that you are His adopted children, and heirs of His kingdom. It is to you the day of your entrance upon that great and glorious estate, of which your parents and sponsors were permitted to take possession for you, when you were yet in your infancy; an estate containing the pardon of your sins, the favour and affection of Almighty God, the assistance of His grace and Holy Spirit, and the promise of eternal life; and, therefore, very fitly denominated 'a state of salvation.' At this your entrance upon the possession of it in your own names, the Church rejoices; the angels of heaven have been spectators, and are glad; the blessed Redeemer of our race receives gratification, and takes you by the hand; and the Almighty Father of all beings condescends to bestow on you His heavenly benediction. So great is the import of what has now been done, that you, as you rest upon it, and we, as we

contemplate it, should be penetrated with admiration and gratitude, with humility and joy; and might well exclaim—"What hath God wrought^a!"

This transaction, however, is not a mere ceremony, which is now done, and is to have no connexion with your future conduct. It ought to consecrate your whole life, to give direction to all the steps of it; never to be forgotten at any of its stages, nor remembered but with thankfulness and godly fear. You have taken upon you the vows of God. The relations into which you are brought are to be perpetual. You have acknowledged obligations which are to be performed daily. There is a covenant between you and the Almighty, in which you have promised to believe, and to be holy. In virtue of this covenant there is opened to you the prospect of the highest felicity of which your nature is capable—even satisfaction in life, peace in death, and immortality in heaven. But your attainment of these blessings depends upon the fulfilment, by the covenanting parties in the transaction of this day, of their respective engagements.

Touching the Almighty, what He hath promised He 'will most surely keep and perform.' He hath graciously condescended to renew to you, in your Confirmation, the assurance of the pardon of your sins, of the aid of His Holy Spirit, and of eternal life. Respecting the certainty and manner of accomplishing these things, it becomes you not to scruple or to doubt. In this matter your business is to believe, with a stedfast reliance on His word that if you are faithful to fulfil your vows, "He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it^b" unto the end; "for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance^c;" "with Him is no varia-

^a Numb. xxiii. 23.

^b Phil. i. 6.

^c Rom. xi. 9.

bleness, neither shadow of turning^d.” The power of your God is equal to His purposes. His veracity is equal to His power. “Hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good^e?” He hath commanded to bless, and you are blessed; and, unless you abandon the conditions of the blessing, nothing can reverse it.

It is, therefore, respecting the fulfilment of the engagements on your part made, that you are to be always concerned, so long as you continue in this lower world. You have promised to the most High God, your Redeemer and best Benefactor, to renounce whatever He has forbidden, to believe whatever He has taught, and to do whatever He has commanded. As you look forward into this path which you have entered, does it seem to you an arduous way? It is an arduous way. For man to be good and gain heaven, is not a light business. But how great, how encouraging, how animating are your excitements to fidelity! If you persevere, the Holy Ghost will remain with you; you will have in life the favour of God, the knowledge of forgiveness, and the consciousness of holiness; He who died for you will see, with satisfaction, the fruit of His love; your parents and friends will be gladdened, and society adorned and refreshed by the beauty and fragrance of your virtues. When death shall approach, (for you all must die,) to convey you from all you here hold dear, to the tribunal of the Almighty, you will have the only hopes by which man can be comforted and sustained in that most awful hour of human probation; and from the tribunal of judgment you will be taken to heaven, there to be happy for ever with all the good, with Jesus, and with God. If, on the other hand, you become

^d James i. 17.

^e Numb. xxii. 19.

wearied of the path, and desert it for any of the enticements of 'the world, the flesh, or the devil,' your portion will be perplexity and dissatisfaction in life; cheerlessness, if not horror, in death; and everlasting banishment from heaven, into regions of darkness and undiscovered woe. What powerful motives are found in this alternative, to the most careful and constant performance of your Christian duties! What inducements to keep your souls diligently, to pass the time of your sojourning here in fear, to endeavour to be righteous before God, "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless ^f!"

Study, then, my young friends, the holy Scriptures. They are given by your heavenly Father, to be a "lamp unto your feet, and a light unto your path ^g;" study, then, some portion of them every day, that you may regulate all the conduct of your lives by them, for they contain for you the only certain instructions: in them we have the words of "eternal life, and they are they which testify" of our Lord ^h. Use yourselves to ask daily in private prayer, and to seek, by a devout attendance on the services of the sanctuary, the continuance and increase of God's Holy Spirit. It is promised to you, if you will seek it and use it faithfully; and without it you can do nothing. Remember your obligation to respect yourselves, and to abstain from all sin and wickedness, considering "that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you ⁱ." As soon as you can, with a full trust in God's mercy and with a quiet conscience, go to the holy table, to celebrate the Lord's Supper; and never neglect, in the course of your lives, to attend with suitable pre-

^f Luke i. 6.

^h John v. 39.

^g Ps. cxix. 105.

ⁱ 1 Cor. iii. 16.

paration and dispositions, on this most comfortable ordinance. It is in this sacrament you must find the food which, from time to time, will refresh and sustain your spiritual life; and the medicine, frequently, which will heal your sickness. To these helps, from the mercy of God, fail not to add the exertions of your own reason, and of all your faculties, to be faithful and virtuous in all the stations and relations of life, to which in His Providence, He shall call you. Cultivate, in yourselves especially, that benevolence, that readiness and desire to do good, which is so conspicuous a part of Christian virtue, and which, we have reason to believe, it is particularly pleasant to our heavenly Father to behold in His children. Meditate upon the life of Jesus Christ, the pattern of all that is perfect in man; and endeavour, by the assistance of that grace which you have received, to be made like unto Him. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure; whatsoever things are lovely; whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think of these things^k." Thus will you be rendered as perfect and happy as man in this region of imperfection and sorrow can be; the way which seemed arduous will be found by you, as you advance, to be the "way of pleasantness;" and the path which you have chosen, to be the "path of peace^l." While all other ways lead down to the gates of hell, it will conduct you, at last, to the inheritance in heaven. But if you at any time quit it, Oh! what shall I say unto you? Repent immediately, and return to it, that so iniquity may not be your ruin. In dismissing you, to run the career upon which you have entered, I can-

^k Phil. iv. 8.

^l Prov. iii. 17.

not but be filled with solicitude ; and the same words which the wise king of Israel addressed to his son, I now leave with you ; “ And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind : if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee ; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever ^m.”

Christians of greater advancement who have received *Confirmation*, pleasant it must be to you to behold these young persons on the same ground with you, starting in the same course which you have for some time pursued ; and you have done well in coming to this rite, to animate them by your example, and to manifest your own desire to “ fulfil all righteousness ⁿ.” Instructed already in the mercies of the Christian covenant, and accustomed, at your communions, to recognise its obligations, it is not needful for me to address to you many words. But there is an admonition of Moses to God’s ancient people, so pertinent to your case, and to the case of all who are associated with us in this holy rite, that I cannot forbear to bring it to your notice, and with it I shall close this address : “ Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in His ways, and to keep His statutes, and His commandments, and His judgments, and to hearken unto His voice : and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be His peculiar people, as He hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments ; that thou mayest be an holy people unto the Lord thy God, as He hath spoken ^o.”

^m 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. ⁿ Matt. iii. 15. ^o Deut xxvi. 17—19.

SERMON XI.

ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.

I CORINTHIANS, ix. 23—27.

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, 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 Testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

HAVING set before you, my brethren, in several discourses, the nature and necessity, the subjects, the uses, and the laws, of the first Christian Sacrament, we come now to consider the second, the Lord's Supper. In approaching the consideration of this holy mystery, I am filled with anxiety that it should be rightly understood by you. If baptism is the great means whereby we are born to a new life, new relations, and new hopes, the Lord's Supper is the great means, whereby that life is sustained, those relations are recognised, and those hopes enlivened and assured. Yet of the benefits of this sacrament, how large a part of the Christian community have no participation. God, of His mercy has been pleased, in compassion to the infirmities of our nature, to pro-

vide for us sensible pledges of His pardon and favour ; visible tokens of the nearest relations to Him, and exalted hopes, into which He has begotten us by the covenant in Christ Jesus, that we may be encouraged and enabled to maintain a lively faith in His mercy, and reminded and strengthened to discharge the obligations, which under that covenant do necessarily rest upon us. But having either no thoughts upon the subject, or erroneous ones, the greater part of Christians turn their backs upon His altar, neglecting their peculiar inheritance, the best gift of their holy religion. What wonder then, that the privileges of Christianity are imperfectly appreciated ; and its virtues so frequently absent from bosoms, in which they might flourish ; yea and in bosoms, in which they have a partial growth, but are so seldom matured !

On these accounts I crave your indulgence, if I shall seem to treat with unnecessary fulness this important ordinance. In the discourses upon it, which will ensue, there are three things which I shall endeavour, through the Divine assistance, to accomplish.

To set before you, in the first place, the considerations which should induce us to partake of this sacrament.

Secondly, to point out to you the qualifications with which we should receive it.

And thirdly, to ascertain and obviate the principal causes, which induce so many to neglect it.

We are first to attend to the considerations, which should induce us to partake of this sacrament. These must be inferred from the history of its institution. Of this, there is an account given by the three first Evangelists, in their several gospels, and also by St. Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, according to a special revelation of it, which

he received from the Lord Jesus ^a. St. John, who wrote his Gospel long after the others, and wrote to supply what was then wanting, rather than to repeat what was already written, omits this as a thing perfectly understood by the Church. Among the several accounts of this institution, there is scarcely any variation. I have taken for our guide, that account of the institution of the Lord's Supper, which is given by St. Paul; it being, perhaps, the fullest and most impressive, which we have in the sacred records. You will recollect, that this great Apostle received the knowledge of the Gospel, not of man, "but by the revelation of Jesus Christ ^b;" and when you consider, that "he conferred not with flesh and blood ^c," concerning the truths he should deliver, you will be struck with the harmony between him, and the holy Evangelists, in their several accounts of this institution, and may perceive the care of its Author, that its history should be indubitably recorded, and its importance unequivocally made known. The words of the Apostle I have read; and in the discourse which may ensue upon them, you will not look for flowers of rhetoric, nor displays of argumentation; you will not find affected conceits, nor mysterious allusions. No eloquence can adorn a rite so simple. No language can add sublimity to an ordinance so holy. My chief concern will be to conduct you, with great plainness, through the several parts of the Apostle's record, persuaded that you will find in it all that you have need to understand, of the nature and obligation of this holy mystery.

The first thing which presents itself to our attention is, the Person instituting this sacrament, the

^a Matt. xxvi. 26. Mark xiv. 22. Luke xxii. 19. 1 Cor. xi. 23; &c.

^b Gal. i. 12.

^c Ibid. ver. 16.

Lord Jesus. It is of the highest and most sacred authority. Its origin is not of men. Our obligation to observe it is not derived from the Church. It is appointed by that Being, whom we are bound to love as our Saviour; whom it is our duty to reverence, as "Lord of all" things^d; whom we have confessed as our Master and Instructor, and have pledged ourselves in our baptismal covenant to observe and obey. It is a positive institution of that Christ, in a conformity to whose instructions, safety and happiness, improvement and final approbation, will always be found. Nothing that He has ordained, as generally necessary in His Church, can be consistently dispensed with by His followers, or deemed by any man optional or useless.

The injunction to the Apostles to do what He had done, to take bread and the cup, and bless them, and distribute them, as a memorial of His death and passion, necessarily implied that there should be recipients. And who, in the reason and nature of the thing, should receive His body and blood, but the members of His Church, for whom they were given? Who should unite in this commemoration before God, of the sacrifice of the death of Christ, but all those who hope to obtain by it remission of sins? Who should eat at the table of the Lord, of this feast upon the sacrifice, but all they, who have need of pledges of God's favour and goodness towards them? Such was the way in which the matter was understood by the first Christians, who cannot be supposed to have been ignorant of the design of the ordinance, or intention of their Lord. On the first day of the week, in all their assemblies, the celebration of this Supper was the great act of their public worship. And every person, who by

^d Acts x. 36.

baptism had been grafted into the body of the Church, and had not forfeited his privileges by notorious iniquities, was considered, not only as having a right, but as being under an indispensable obligation, to join in this holy Eucharist.

The second thing which you will notice, is the time in which Jesus appointed this ordinance; "the same night in which He was betrayed." What, blessed Lord, couldst Thou have required of Thy followers in that night, which they will not all be anxious to observe and do? We are so constituted, that we are much influenced in our opinions and conduct, by the circumstances of things. When this influence is promotive of good feelings, and friendly to virtue, it is commendable to indulge and cherish it. The circumstance of the time of the institution of the Lord's Supper, is carefully recorded, and renders it peculiarly interesting. In that night, "the heathen raged, and the people imagined a vain thing; the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers took counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Anointed^e." In that night the powers of hell were in array against our Redeemer, aiming at the subversion of His purpose, and the oppression of His spirit. In that night He experienced the first wound in the house of His friends, the first treachery of one whom He had chosen, and beheld in anticipation the subsequent faithless desertion of all His followers. In that night the soul of our Master was "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death^f," and the hour was near, when He would exclaim, under the power of darkness, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me^g?" In that night He perceived His ministry drawing near to a close; He knew that the agonies of the

^e Ps. ii. 1, 2.

^f Matt. xxvi. 28.

^g Ibid. xxvii. 46.

cross were at hand. But under all the emotions which possessed His bosom, He is chiefly anxious for the welfare of His Church. In that same night He collected His disciples, and appointed the thing which He would have us to do, in remembrance of Him. Sacred are the commands of the departing soul. Precious are the last bequests of parents and friends. This holy rite, what is it but the dying injunction of our Lord? This blessed sacrament, what is it but the parting legacy of Christ to His Church, to be to them a comfort and nourishment, when He should be gone?

A third thing for our consideration is, the elements which are used in the Supper; "the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread," and "after the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped." Unquestionably our Redeemer might have exalted, by His appointment, any creature which He chose, to be to His Church a memorial of His body and blood. But there are some obvious and affecting reasons, for the selection of bread and wine, of which I would not have you ignorant. These were pure elements, which His followers would be able to procure in every age, and the Church, by the consecration of these to the purpose, would partake of the same symbols in every place. There were too before our Saviour, at the time, the loaf and the cup, which, among the Jews, the master of the feast at the close of supper distributed among the guests, in token of peace and good will; and with instructive felicity, were these converted into the elements of that sacrament, in which we receive from our Lord the assurance of His favour and love. "Wine," also, hath God provided to "make glad the heart of man^h,"

^h Ps. civ. 15.

and bread hath He ordained to be the staff of our subsistence; and most significantly do they represent that refreshment of the soul, and nourishment unto eternal life, which those find in the body and blood of Christ, who spiritually receive them in this sacred Supper. The faithful, moreover, in the use of these symbols are impressively taught their joint communion in the mercies of Christ, and their union with each other in Him. For though there be many grains reaped perhaps from divers fields, yet is there in the same loaf but one bread; and though there are many grapes gathered perhaps from several vineyards, yet is there in the same cup but one wine. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread¹." Though, therefore, our blessed Lord might have set apart any of His gifts and creatures, to this exalted use, and all things might well have vied with each other for this holy appropriation; yet in the appointment of bread and wine, He hath consulted the convenience, and promoted the unity of His Church; He hath furnished us with an ancient and significant pledge of peace and good will; He hath set before us in a lively image our eternal sustenance in and by Him; and He hath taught us our common interest in His graces and our near relation in Him to each other. I might add a further significance in the breaking of bread, and pouring out the wine; but this will come more properly under another point to be noticed by you, namely, the act of the Lord in consecrating these elements.

¹ 1 Cor. x. 16, 17.

In themselves they were nothing more than means of corporeal strength and refreshment. Not till He had blessed, did He break the bread, and deliver the cup. Not till He had broken the bread, and taken the cup, and by His word and benediction hallowed them to this purpose, were they in any sense His body and blood. It was His consecration and offering of them, as symbolical of His sacrifice of Himself, which gave them their sacred significance, and converted them into means of spiritual sustenance. And of bread and wine consecrated and offered to God by the same authority, after the same manner, must we partake, when we would receive this sacrament; for otherwise we cannot be said to eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. This authority therefore Christ left with His Apostles and their successors for ever, with power to commit it to others, as He had committed it to them. And to them and such as they shall authorize, does it exclusively appertain, in behalf of their Master, to bless the cup, and to break the bread. No man, not lawfully set apart to the office, and deriving his authority from the head of the Church, through the channels which He hath appointed to convey it, may administer these elements to himself or others, any more than Uzziah might acceptably offer incense^k, or Korah and his company be their own priests^l. In the act indeed of breaking the bread, is shadowed forth, as the text suggests, the breaking of His body, who is the sustenance of the faithful; and in the pouring out of the wine is represented the shedding of His blood, as the libation which propitiates the Father, and washes away the sins of the world. And is this commemorative representation the memorial of a sacrifice without a priest? To whom is the care of

^k 2 Chron. xxvi. 18.

^l Numb. xvi. 40.

it with such advantage of order and significance committed, as to those who have received from Him the ministry of reconciliation, and are His organs and representatives to the Church? Not that there is in them any singular virtue. Alas, they are frail as their fellow men! The efficacy of their functions is not in them, but in the office and authority, with which Christ has seen fit to invest them. The Lord is in all things a lover of order. The Church, according to the pattern of it in the heavens, is a system of holy and beautiful order. All the institutions of our Saviour are conformable to the same order. When He would miraculously feed the multitude, the people sit down, and the Apostles distribute to them the loaves and the fishes. When He would dispense the knowledge of the truth to Cornelius and to Paul, though present in person with the one, and by an angel with the other, He refers them both to members of the ministry, to which He had committed the preaching of His word, and government of His Church. He hath ordained a perpetual priesthood, to attend continually on this very thing. They are in an especial manner the depositaries on earth of the powers, which are necessary to give validity to His sacraments; and now He hath ascended up on high, it is through their act of consecration, in His behalf, that bread and wine are by His word and spirit, made to the faithful in the Supper, the symbols of His body, and pledges of His love.

But it is time to pass to a consideration of the intent and use of this holy institution; "this do, in remembrance of Me; for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come;" that is, to preserve a lively recollection of Me, and of My sacrifice for the sins of the world, ye shall observe this ordinance for

ever. As often as ye shall eat bread and drink wine like these, made by consecration in My name, symbols of My body and blood, ye do show forth My death in an acceptable and effectual manner. Ye do show it forth to the Father, as the ground of your plea for pardon, grace, and immortality. Ye do show it forth to Me, as gratefully impressed upon your hearts, and as an inducement to Me to forgive and preserve My Church, having redeemed it with My blood. Ye do show it forth to the world, as the subject of your faith, whereof you are not ashamed ; as the only ground of your reliance for pardon, and immortality, to which they also should betake themselves, and through which alone, they, and any of the human race, have everlasting life. Ye do show it forth to each other, as a source and occasion of common joy, of mutual consolation and encouragement, of tender amity, and reciprocal good services. And ye do show it forth to your own souls, as the purchase of your redemption, as the sure foundation of hope and peace ; as the sacrifice whereby your sins are taken away, and you are restored to the love and favour of God. “ Do this,” then, all of you, “ in remembrance of Me.” Let it be the great act of Christian worship in all generations. In this simple, easy, and significant sacrament, commemorate often My love and My death, and the relations and hopes to which I have begotten you ; and the benefits which I have purchased for you with My blood, you will thus acceptably celebrate, and sensibly enjoy. This appears to be the full purport of the words, which our blessed Lord is said to have used, at the institution of this sacred ordinance. It is obvious in them, that the intent and meaning of this holy rite, is a commemoration of the sacrifice of the death of Christ ; in which we avouch ourselves to be His disciples, believing in, and relying upon, the

redemption and mercies that are in Him; desiring especially to be fed with that bread of life which came down from heaven; to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, that we may have eternal life abiding in us. Whatever blessings the ordinance is calculated to represent or convey, we may be sure will be annexed to the faithful observance of it; for no institution of the Almighty, unless it be through our own fault, can ever fail of its proper effects.

You are prepared now to consider, lastly, by whom this sacrament is to be received. It was to the twelve alone, at its first celebration, that it was administered. But it was evidently designed to be a perpetual ordinance in the Church. By it the Lord's death was to be shown until He comes. All therefore who stand related to Christ as the disciples did; all who are sensible of their salvation by His death, and after the way of His appointment have been grafted into His Church; all to whom Jesus has been manifested as Lord and Christ, are bound to fulfil this His great command. Every adult Christian in the primitive Church, who had not been set aside for his unworthiness, partook constantly of the Supper. And the command of the Lord is, "Drink ye all of it^m." The considerations which rendered it a significant, becoming and useful ordinance to the Apostles, will render it so to every believer. For who that looks for salvation by the blood of Christ, is not concerned in the grateful commemoration of His death? Accordingly, the invitation of the Church is given 'to all such as shall be religiously and devoutly disposed.' And if, indeed, there can be among Christians one duty which may be raised above another, when all rest

^m Matt. xxvi. 27.

upon the same authority of their Lord, it is this of observing, with proper affections, the rite He hath ordained for the perpetual commemoration of His death. None of His followers is beyond the application of the request, "Do this in remembrance of Me."

You see then, my brethren, in the views we have taken, how interesting and obligatory, how holy and significant, how proper and useful, this sacrament of the Lord's Supper is. Much it were to be wished, that every Christian was in the habit of constantly observing it with suitable dispositions and affections. I cannot forbear to express my regret, that in this, and indeed in other Christian communities, so few males are found at the Supper of the Lord*. Except here and there a beloved disciple, the holy women, as at the beginning, are alone by the cross, and first at the sepulchre. Surely these things ought not so to be. You have seen by whom this ordinance was instituted, the Lord Jesus. You have adverted to the solemn time of its institution, "the night in which He was betrayed." You have observed with what attention to our convenience, instruction, and comfort, He chose the elements, bread and wine. You have heard with how much care He hath appointed a Ministry in His Church, and made them the depositaries of His authority; that of elements, hallowed by virtue of the same power which hallowed the first sacramental bread and wine, you also may partake. You have seen the intent and meaning of this holy institution; that it is a grateful commemoration of the death of Christ, made at His request, in remembrance of Him, and for our own spiritual improvement. And you have

* This observation is, alas! too generally applicable to congregations, in our own Church.—ENGL. ED.

been informed, that it was designed for the benefit of the whole Church, and is among the most important of those duties, which are obligatory upon all Christians. In these considerations, how great are the inducements, how powerful are the reasons, which should bring all the followers of the Lamb to His holy table! Will it be said by them, that they are conscious of much sinfulness? "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners".ⁿ And for the benefit of sinners, who, 'with a true penitent heart and lively faith,' turn unto Him, was this ordinance specially instituted. Will it be urged, that by reason of their want of repentance and faith, they are unworthy? But if they are not in a state to receive their Redeemer and His veiled presence at His holy table, how shall they approach Him, in the unveiled display of His glory, when He cometh to judgment? That faith and repentance which they need, it is the most important concern of their lives immediately to acquire. Will it be said, that they see many go to the Supper of the Lord, who seem not, in any respect, to be benefited by it? Alas, it is an afflicting, a humbling consideration! But let it be remembered, that the deficiencies of others can never pollute the ordinance unto us. It is generally supposed that Judas, the basest and most ignoble of the human race, was present at the first celebration of the Supper, and we may draw from it this important lesson, that duties which others prostitute or perform insincerely, we are not, on that account, to neglect. Will it be pleaded, that they are deterred by the fear, that they may not subsequently live up to their obligations? Commendable, in some degree, is this humility. But they should consider,

ⁿ 1 Tim. i. 15.

that they are already brought under the same obligations by their baptismal covenant, that the same faith is professed by them in their creed, and a consciousness of the same duties is implied in their prayers and praises. Besides, we should ever remember, that when our exertions are faithful, God's grace is sufficient for us, and that when we are weak, then He is strong.

Let me not be supposed to diminish the sacredness and most holy solemnity of this institution, or to encourage an unmeaning and presumptuous attendance at the altar of the Lord. No. 'If any of you be a blasphemer of God, an hinderer or slanderer of His word, an adulterer, or be in malice, or envy, or any other grievous crime, repent ye of your sins, or else come not to that holy table.' But it is my desire to persuade you, if you have the Christian dispositions and principles, to avail yourselves of the comfort and encouragement of this ordinance; and if you have them not, to induce you to acquire them by a sense of your separation from Christ on earth, and a dread of a consequent separation from Him, in His heavenly kingdom.

To you, my Christian friends, who expect, at the approaching festival *, to join in the celebration of this holy sacrament, I would say, in the language of the Apostle, "examine yourselves." When you come to the altar of God, come with hands that are clean, and hearts that are pure; come in the garments of humility, and with the spirit of love. Come with a penitence which your Maker will accept as sincere, and a faith which He will approve, as holy and immovable. And may that Spirit, for which the disciples were waiting on the day of pentecost with one accord, in one place, descend also upon

* Easter Sunday.

° 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

you, to enlighten your understandings, to purify your affections, and to strengthen you unto all such good works, as God hath prepared for you to walk in; that thus you may be fitted, when you shall have passed through the gate of death, to celebrate the love and praises of your Redeemer, in that temple above, in which 'angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven,' in perfect felicity and uninterrupted joy, unitedly worship God and the Lamb.

SERMON XII.



ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.



1 CORINTHIANS, xi. 28.

*Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread,
and drink of that cup.*

WHEN we entered in a former discourse upon the subject of the Lord's Supper, it was proposed to set before you, in the first place, the considerations which should induce us to partake of this sacrament; secondly to point out to you the qualifications, with which we should receive it; and, thirdly, to examine, and, if possible, remove the principal causes which induce so many Christians to neglect it. To the first of these heads we then confined our attention; and found in the authority and character of the Being by whom the ordinance was instituted; in the peculiar time of its institution; in the reasons which induced Him to choose for the elements of it, bread and wine; in His care, for the better assurance of the faithful, to leave in His Church a Ministry, instructed and qualified to perpetuate it, and give it validity; in the intent, and meaning, and uses of the holy institution; and in the merciful and comprehensive design of applying it to the benefit of the whole Church; a body of motives, to induce every believer in our Redeemer to partake of this sacra-

ment, as strong, numerous, and affecting, if not more so, than those by which any other Christian duty is enforced. No man, therefore, who looks for the mercies of the Lord Jesus unto eternal life, may innocently, and without great detriment to his spiritual interests, neglect to do this, which He hath commanded for our benefit to be done, in remembrance of Him. But though every Christian is obliged both in interest and duty, to join in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, it is of unspeakable importance, that he do rightly; 'for as the benefit is great, if with a true penitent heart and lively faith, we receive this holy sacrament, so is the danger great, if we receive the same unworthily.' It is a holy mystery. It was styled anciently, a tremendous mystery. It is represented in Scripture, as a most efficacious mystery. And the reason why it fails to produce its proper effects, upon the hearts and lives of any who partake of it, must be found in the ignorance or inconsideration or wickedness, with which it is received. You will, therefore, indulge me with your serious attention, while I proceed to the second thing proposed, in treating of this subject, namely, to point out to you, what are the qualifications, with which we should receive the Lord's Supper.

It may be well to observe, in the first place, that it is necessary, before a person receives this holy sacrament, that he should have been baptized. The Lord's Supper was instituted by our Redeemer, exclusively for the nourishment and comfort of His Church. No man, therefore, can with any propriety partake of it, who is not a member of His Church. Baptism is the means, and the only means which He hath appointed, of grafting men into this His mystical body; and when once they have been baptized, they are incorporated into His Church;

and have a title ;—which, if they do not forfeit it by violating the conditions of their baptismal covenant, will be eternal ;—to all the instructions, assistances, and blessings, which for His Church He hath purchased wth His blood. Among these, the benefits of the Lord's Supper are upon earth among the greatest. And it may be generally observed, that the Christian life, which by our baptismal obligation we are bound to lead, is the best preparation for receiving rightly the holy communion. For in the detail which it will be useful to give of sundry qualifications, which we ought to carry, whenever we go to the table of the Lord, you will perceive, and I could wish the thing might be observed and remembered, that it comprises those graces and virtues, which Christians are obliged to possess, whether they partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper or not.

Thus, that we may descend to particulars, repentance is a qualification, without which we cannot consistently nor with any advantage go to the Lord's table. And this for many reasons. Do we not go thither to obtain the tokens and seals of our forgiveness? But can we hope, can we ask to be pardoned for the sins, at the remembrance of which we feel no sorrow, and with the dominion of which over us, we have no desire to part? Do we not go thither to commemorate the sufferings and death of the Son of God, for the expiation of our sins? And can we do this sincerely and worthily, without being penetrated with compunction for the transgressions, which required to be expiated at such a price; which subjected our merciful Redeemer to His unparalleled grief? Do we not go thither to recognize, and be recognized in, our exalted relations to the family of God, and to participate of the glorious privileges, which belong to the children whom He

hath adopted? But can we think of these high and holy relations, can we plead our claim to those privileges, without being sorrowful for the omissions of our duty, and violations of our baptismal vows; into which, through the infirmity of our nature, or through the perverseness of our wills, we at any time have fallen? The Church, in framing the office for the holy communion, presumes that her children come to it, truly and earnestly repenting of their sins. And what dangerous inconsideration, what solemn mockery is it, to profess to bewail before God ‘our manifold sins and wickedness, which from time to time we have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against His Divine Majesty,’ if our souls with heedless levity forget their trespasses; or, having them in remembrance, are not humbled on account of them, and turned suppliantly unto God. “Let a man examine himself.” Let him compare his life with the rule of God’s commandments. Alas! he will find in himself many iniquities, “for there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good, and sinneth not^a.” But let him have a painful sense of them; let him be heartily sorry for them; let him earnestly resolve to relinquish them; “and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup;” that the Almighty may behold in him the humble and contrite spirit, without which there is no promise of remission. For unto the ungodly God saith, “Why takest thou My covenant in thy mouth; whereas thou hatest to be reformed, and hast cast My words behind thee^b?” But to him who sincerely laments and resolves to forsake his sins, our Redeemer doth vouchsafe to give sacramentally in this ordinance, His body and blood to be pledges and earnest of forgiveness.

^a Eccles. vii. 20.

^b Ps. l. 16, 17.

This leads me to add, in the third place, that if we would receive this sacrament with propriety and benefit, we must bring to it a lively faith in Jesus Christ. The necessity of this qualification arises out of the nature of the thing. For with an infidel, a doubting, or an indifferent mind, to pretend to show forth before God in solemn memorials the death of His Son, would be an horrible impiety and base hypocrisy. Consider, my hearers, the necessity and character of this faith. It is not enough that we be free from unbelief. We must have a living and active faith in our Redeemer, in all His important offices; a faith that eagerly seizes hold upon Him as “mighty to save^c,” a belief that God hath appointed Him to be unto us, “a Prince and a Saviour^d,”—“in whom we have redemption through His blood^e ;”—a confidence, especially, in the efficacy of the spiritual food and sustenance, which He hath provided for us in this holy sacrament; that therein He is, as it were, “evidently set forth, crucified among us^f,” and we receive the assurances and comforts, which arise from feasting upon the sacrifice which the Almighty hath accepted; and ‘are made partakers of His most blessed body and blood.’ It is by this faith alone, that we offer unto God in the Eucharist an acceptable sacrifice. It is by this faith only, that we discern in the holy Supper the Lord’s body. Without this faith our souls can no more be benefited by the body and blood of Christ, than without the use of the proper corporeal organs, our bodies can be by bread and wine. The mere eating of the latter in the sanctuary, even if it be accompanied with prayer and some devout aspirations, can have but little

^c Is. lxiii. 1.

^e Eph i. 7.

^d Acts v. 31.

^f Gal. iii. 1.

significance or efficacy. Without respect to the offices of Christ, and confidence in the Divine mercy through the merits of his death and passion, it will be little more than an unmeaning and useless ceremony. It is using it merely as a religious ceremony, that deprives many of those who receive it of its sanctifying influences. "Let a man examine himself," then, "whether he be in the faith^a." Let him know and embrace the Lord Jesus, as "the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him^b." Let him look to the cross as the instrument of his redemption, and to the Lamb expiring upon it, as the propitiation for his sins. Let him see in the sacramental bread, the body of his Redeemer broken for the offences of men, and in the sacramental wine, the blood of his Redeemer shed for his salvation. Let him be able, as he takes these elements, to say, Through Him whom these represent, I am pardoned and accepted; "and so let them eat of that bread, and drink of that cup;" that thus, he may join in this Supper with that faith, without which it is impossible to please God. For whosoever cometh unto Him in this ordinance, and would be benefited thereby, "must believe that He is" in it; "and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" thereinⁱ.

It is unavoidable to remark here, in the fourth place, that we should bring to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, hearts overflowing with gratitude to Him for His wonderful love. This sacrament is the commemoration of the most stupendous act of benevolence, and to us the most beneficial act, which in this part of the universe is known; the death of the Son of God upon the cross, for the redemption of our sinful race. "Let a man examine

^a 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

^b Heb. v. 9.

ⁱ Heb. xi. 6.

himself," whether he hath appreciated justly and with sufficient thankfulness, the death of his Lord? Let him impress upon his bosom the glory and happiness which his Redeemer left; the humiliation and misery which He endured; the awful destruction from which He ransomed, and the delightful expectations to which He hath raised, the human race. Let him, by pondering "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height^k," of His merciful purposes, fan into a holy flame that love, which the knowledge of His passion can hardly fail to kindle; "and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup;" that with such affectionate gratitude as he would feel in fulfilling the wishes of a dying Benefactor, he may "do this," which Jesus hath commanded, "in remembrance of Him."

Once more. We should be filled with charity, when we go to the Lord's Supper. The feast of the Eucharist is a feast of love. One design in ordaining it was, to render it to Christians a bond of love. The deeds which it celebrates are deeds of unparalleled love. In the night in which He instituted it, Jesus said to His disciples, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another¹." And who can contemplate His patient and infinite love, and not be warmed with the glow of His benevolence? Who can look upon the family, for which He was contented to die, and feel ill will towards any of them? Who can stand by His cross, and behold Him pouring out His soul unto death, a ransom for many, and not be excited to acts of beneficence and piety? Who can see His patience and forbearance, amidst the indignities of His passion, and hear Him, while He offers Himself upon

^k Eph. iii. 18.

¹ John xiii. 34.

the cross a sacrifice for His enemies, uttering a prayer for their pardon, and an apology for the wrongs they had done Him; and not have his resentments towards those who have injured him, stilled and subdued, and his heart softened to reconciliation and forgiveness? The character of Christ is so entirely benevolent; the events which we celebrate at His Supper, are of a character so consensaneous with the spirit and acts of charity; that he who carries to it any other temper than that of peace and good will, exhibits in himself a monstrous contrast to the qualities which he is professing to admire, and can hardly expect that the Spirit of his Redeemer will love and abide with him. "Let a man," then, "examine himself," whether the same mind be in him, which was in Christ Jesus^m. Let him supplicate Charity to come down from her seat by the throne of God, and shed abroad her heavenly influences upon his heart:—let her fill him with a sincere desire and lively regard, for the welfare of his fellow men: let her remove from his bosom all envy, hatred, and malice, and introduce in their stead peace with all men and good will: let her excite him to generous almsdeeds for the poor and needy; and invest him with a part of the golden chain, which binds one fellow being to another, and all to God: "and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup."

Now these qualifications form the habit of every sincere Christian's life. They are carried by him into the scenes of his business, and walks of his pleasure; they are found with him when he sitteth in the house, and when he walketh by the way; they constitute his character in the days which are given to the world, and in the Lord's day. To him, there-

^m Philip. ii. 5.

fore, no opportunity to show forth his Lord's death, need be lost. Like the ancient Christians, he should seize every occasion to eat of the bread which came down from heaven, and sprinkle himself with the blood which cleanseth him from sin.

But you may ask, Is it not proper that we should especially prepare ourselves, when we would join in the celebration of this sacred ordinance? I answer, when we are sure that we approach the holy table, self-examination, prayer, and whatever may purify and elevate our affections, is both decent and useful. It is to be reckoned amongst the beneficial effects of receiving this sacrament frequently, and at stated times, that the preparatory recollections and devotions, to which it will naturally lead us, are most happily adapted to prevent the incoherence of our minds to religious principles, and to check the wanderings of our feet from the paths of virtue. And St. Paul, in the text, seems to recommend and require a sober consideration and proving of ourselves, when we are about to join in this great act of Christian worship. But yet the habitual is far preferable to the occasional preparation. The sincere Christian can never be unwelcome at the table of his Lord. For is he not always ready to confess, and desirous to forsake his sins? Does he not always rest upon the merits of his Redeemer, and find gratitude warming his bosom at every remembrance of His love? Is it not always his wish, however feeble his power, to be conformed to the will of his Maker, and is not benevolence towards his fellow beings, the reigning principle at all times, by which he would regulate his feelings and conduct towards them? Is he not a subject of his Redeemer's intercession, even when Satan may be desiring to sift him as wheat? Is he not constantly an object of his Redeemer's regard, even when, like Nathanael, he

is seen under the fig-treeⁿ, unconscious of the eye that observes him? Let not, then, the true follower of the Lamb unnecessarily deny himself the refreshment of the holy Supper. If there be not upon his conscience some extraordinary impediment, let him be by the table of his Lord, whenever he beholds it spread. But let not this diminish the awe, with which that table is guarded.

ⁿ John i. 48.

T SERMON XIII.

—
ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.
—

ST. LUKE, xiv. 18.

They all with one consent began to make excuse.

IN discoursing upon the subject of the Lord's Supper, we have already attended to the considerations which should induce us to partake of it, and the qualifications with which it should be received. The former, we have seen, are very numerous and weighty, and the latter attainable by all Christians, and such as they should possess, whether they partake of this sacrament or not. Whence then is it, that by so many Christians this ordinance is neglected? Whence is it, that before so many of His followers, the table of the Lord is spread in vain? This is the enquiry which we come now to consider; and with our remarks upon which, we shall close our discourses upon the sacraments of Christianity.

The causes which prevent men from observing this ordinance of our religion, are various. We shall speak only of those, which are the most obvious, and in speaking of these shall claim your indulgence for that plainness of speech, which, in the discussion of such topics, is both necessary and useful.

It may be presumed, that a leading cause of the neglect of this ordinance is a thoughtlessness of its

nature and obligations. There are many persons, who have never seriously considered it, as the great and proper act of Christian worship; as an ordinance, which by their baptismal vows they are solemnly pledged to observe and keep; as a sacrament, instituted for the whole body of the Church, of which no member of the same can neglect to partake, without great detriment to his spiritual life. They have never said to themselves, This ordinance was appointed not for a few, but for all the followers of Christ. They have never asked themselves, How shall I live, if I keep not up a communion with the Source of life; what shall I reply, when He who shall judge the world, shall say to me, Wherefore hast thou neglected to perform the services which I commanded to be done "in remembrance of Me^a?" And yet this inconsideration, though it may explain, can never excuse the neglect of this sacred duty. Can we innocently be thoughtless of the obligation of an ordinance, about which for our benefit the Redeemer of the world employed His care, when the agonies of crucifixion were pressing towards Him? This very thoughtlessness is surely a great crime, when God and His ordinances solicit attention. It is the requisition of reason, as well as the precept of inspiration, "Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is^b."

The pressure of the business and cares of this world, is urged by many as a reason, why they neglect to receive this sacrament. The avocations of life are so numerous and indispensable; their time is so taken up, and their minds so occupied with them, that they are not able to give that attention to this duty, which it deserves; and they hope the Al-

^a 1 Cor. xi. 24.

^b Eph. v. 17.

mighty will pardon their omissions. Now does not this plea evidently imply, that the demands of the world are to be satisfied, before the commands of God : that the affairs of this life are more important, than the things which belong to our eternal peace ? But what is there in the cares and toils, or in the pursuits and pleasures of this transitory state, to entitle them to this pre-eminence ? What claim have they to monopolize our time, and absorb our attention ? Are they most properly our business here ? No. We are destined for an immortal existence in another world, and are placed here to be trained up for it. Are they sources of greater and more substantial happiness ? No. Tell us, ye busy men, ye votaries of wealth, ye slaves of fashion, are the happiness and pleasure ye pursue, either sure or satisfactory ? Are they most noble in their nature, and worthy of our first regard ? No. They, in general, affect the inferior part and properties of man, and are perishable as the bodies they concern. Are they, in their influence or their advocates, furnished with pretensions to a more alluring character ? No. The scenes of the one are time, of the other eternity ; the advocate of the former is man ; of the latter, God. So that if there be any incompatibility between the business of religion, and the business of life, the former has the first claim to attention ; to use the latter in apology for neglecting the former, exposes us to the charge both of imprudence and impiety.

But it is apprehended, that there is nothing incompatible between the requisitions of the Gospel, and an attention to all our lawful secular concerns. Is a man unable “to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God^c,” because he has much business ? Is a man unable to be industrious, to

^c Mic. vi. 8.

controul his passions, to have trust and resignation towards his Maker, because he has many avocations? Is a man unable to rejoice in the knowledge of a Redeemer, whose blood may cleanse him from his sins, and whose intercessions may propitiate the Almighty in his behalf, because he has many cares? And concerning the appropriate duties of public and private worship, is there any man who, by a methodical arrangement of his business, may not find time for these? Man is by nature social; and his situation in this world renders it necessary and proper, that he should be occupied with many temporal concerns. Christianity is a religion adapted to him in that nature and condition, in which it finds him. It is a religion for men of business as well as for men of leisure. It is a religion for the world, as well as for the closet. Its ordinances are not something, to which he who embraces it must betake himself, and abandon every thing else. They are rather provided to protect him in his necessary pursuits, and to encourage him in sustaining his temporal cares. And he who is just and benevolent, in all his temporal transactions, who from a principle of obedience is faithful in discharging the duties of the relations, into which his connection with the world has brought him, does thereby honour his Creator, as well as when he brings to Him his prayers and praises. Is thy business criminal? Thou mayest well abstain from the altar of God. He who is engaged in the pursuit of a forbidden object, or pursues in a forbidden manner an object which is lawful, is in a state of awful liability to Divine vengeance, whether he goes to the sacrament or not. But are your occupations, Christians, lawful? In your business are you true and just, meek, compassionate, and beneficent? Throughout the paths into which your avocations

lead you, are your steps regulated by the laws of God? Let not the multiplicity of your concerns, nor the greatness of your cares, keep you from the ordinances of the Church. Come, rather, the more willingly to the green pastures, which in the holy Eucharist are set open to you, that from the hurry and turmoils of the world, you may there, at intervals, rest and be refreshed. Come the more gladly, to the still waters by which your Redeemer in this sacrament would lead you, that you may be cooled from the heat with which intensity of earthly business may oppress you; that you may be cleansed often from the defilements, which the best men may contract in the midst of this miserable world: yea, that you may be invigorated to pursue your temporal concerns in future, with the firm step of undeviating integrity, amidst the numerous temptations by which you are surrounded, and the infirmities of nature which you carry within you.

Further. A sense of sinfulness deters many from approaching the table of the Lord. They are so oppressed with the consciousness of having transgressed many commands, and omitted many duties, that they dare not go to so holy an ordinance. Such persons, surely, have not rightly pondered that "faithful saying," which St. Paul says, is "worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners^d." For sinners He became incarnate. For sinners He died. And for the benefit of sinners He instituted this holy sacrament:—not for the whole, who need no physician; not for the righteous, who need no repentance; but for the penitent offenders, over whom "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God^e," was this table of His compassion spread. Indeed, if none but sinless beings should go to that

^d 1 Tim i. 15.

^e Luke xv. 10.

Supper, from the family of man no guest could be invited. If we would wait till we have put off all our imperfections, we must wait till we have put off our flesh. We do not go thither 'trusting in our own righteousness;' and they go most worthily, who feel that they are 'unworthy to gather up the crumbs under the Lord's table.' It is not the sinner who is excluded therefrom, but the obdurate and impenitent sinner. "If with true penitent hearts, and lively faith, we receive that holy sacrament;" "though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool^f." But perhaps you say, I have not this faith and repentance. Ah, is it so? Stay yet a while from the holy table. Nevertheless, be not easy in your absence from it. Think not, because you abstain from this ordinance, you shall be safer in your sins. Preposterous were the supposition, and in the highest degree dangerous and impious, that the neglect of one duty can diminish our responsibility for other deficiencies. The truth is, without repentance and faith, no man is in a state of safety. It is not the only consequence of the want of these, that we cannot go acceptably to the Lord's Supper. Without them, there can be no peace in life, no hope in death, no entrance into heaven.

There are many persons, who have a lively sense of the holiness of this ordinance, and wish to join in the celebration of it, who are deterred by a fear, that they shall not be able, afterwards, to live up to their obligations. Estimable in the sight of God is this diffidence of their own strength. When it is accompanied by an earnest desire to perform the duties, for which they fear their insufficiency,

^f Isa. i. 18.

it is one of the essential requisites to a worthy participation of this sacrament. But it may be carried too far. It may lead us to think our merciful Lord “an hard man^g,” and with wicked timidity to wrap the talent, with which He hath entrusted us, in a napkin. Let it be remembered, that this ordinance devolves upon us no duties, which with the aid of that grace, which it promises us, we are not able to perform. Under the same obligations we are already brought by our baptismal covenant; the same faith is professed by us in our creed; and a consciousness of the same duties, and a promise to perform them, is unquestionably implied in our prayers, and our praises. Him who desires sincerely to please his God, this ordinance is calculated to encourage and strengthen, to protect and bless in the fulfilment of his obligations. And, diffident Christian, dost thou tremble, lest going to His table thou shouldst incur obligations, which thy infirmities may not permit thee to discharge? Remember the power and faithfulness of thy Maker. What is the consolation which accompanies the elements of this Supper? “My grace is sufficient for thee^h.” What are the truths which these holy symbols seal to thy soul? He is merciful to them that fear Him;—“He will ever be mindful of His covenantⁱ”;—“His strength is made perfect in weakness^k.”

Another cause which prevents men from receiving this sacrament, is the existence of anger and animosity in their bosoms; the consciousness of ill will between them, and some of their fellow-beings. Without charity, we cannot indeed go safely to the table of our Lord. And without charity we cannot

^g Matt. xxv. 24.

ⁱ Ps. cxi. 5.

^h 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^k 2 Cor. xii. 9.

safely live in the world. We may not sit down quietly, when this important Christian grace has departed from our bosoms, and trust that no ill consequences will result from her absence, because we do not go to the Lord's table. She is the grace, without which man can have no continued unction from on high; no spiritual life and hope; no progress in holiness; no joy and peace in lifting his eye to another world. If she be absent from his heart, he will not receive the visitations of the Holy Spirit; for into a malicious soul He will not enter. If she be absent, he can know nothing of the pleasures of the new life; for "he that loveth not his brother abideth in death¹." If she be absent, his praises and adorations to his Maker are unacceptable; for he that "loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen^m." If she be absent, he shall in vain expect the pardon of his sins; for "if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespassesⁿ." If she be absent, he will be destitute in the eternal world of the chief grace, which shall then be of utility; for faith will there be swallowed up in vision; and hope will be lost in the final judgment. Charity only shall remain to guide the thoughts and regulate the conduct, and bless the joy of the redeemed; and by the lovely character which she will shed over them, cause the Almighty Father to smile complacently upon His offspring, and all heaven shall be glad as He smiles. Not a moment then should we allow ourselves to be destitute of this grace; much less when we should together be gathered round the table of our Lord. What saith the Scripture? "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother

¹ John iii. 14.^m Ibid. iv. 20.ⁿ Matt. vi. 15.

hath aught against thee ; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift °.” Observe, you are not permitted to come to the altar of God, with the knowledge of enmity between yourselves and your brethren ; nor yet are you permitted to stay away. Reconciliation is enjoined. “ Be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” But it may be, you have conquered the enmity in your own bosom, but your adversary is implacable. In this case, what conduct ought the Christian to pursue ? If, with our utmost endeavours, we have sought peace with all men, but have failed on account of the implacability of others, we are not, while we have only emotions of benevolence in our bosoms, to debar ourselves from the comfort and privilege of discharging our duty to God. With them is the sin. To the table of the Lord we should go, that we may learn to perfect and perpetuate our forgiveness, and there with godly sincerity should pray for our enemies, that God would ‘ give them repentance and a better mind.’

It is urged by some who neglect this ordinance, that they see many go to the Lord's table, who seem not in any respect to be benefited by it. Their dispositions are not more heavenly, nor their lives more virtuous, than others. There is some foundation for this remark. It is an afflicting, a humbling consideration ; and should teach the disciples of the Lord, who mind to come to the communion of His body and blood, to exercise a holy and vigilant circumspection, that others may not be deterred by their deficiencies from glorifying their “ Father which is in heaven p.” But, at the same time, all men should be careful how they judge their fellow-beings. Per-

° Matt. v. 23, 24.

p Ibid. v. 16.

haps, the communicant laments with secret sorrow at the foot of that table, the imperfections by which thou art offended. It may be, the strength shall one day be there obtained, by which those imperfections shall be vanquished.

There are many persons deterred from receiving this sacrament by a particular passage of Scripture, which is frequently misunderstood. I mean that striking observation by St. Paul, that "he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body ^p." There are two causes from which the misapplication of the passage proceeds; from affixing a meaning to the word "damnation," which in the original it does not bear; and from indefinite or erroneous ideas of the unworthiness which the Apostle condemns. By damnation is not here meant, as by many is supposed, everlasting destruction; but immediate disapprobation, the displeasure of the Most High; which displeasure is manifested as the Apostle states, by visiting the unworthy recipients with divers temporal judgments; and this too in order to their final salvation; if, haply, being chastened of the Lord, they may not be condemned with the world ^q. And, accordingly, the same word which is here rendered "damnation," is rendered in one of the following verses of the same chapter, by "condemnation." Moreover we should have definite ideas what it is to eat and drink unworthily. The Corinthians, whom the Apostle here addresses, had fallen into an irreverent, and in some cases, profane manner of celebrating the Lord's Supper. They brought their own bread and wine; they blended this sacred mystery with their common feast: the rich waited not for the poor; the poor were jealous

^p 1 Cor. xi. 29.

^q Ibid. xi. 23.

of the rich ; there was division in their bosoms, and confusion in their conduct. In the elements before them, the Lord's body was not discerned. Against this irreverence the Apostle, with great propriety, pointed his sharpest reprehension. But his solemn sentence will not light upon those, who with the qualifications which have been stated, are careful to receive this sacrament. Let a man with a willing mind, go to the Lord's Supper, carrying to it repentance, faith, and charity, a thankful remembrance of his Redeemer's love, and a stedfast resolution to walk in newness of life ; and he will be owned by the Master of the feast, as a welcome guest, and share in the peculiar benediction which blesses that Supper.

Finally. There is an objection, which deters a large number of those, who have by baptism been grafted in the body of Christ's Church, from discharging this most incumbent Christian duty ; I mean, that they are too young. There is not, I conceive, an objection which would be more painful to our blessed Redeemer. The young are most endangered by the temptations and troubles of this evil world. They have most need of the shield which He hath provided for the redeemed, in the sacraments of His Church. He Himself dwelt not in the flesh to the period at which man arrives at the meridian of life ; to teach us, perhaps, in our earliest years, with our earliest faculties, to do the will of Him who sent us. In early piety His Father had many times manifested His special delight ; and He Himself evidenced on earth, a partiality for the devotion of the youthful heart. The wise Solomon ; the distinguished David ; the good Josiah ; and Samuel, who, at the close of his life could challenge an impeachment of his integrity, all knew the Almighty in their youth : and of the disciples of our blessed Lord, he obtained most of His love who had seen

the fewest years. Yes, happy John ! “ the disciple whom Jesus loved † ;” thou didst follow Him in juvenile years ; and it is among the recollections which now gladden thy spirit, that thou didst early devote thyself to the peaceful pursuits of His kingdom, that thou leanedst in thy youth on His bosom, at the first celebration of the holy Supper^s. My young friends, follow his example. Let not your youth deter you from manifesting your gratitude to the Being, to whom you owe all the years of your existence. You most need in this dangerous world the protection of His wing. By an observance of His ordinances, place yourselves under it, and you shall not fail of His care who hath said : “ I love them that love Me, and those that seek Me early shall find Me †.”

Thus, my respected hearers, I have endeavoured to remove the obstacles which prevent so large a part of the Christian community from discharging what, in the right and ancient view of it, is the highest and most distinguishing Christian duty. Forgive me, that I have dwelt so long upon this subject. The late eminently pious, and truly Reverend Bishop of London, considered the signs of the times as affording him a special reason, for calling upon the Christians of his diocese, to return to the ancient practice of offering their devotions in the temple, humbly upon their knees. How much rather, then, may we call upon you, by the motives which have been suggested, by the judgments of the Almighty which are abroad in the world, and by the disparity in attainments of holiness, between the Church in the primitive, and our own days ; to gather yourselves together around that altar, where your devotions may be offered most acceptably, and the best pledges of

John xxi. 20.


† John xiii. 23.

† Prov. viii. 17.


benediction are to be found ! What Christian is now hearing me, who, if the trumpet which shall give notice of the second advent of our Lord should burst upon his ears, would not gladly be found at His holy table, with humility and gratitude commemorating His love ? But oh ! if He shall not find us there, let none of the obstacles which have been considered, prevent us from being of the number, concerning whom He shall say, in the day of judgment, presenting them unto the Ancient of Days, These are they who on earth were faithful. They have eaten of My bread “ in remembrance of Me,” and drank of the cup which I mingled. Father, I will that they also be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory^u, and drink of the wine, of which I desire to drink with them in Thy eternal kingdom.

^u John xvii. 24.

SERMON XIV.



ON THE SABBATH.



EXODUS, XX. 8.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

THAT God is to be worshipped, is a sentiment of nature, a dictate of reason, and a declaration of the written law. This point being established, there follows a necessity, that there should be established times for discharging the duties of devotion. As regularity in transacting business of any kind is ultimately beneficial, so in this particular, unless there be stated periods for paying our devotions to the Most High, inattention will produce indifference, indifference will form a habit of forgetfulness or neglect; and thus, in the noblest employment of a rational being, the mind would but seldom, and accidentally engage. When we further consider, that there are favours which we unitedly need, and consequently, for which we ought unitedly to petition; that there are sins, which we join in committing, and consequently ought to join in imploring remission of the same: that there are blessings which we enjoy in common, and consequently, for which we ought to return a common tribute of praise:

in a word, when we consider, that, social in every thing else, man ought to be social in the worship of his God, we cannot but be convinced of the necessity, that some definite part of time should be appropriated to the service of religion. Now, were it left for men to determine among themselves, how great, and what particular part of time should be thus consecrated; it would be rare indeed, if, differing in sentiment upon almost every other subject, they should be united upon this. The supposition is admissible. We can conjecture ten thousand circumstances, which would inevitably operate against this unanimity. But blessed be God, in this respect, He has not left mankind a prey to uncertainty and discord. He Himself has determined, what portion of their existence His intelligent creatures shall dedicate to Him. "Remember," says He, when promulgating His sacred laws, "remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." Permit me, beloved, to bespeak your attention, while I endeavour to state to you, in the first place, the history of this day; secondly, the reasons for remembering it; and, thirdly, the suitable and reasonable methods of keeping it holy.

We learn from the history of the creation, that the Deity employed Himself six days, in forming the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them. It could not have been necessary, that He should be occupied for this, or any other particular space of time, in effecting the purposes of His will. He, whose simple fiat could call light into existence, could with equal ease have said, 'Let creation be,' and instantly the universe would have appeared. But for some certainly wise and good end, perhaps for our instruction, He chose to employ Himself six days, in creating our world. "The seventh day," says the sacred historian, "God blessed and sancti-

fied, because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made^a." Not that He was fatigued by the exertions which He had made, or exhausted by the greatness of the work which He had accomplished. Far otherwise. "The Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary^b." When it is said, that God "rested on the seventh day^c," the expression means, that He then ceased from that particular employment, in which He had been engaged. And when He sanctified this day, He determined that every periodical return of it, should be duly observed by His intelligent creatures, for commemorating the nativity of creation, "when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy^d:" and for impressing upon their minds a remembrance, that He, to whom they dedicate the day, was the Author, and is the Preserver and Governor of the universe; "of whom, and through whom, and to whom, are all things^e." Such was the origin of the Sabbath day; and there is a probability, that the observance of it commenced, and continued from the time when the reason first existed, for which it was blessed and sanctified. It is true, that we have no account of the actual observance of the day, before the time of Moses. Many have inferred from this, that the notice of the day is to be dated from the solemn appointment of it by Moses. But if the Sabbath had been kept from the creation, as a matter of course, it is a circumstance which we should not expect to find mentioned in a history so concise; when the author himself must have viewed the thing as common as the resting at night, after the labours of the day. Now we have no account from which we can possibly infer the neglect of the day; and it

^a Gen. ii. 3.^b Is. xl. 28.^c Gen. ii. 2.^d Job xxxviii. 7.^e Rom. xi. 36.

is observable, that the first observance of it, noticed by the historian, was previous to the promulgation of the law from Sinai. When the children of Israel were miraculously fed with manna, they had not arrived at the holy mount, but were in the desert of Sin. *This* was their eighth encampment; *that* was their twelfth. In order to refrain from labour on the seventh day, they then gathered on the sixth two omers of manna, which was twice the quantity of one day's consumption. When Moses assigns the reason for this, he mentions the Sabbath, not as any thing new, but as something to which they had been accustomed; "to-morrow is *the* rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord^f." It may further be remarked, that notwithstanding the commandment in the text, and other arrangements in the Jewish Law, for the service of the day, there is no particular mention of the observance of it, for several years after Moses. But it is argued, if men had remembered the Sabbath day from the creation, why was it so formally ordained at the promulgation from Sinai? Now, would it not be equally as rational to argue, that it was not esteemed unlawful to dishonour parents, to commit adultery, to murder, to steal, to bear false witness, &c. previous to the Decalogue, because that, in that communication of the Divine will, these crimes are formally forbidden? The truth of the matter undoubtedly is, that when God had sanctified the Sabbath, He informed man thereof; and from Adam to Moses, those were not wanting who paid attention and reverence to the holy day. As men became more and more corrupt, the obligation to this, as well as all other moral obligations, were held less and less sacred. To revive their ideas of duty, and preserve among mankind a know

^f Exod. xvi. 23.

ledge of His will, God, in His own time, benignantly vouchsafed to His people a written law. In this law, the religious and constant observance of the Sabbath was solemnly enjoined, and two additional motives thereto urged upon the Jews. "Remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day ^g." And likewise, "that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thine handmaid, and the stranger may be refreshed ^h." Thus was the Sabbath established, and continued a day of rest, from the first pair of our race, to Jesus, the Immanuel. At His birth, a new scene opened, a new era commenced. Then was "the mystery, which had been hid from ages ⁱ," revealed, and the whole counsel of God manifested. His religion was not to be the religion of a nation, but the religion of man. He came not to deliver a single people from foreign servitude; but to rescue a world from tyrants, more merciless than Pharaoh and his officers; and from a slavery harder and more menial, than the bondage of Egypt. Surely, if the Israelites were obliged to observe a Sabbath, in honour of Him who broke the power which held them slaves, and gave them deliverance; Christians are bound to appropriate part of their time, as sacred, to the goodness which freed them spontaneously from the shackles of sin, and opened the prisons where death had confined them. But this is not all. The redemption effected by Jesus is styled in Scripture, a new creation. And justly, my friends, may it thus be styled. Chaos itself did not exhibit more confusion, before the Creator converted it to order and beauty, than

^g Deut. v. 15.^h Exod. xxiii. 12.ⁱ Col. i. 26.

did the state of fallen man, before the Redeemer presented a spiritual system, far more wonderful, harmonious, and sublime, than that which we admire in the material world. As at the first creation, “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy^k ;” so, at the second, the heavenly hosts exulted with reverence, and the inhabitants of the earth were bidden to rejoice^l. As it had been proper, that men should reflect upon the former glorious event, at every revolution of the period in which it was completed ; so it was proper that that part of the week should be esteemed holy, on which, by rising from the dead, Jesus completed the latter. When the design of a Sabbath was thoroughly understood, the observance of any one day in seven, would perpetuate the memory of the first creation : and, by choosing that day on which Christ triumphed over death, we commemorate the greatest deliverance, ever experienced by men, and secure the hebdomadal remembrance of the new creation. If it be asked, why the old Sabbath may not be preserved, and a new one appointed for the new creation ? I answer, that the institution which commands men to appropriate a seventh part of their time to religion and rest, commands also, that during the other six parts, they should manage faithfully their secular concerns. If it again be questioned, why the day first instituted should not be preferred ? I answer, because the latter event is more wonderful, more interesting, and more glorious. In confirmation of this we find, that on the first day of the week, the disciples of our Lord rested, and assembled for religious worship and instruction^m. St. Paul, in many passages, proves and declares, that we are not bound to observe the Jewish Sab-

^k Job xxxviii. 7.

^l Luke ii. 13, 14.


^m John xx. 19.

bath, and the first day of the week is expressly styled in the relation from God, "the Lord's day". Accordingly, the Christian Church, from the first moment of its existence, has consecrated this day, as holy to God and religion; and commands her sons to remember it, as the *Christian Sabbath*.


There is something of an awful holiness, of a solemn dignity, surrounding the Sabbath, when we consider the consecration of it, as coeval with the existence of our race. How venerable its antiquity! How sublime the ends for which it was instituted! With what horror does the sensible mind recoil at the recollection of those, who would demolish, with worse than Vandal arms, this first, and most gracious institution of God! My brethren, I must defer, till another opportunity, to lay before you the distinct, and most powerful motives, which should induce you to remember invariably this holy day. But from the account which has been given of its nature and history, you may gather reasons sufficiently engaging, to fill you with a resolution, that you, and your houses, shall reverence the Sabbath of the Lord your God.

ⁿ Rev. i. 10.

SERMON XV.



ON THE SABBATH.



EXODUS, XX. 8.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

THESE words, many of you, my hearers, may recollect, were the subject of our meditation in the forenoon of the last Lord's day. When entering upon the discourse, I proposed to give you, in the first place, a history of the Sabbath; secondly, the motives for remembering a Sabbath day; and, thirdly, the most suitable methods of keeping it holy. To the first of these heads we paid full attention, and proved, that the Sabbath began to be sacred at the time, when the reason for consecrating it first existed; namely, when the Creator rested from the work, in which He had been engaged, during the first six days from the beginning of the creation. We observed, that when mankind were grossly corrupted, and alienated from all truth, God vouchsafed to His peculiar people a written declaration of His will, and enjoined upon them, in one of His commands, the religious observance of this day—that the seventh day was dedicated to the Lord, from Moses to Christ, when man and all his concerns, assumed another aspect—that a new creation was now to be

commemorated ; a new deliverance to be celebrated by man—that to unite a remembrance of the former with the latter event, the Church of Christ solemnized the day, when the Lord completed His purposes of love, and has constantly observed the first day of the week, as the Christian Sabbath.

I now proceed to the second head of discourse, in which are to be shown, the motives for observing a Sabbath. The first and most weighty of all motives is, that it is of Divine appointment. It is not a human institution. It is not a mere matter of convenience. It is not left optional with us, whether we will observe it, or not. It is a positive command of that Lawgiver, who rules supreme, and before whose judgment seat we all must stand. That the Most High had a right to frame such a law, no one will dare to question. That He did frame such a law, no one, who has faithfully examined into the matter, will presume to deny. That we are bound to live in obedience to His injunctions, no one, who realizes the dependence of man, and the supremacy of his Maker, can hesitate one moment to acknowledge. Now, however lightly we may think of it, every profanation, every wilful neglect of this holy day, is as likely to subject us to the punishment of transgressors, as any other breach of God's sacred laws. We are as strongly bound to remember the Sabbath, as we are to refrain from stealing, murdering, bearing false witness, or breaking any of the commands of the Decalogue. It is expressly enjoined, "Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day ;" and whoever by his conduct, his conversation, or even his careless indifference, forgets this day, implicitly revolts against the authority of his God. Every Christian, therefore, who feels that concern for the honour of his Maker, which he ought to feel, must have his indignation excited,

when he beholds this very day, sacred from the infancy of our species, and hallowed by the Sovereign of the universe, assailed and polluted by unthinking men, and treated with less reverence, than savages would discover for religious institutions. If not its venerable antiquity, if not its usefulness to mankind, certainly the idea that it was instituted by the Creator, should restrain the arm of the sacrilegious assailant, and secure its respect from His dependent creature.

But if the Sabbath were not of Divine appointment, if it were only an institution devised and established by men, for the maintenance of true religion, in this sense it would be entitled to our attention and reverence. So averse is corrupted nature from all religious sentiments, so alienated from a knowledge and love of God, and of duty, that it is necessary to contrive expedients, for enticing their minds to a contemplation of these things, and for impressing them with a sense of their solemnity and importance. By an observance of the Sabbath, a common respect is paid to religion; men are made acquainted with her character and loveliness; the mind, six days busied about secular concerns, is led to think upon nobler objects. That atheism, which would be the consequence of no worship, and that superstition, which would be the consequence of a worship always private, are prevented: and a secure barrier is opposed to that general indifference to God and religion, which might possibly ensue, if there were no fixed period, at which man should pause from his worldly pursuits, and turn his attention to the one thing needful.

Every person who observes the ignorance, and situation of man, must perceive the necessity of providing some means, for communicating to him that religious instruction, without which he can give lit-

tle significance to his life, and find but little hope in his death.

Ah, my friends, it is with this, as with many others of the blessings we possess, we lose our sense of the value in the constancy of our enjoyment of it.

It is no extravagant assertion, that from this holy institution have accrued to man, more knowledge of his God, more instruction in righteousness, more guidance of his affections, and more consolation of his spirit, than from all other means, which have been devised in the world, to make him wise and virtuous. We cannot fully estimate the effects of the Sabbath upon religion, unless we were once deprived of it. Imagination cannot picture the depravity, which would gradually ensue, if time were thrown into one promiscuous field, without these *heaven-erected beacons*, to rest and direct the passing pilgrim. Man would then plod through a wilderness of being; and one of the main avenues, which now admits the light, that will illumine his path, would be perpetually closed. Considered, therefore, in this sense, the preservation of the Sabbath is of infinite importance.

But, further, inadmissible as is the supposition, if the Sabbath were only a civil institution, if it could boast no higher authority than that of earthly powers, if the design in appropriating it to rest, worship, or instruction, were altogether political: every friend to order, every friend to his country, every friend to mankind, must advocate its preservation and observance. The arm of secular power could never be strong, if the minds of men were wholly destitute of ideas of a God, and a future state. As these ideas, and their consequent moral principles, are more or less lively in the minds of a people, civil government will be more or less efficacious. Now, to have a day for publicly inculcating

these ideas periodically observed, and revolving so frequently, that the effects of the last are not erased from the mind before the return of the next, and, at the same time, leaving a sufficient interim for the discharge of the avocations, and the enjoyment of the pleasures of life, would be as advantageous an expedient, as reason could devise. Besides, the effects of a Sabbath upon society are great, not merely in a civil, but in a social sense. Members of the same community, on this day, meet to pay their addresses to their common Father and Friend. They see each other in a light highly engaging, and calculated to excite none but sentiments of affection. A variety of pursuits does not to-day distract their attention, nor excite their jealousies; but they assemble, united in their intentions, prepared to join in the amiable acts of social worship. The royal Psalmist mentions it as one of the most pleasing circumstances, which bound him to his friend, that they went up together to the house of the Lord^a. There is something in beholding people of all classes, dressed neat and clean, exhibiting a decorum becoming the rational character, going together into the sanctuary, like children into the presence of a parent, which, in a mind susceptible of delicate associations, excites indescribable emotions of delight. The effects of the Sabbath upon individuals, are still more important. The rich man finds in it a respite from his round of pleasures and pursuits; and an opportunity to collect his thoughts. The poor man finds in it a respite from those labours which are necessary to his subsistence, and, in our country, generally enjoys on Sunday a comfortable meal. The servant is happy in his Sunday attire, and in a relief from his weekly task; and even the *little ones*, for-

^a Ps. lxx. 14.

getting their sports, take a pleasure in going to Church. It relieves all descriptions of men from the cares of the week that is past ; and invigorates them for the duties of that upon which they have entered. It forms habits of order in the mind, and introduces regularity into families. So much is this the case, that observation will generally sanction the assertion, that he, who is punctual in his observance of the Sabbath, is generally regular in the management of all his concerns. Certain it is, that those families are the most regular in their arrangements, have the best domestics, and are most entitled to favour from Heaven, in which a regard to sacred institutions is always paid, and an attachment to moral propriety steadily evinced. Such are the families which the Deity delights to bless, for they resemble the households of the Patriarchs whom His soul loved. In a word, if the Sabbath were merely a civil institution, so beneficial are its influences upon all classes of men, that he can be no philanthropist, who wishes its subversion ; nay, who does not contribute to its support.

Again. Art thou emulous of the character of the grateful ? Thou wilt remember the Sabbath-day." For gratitude pleads strongly for the observance of this institution. We find ourselves in this world, placed in a magnificent dwelling, furnished with innumerable varieties of good, all submitted to our use. Should we not, at times, turn our attention to the beneficent Architect, who raised the stupendous building, and placed us in it ? We find deposited here for us, a deed and title to eternal life, to be inherited by us, when we shall have received the education for which we dwell in this building. Should we not, at times, turn our attention to the great Benefactor, through whose mediation this precious deed has been obtained ? To an ingenuous mind,

there is something awful in the thought of living in a splendid abode, surrounded by comforts, and invested with privileges and honours, without thinking of the Being to whom the abode belongs, and from whose munificence, the comforts and privileges proceed. The consecration of a day to the remembrance of Him, must be pleasant, as well as useful, to the grateful heart. Base are our spirits, if of this day the vain idols of the world can deprive Him! His goodness in vouchsafing to hallow this day, that of our highest relations and best privileges, we may not be ignorant or unmindful, leaves our gratitude without a plea for its imbecility, if the day pass with us, as with those benighted mortals, who know not that it is the Sabbath of God. For, Great Creator, when I contemplate Thee, hallowing a stated time, to bring back the recollection of Thy children from the vanities of the world, to Thee, and their duty, and their eternal destiny; I behold an affecting manifestation of Thy Fatherly care, which leaves them without excuse, yea, heinously criminal, if they neglect the gracious institution! How tender, how irresistible is the motive, with which the Redeemer enforces the observance of His Supper: "This do in remembrance of Me^b." But in hallowing the Sabbath, what saith the Eternal God, the Author of all that we are and enjoy, but, Observe this day in remembrance of Me? Which, then, of His children can be willing to pollute it?

Thus, I have stated motives sufficiently powerful, to induce every good man to advocate the remembrance of the Sabbath-day. I have entered thus largely upon this point, because it is an unhappy symptom of modern times, that this ark of the covenant, hitherto sacred, has been deserted by its friends,

^b Luke xxii. 19.

and rudely shaken by its enemies. Frequently has it grieved the pious mind, to behold in our own country, but yet in its infancy, so solemn an institution so lightly regarded. The subversion of the Sabbath among Christians, is the subversion of all religion. When once the mind has become so callous to all sense of moral obligation, as to cease to venerate the institutes of Heaven, religion is in it but an empty name. If, then, the felicity of our country, if the happiness of posterity can interest our hearts, let us strengthen our respect for this hallowed day.

SERMON XVI.

ON THE SABBATH.

EXODUS, XX. 8.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

THIS sacred command has already afforded important matter for two discourses, and it again solicits your attention. We have already given a faithful history of the Sabbath, and have stated motives sufficiently powerful, to induce every professor of Christianity, every believer in a Supreme Being, every lover of mankind, to hold it in remembrance, as consecrated time. An interesting question now arises. How is it to be kept holy? What are the most suitable methods of remembering it? How far may it be used like other days; and in what is it different? The discussion of this point was reserved for that head of discourse, upon which we are now about to enter; and which will close our observations upon this too much neglected subject. It is a point, in which we are all concerned, and to which few have paid that attention, which its consequence deserves. How they ought to spend the Sabbath, is a question, which men seldom ask. How they do spend it, is a question, which the good man generally must answer with grief. For most men, alas!

have run to an extreme, conceiving it necessary on this day, to hang down their heads like bulrushes^a, and to be masked in the austerity of monks; or else, converting it into a day for indulging themselves in indolence, pleasure, or dissipation. How, then, can your time be better employed, than in listening to a statement of those methods of hallowing the Sabbath, which are accommodated to human nature, conformable with the design of the institution, and coincident with the will of the Most High?

In the first place, the Sabbath is to be strictly observed as a day of rest. The avocations of life are to be suspended; we are to pause from our secular pursuits, to do no manner of work. Not only we, but “our sons and our daughters, our man-servants and our maid-servants, our cattle, and the stranger who is within our gates,” are peremptorily forbidden to labour on this holy day. By resting, we symbolically commemorate the rest of the Deity, when He had completed the creation, and that of the Messiah, when He had effected our redemption. By resting, the mind affords religion a hearing which she could not have, if its attention were engaged about worldly concerns. By resting, we advance the cause of humanity, and co-operate with the goodness of our God.

Sacred, my brethren, is the rest of the Sabbath. From its first establishment, this was one appointed method of observing it. Jehovah frequently alleges it as a reason of His anger against His people, that they turned their feet from His Sabbath, and did their own pleasure on His holy day. And the good, the indefatigable Nehemiah, when he went up to Jerusalem, to recover that city from the damages it had sustained from war's ruthless arm, had his spirit

^a Is. lviii. 5.

stirred within him, when he beheld some treading their wine-presses, bringing in their sheaves, selling their fish, and all manner of ware upon that day, which their God had consecrated to rest. It wounded the piety of the Prophet. His bosom was fired with resentment. "I contended with the nobles of Judah," says he, "and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath^b." Such was the earnestness of the good man in the cause; and such must be the sentiments of every good man, when he beholds those occupations pursued upon this day, which are inconsistent with its nature and design. Whoever wishes to live in obedience to the command in my text, will not be unnecessarily employed himself, nor suffer those under his care to be unnecessarily employed, in any occupation or pursuit, which may disturb that cessation from work, which is essentially necessary to the proper observance of the Sabbath. Here, perhaps, the question will arise in your minds, whether you may engage in no transactions of a temporal nature upon this day? He, to whom the day is dedicated, has declared for our instruction, that He will have mercy before sacrifice^c. This being the case, all offices of humanity, all works of charity and love, either to those of our own species, or to the brute creation, may, and ought to be discharged upon this, as upon other days. These works are in their very nature virtuous, and no after arrangement can render them displeasing in the eyes of Heaven.

Further. The Saviour of the world asserted, when upon earth, that "the Sabbath was made for

^b Neh. xiii. 17, 18.

^c Matt. ix. 13.

man, and not man for the Sabbath ^d—that it was designed for the comfort of the creature, as well as for the glory of the Creator. Consequently, all those works may be innocently done, which are necessary to our subsistence, and decent appearance. He, whose conduct should be our guide in all cases of doubt, never hesitated to do any thing upon the Sabbath, which humanity, or reasonable need required. A farther licence than this we cannot safely take; and, surely, this is sufficiently liberal. It is equally remote from that hypocritical austereness, which our Saviour reprimanded in the Jews, and those needless works, that willingness to do any thing, indiscriminately, upon the Sabbath, which, were He now upon earth, He would too often have occasion to reprimand, even in Christians.

But I hasten to observe, secondly, that though the Sabbath was designed for a day of rest, it was not designed for a day of indolence. There is a vast difference, between that pious cessation from secular concerns, which the command enjoins; and that lazy, lounging life, which too many love to lead, when this day arrives. The Sabbath is consecrated to religion, as well as to rest, and the duties of public worship are essential parts of its solemnity. The Deity never designed, that this should be to man a day of idleness, but that the subjects it commemorates should fill his mind with devotion, and lead him to the discharge of religious duties. And how natural is the connection, between contemplating the creation of the world by the Supreme Architect, and falling in reverence before His throne! How extremely natural is the connection, between recalling to mind the redemption of our race, and paying our homage to the great Redeemer! Accord-

^d Mark ii. 27.

ingly, we find that the Sabbath and the sanctuary, on account of their alliance, are frequently joined together in Scripture. Before the birth of our Saviour, this day was always partly employed in publicly reading the Scriptures, and worshipping God. When He came upon earth, that He might fulfil all righteousness, it was His invariable custom on the Sabbath, to attend Divine service in the Synagogue. So that it is evident, from the very nature of the institution, from the authority of custom, and from the unerring example of Immanuel, that useless laziness on this day is highly criminal, and that assembling for the purposes of public worship is an essential method of keeping it holy. Our world cannot exhibit a more lovely, heavenly sight, than that of a Christian society, in "the still small voice" of devotion, unitedly worshipping their Father and God. When we carry the idea further, and reflect that the whole Church militant, the whole brotherhood of Christians upon earth on this day assemble, and the Most High is, undoubtedly, giving audience to their prayers and praises, can any who have health and reason, avoid longing to join in the general devotion, or contentedly be absent from the grand community? Yet alas! there are no less than three classes of characters, each of which comprises many individuals, who, at best, are but inconstant in their attendance at the sanctuary. The first class is composed of those persons, to whom the Sabbath is no holy day, who view religion, and all its ordinances, as chimeras fit for weak minds; who, if they ever go to the sanctuary, are not led thither by an "hunger or a thirst after righteousness," but to try the preacher, to mingle with the multitude, or to pass away an

* Mark v. 6.

hour or two, in seeing and being seen. Now, such characters exhibit living proofs of the depravity of our nature. For we cannot but conceive, that, by being perfectly pure, the duties of devotion would be esteemed, not only useful and pleasant, but in the highest degree honourable. If to be admitted to the presence of an earthly prince, is viewed by his subjects as the highest dignity they can receive, shall man lightly prize an admittance to the presence of his heavenly Prince, an intimate communion with his God? Do the pure spirits of heaven take pleasure in religious acts, and find their delight in worshipping their Maker; and shall mortals view these things as weak, superstitious, unworthy their attention? Blind infatuation! Proof convincing of the truth of man's Fall! The fact is, these characters have no sense for the perception of the pleasures of public worship. They have no soil for the seed of the word. The things which they hear in the sanctuary are incompatible with their feelings, and their wishes. Like the unhappy pair in Eden, their hearts are not in harmony with the voice of their Maker, and, conscious of their nakedness, they shrink from His presence. There is another class of persons, who profess themselves religious, but who seldom join in the services of the sanctuary. These are they, who have accustomed themselves to think, that the duties of public worship are not essential to a virtuous life; that they can be devout at home, and there engage in pious meditations. Every one who has observed human nature in its various forms, must have observed that these persons are generally of a selfish disposition. They do not possess those feelings which make men love the countenance of man, which can contemplate a body of individuals as one,

and which gives a zest to the acts of social worship. Such persons would do well to remember, that there are sins to be confessed, blessings to be acknowledged, and favours to be implored, by society as a body. They should bear in mind, that the impotent who would be healed from their diseases, were to wait *at the pool*, till the angel moved the waters^f. They should consider, that at Zion the Lord's blessing was to descend^g; that the foundation of social worship is laid in nature; that it was sanctioned by the practice of the Redeemer, and that it was tacitly inculcated in that promise of the Lord, that where two or three were gathered together in His name, He would be with them and grant their requests^h. There is a third class of characters, who are perfectly convinced of the importance of public worship, and yet are inconstant in their attendance at the sanctuary. These are they, whom the most trivial excuse of weather, of company, and even of dress, can detain from their duty to their God. That there are constitutions which cannot, and seasons when many persons ought not, to expose themselves, every liberal man will readily allow. But are there not characters, who can be kept from offering up their devotions to the Most High, in his sacred courts, by such circumstances as would not form the shadow of an obstacle to their visiting an earthly friend, or joining with a party in the pursuit of pleasure? Such persons cannot be said to "remember the Sabbath." They do not live in obedience to the sacred command. Whoever would keep the Sabbath must reverence the sanctuary, and not suffer himself to be needlessly absent from the duties of public worship.

^f John v. 2—4.

^g Ps. cxxxiii. 3.

^h Matt. xviii. 20.

In addition to the methods, which have been mentioned, of keeping the day holy, we observe, thirdly, that the affectionate mother will find this, an eligible opportunity of teaching to her children, and her children's children, the truths of that religion, upon which she rests the anchor of her hopes. The Christian master will, on this day, acquaint his servants with those doctrines and precepts, which are calculated to make men live the life becoming man, and to secure their felicity in the future state. The true Christian will, on this day, study the Scriptures, commune with his own heart, and put up his humble petitions in secret to the prayer-hearing God. He will refrain from all amusements and engagements, which do not comport with the solemnity of the holy day. At the same time, he will avoid that severity which makes man a slave to an institution designed for his comfort. After having faithfully discharged those services, which are indispensably incumbent upon him, he may spend the leisure moments that remain, with cheerfulness and joy, which the disciples of Jesus ought always to feel. Seated at the fire-side, he may partake with his friends the innocent pleasures of social converse; or walking with Isaac, he may meditate in the fieldsⁱ, and join in the emphatic though silent praise, which nature, through all her works, ascribes to God. Thus he will find "the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable^k;" and even in the relaxation which his nature will require, find suitable methods of keeping it holy.

Thus, we have accomplished the plan which was projected, when we entered upon this important subject. What now remains, but that each resolve

ⁱ Gen. xxiv. 63.

^k Is. lviii. 13.

for himself and his house, “to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” In doing so, we shall benefit ourselves, our country, and mankind. We shall derive joy from that declaration of the Most High, “Them that honour Me, I will honour^l.” And when time and the divisions of time shall be lost in eternity, we shall join “the general assembly and Church of the first born^m,” in celebrating that perpetual Sabbath, in enjoying that endless rest, which remaineth in heaven for the people of Godⁿ.

^l 1 Sam. ii. 30.

^m Heb. xii. 23.

ⁿ Ibid. iv. 9.

SERMON XVII.



ON THE SANCTUARY.



LEVITICUS, xxvi. 2.

Reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord.

THE Mosaic dispensation consisted of three general divisions; its moral, its political, and its ceremonial institutes. The two last were adapted to the Jews, as a nation; and especially accommodated to their time, circumstances, and necessities. These, at the promulgation of Christianity, were abrogated; for the dispensations of Heaven then ceased to be confined to one people, and were extended to the whole human race. But the moral institutes of the Jewish Code are in their nature unchangeable. Founded on the eternal principles of truth, they must, for ever, continue right, and obligatory upon moral agents. These Christianity did not abrogate; these Jesus came not to destroy, but to fulfil^a. The Decalogue, if it did not express, implies all moral duties; and is a good summary of the virtues, which are expected of man, considered as a rational being. Of these, an important one is contained in the words of my text; which, though originally delivered to Jews, may, with equal propriety, be addressed to

^a Matt. v. 17.

Christians. The duty, which it ordains, is implied in the fourth commandment; for it is essential to keeping holy the Sabbath day. Accordingly, in the very verse from which the words are selected, it is joined with the observation of the Lord's day: "Ye shall keep my Sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord."

In discoursing from the text, it is proposed to show, first, how the sanctuary is to be revered; and,

Secondly, the foundation, and importance, of this injunction of the Most High.

The sanctuary is revered, when proper ideas are entertained of its nature and holiness. For the accommodation of His worshippers, and the advancement of His glory, the Deity commanded a sanctuary to be erected, that He might dwell among men: He took Moses up to Mount Sinai; and, in awful state, gave directions concerning the erection of the sacred dwelling. The first idea was, that it should be a place, where the Divine Presence should be manifested; where the Deity should be met by the high priest, in behalf of the people. There, by sacrifices and prayers, He was to be honoured. There, by Urim and Thummim, He was to be consulted in difficult cases. There the Shechinah rendered the place supremely holy, for in it the Most High was visibly present. Thus sacred in its original was the sanctuary. It was the audience chamber, and special residence, of the Eternal God. In the Gospel, His invisible presence is to be clearly understood; but still, the sanctuary is the same in its nature and holiness. In it, the people meet and worship their God; who, though invisible, is especially present for the purpose of accepting their services. Though but two, or three, are gathered together in His name, He has declared, that He is

there, “in the midst of them^b.” In order, therefore, to reverence the sanctuary, we must not consider it as a mere place of resort; but view it, as dedicated to God, and rendered holy by its appropriation. We must have a most respectful regard for the place; and have none but ideas of veneration towards it; as being the place, where the Most High is worshipped, and where He expects to meet the faithful. This appropriate and sacred respect will be shown, by not permitting the sanctuary to be dishonoured by any profane use of it, by keeping it in decent repair and cleanliness, and, as far as in us lies, in a state of magnificence worthy of the Great Being to whom it is dedicated; and by those outward signs and tokens of reverence, by which we can express, without an idle superstition, our respect for the Being, the dwelling-places of whose honour are the temples devoted to His service. The sanctuary is His house on earth. Our sentiments of it must be those of the pious Patriarch: “Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven^c.”

After having proper ideas of the nature, and holiness of the sanctuary, the next step towards reverencing it is, to love to be in it, and to join in its services. When a place is consecrated to the worship of God; when He has promised to be there with a blessing; when He has proffered His word to be there as a fountain, set open for sin and uncleanness^d; and has appointed a priesthood to minister between Him and His people; when the priesthood of Christ is there enjoyed after His ordinance; to be wholly absent, or but partially present, comports little with a reverence for the sanctuary. The man

^b Matt. xviii. 20.

^c Gen. xviii. 16, 17.

^d Zech. xiii. 1.

who feels a respect for the house of the Lord, will be detained from it by no trivial circumstance. He will be anxious for the honour of its proper offices. To him it will be a subject of anxiety and care, that its oblations should be statedly offered ; that its altar should not be without its fire, and its priest ; that the smoke of its incense should constantly ascend, as is meet, from the habitations which men have devoted to God. He will not content himself with abstracted sentiments of the holiness, and beauty of Zion : but will evince his reverence for the sanctuary, by being always there, when it is opened for devotion, and opportunity will permit. When there, he will find his purest delight in joining in the services of the temple ; not with the empty sound of unfelt piety, but with the “ still small voice ” of devotion, giving utterance to the sincerity of the soul. In reverencing the sanctuary, he will reverence its services ; and never think it irksome to be long, or often, in the temple of God. Did we possess that perfect respect for the Church, and its institutions, which the text inculcates, we should be always ready to adopt the language of the man after God’s own heart, and say, “ How amiable are Thy tabernacle, O Lord of hosts ! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord : my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house : for a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand^c.”

Once more. It is essential to a reverence for the sanctuary, that we strive not to bring thither our worldly thoughts and improper affections. When

^c Ps. lxxxiv. 1, 2, 3, 4. 10.

we are going to appear before any earthly personage, whom we revere, do we not divest ourselves of all improper attire, and array ourselves in the garments of decency and comeliness? Shall we not, then, when we enter the courts of the Lord of the universe, divest ourselves of every improper appendage, and be clothed, as becometh dependants, supplicants, and sinners? When about to present ourselves before any earthly dignity, do we not usually reflect where we are going; and free ourselves of all incumbrances, which are foreign to our purpose? Ought we not, then, when expecting to present ourselves before the King of kings, to prepare our minds for the solemn interview: and leave behind whatever may offend the Divine Majesty, and interrupt the business upon which, alone, we should be intent? Surely, our God is entitled to as much courtesy, as any of our fellows; and will not be satisfied with less respect, than we pay to them! He expects, when we come before Him, that we bring nothing with us, but virtuous hearts, humble spirits, and minds established in the faith. No one, who was in any respect unclean, was permitted to enter the Jewish temple, until he had undergone some established purification. Is it not incumbent, then, upon Christians to prepare themselves for the sanctuary; that they may not, willingly, carry into the sacred place, their worldly cares and concerns; their temporal perplexities and passions? What can be more inconsistent, than to profess a reverence for the sanctuary, and, at the same time, to rush into it thoughtless, without considering that it is the house of the Lord; and carry in thither, “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life^f?” Would we be obedient to the injunction

^f 1 John ii. 16.

in the text, we ought always, before we go to the sanctuary, to recall to mind the command of the Almighty to Moses: "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground ^g."

This leads me to observe, that in order to discharge the duty enforced in the text, we must be attentive to decorum, when entering the sanctuary, while continuing in it, and when returning from it. A due reverence for the sanctuary, will lead the considerate man to be nicely attentive both to the time, and the manner of his entrance. It will be done, by the Apostle's rule, "decently and in order ^h." He will be fearful, lest he should mar the beauty of devotion by abruptness; and will perceive, how much the solemn scene of social worship is confused by the movements which those must occasion, who enter the temple after the solemnities have commenced. He will, therefore, aim to be seasonable in the sanctuary; and will prefer sitting there awhile, before the services are begun, to the unpleasantness of disturbing his brethren, by an untimely entrance. While he continues there, he will possess the feelings, and exhibit the deportment, of the publican in the parable. He will consider, that he is in the temple of the Almighty; and keep the object in view, for which good men go thither. Awed by a sense of the Divine Presence, his thoughts will not wander to the world's end. He will be still. With sober attention he "will hearken unto the voice of His word ⁱ." With profound solemnity he will make his supplications, and offer praise. No whisper of thoughtlessness, no air of folly, no frivolous indecency, will render him a proof of the too common, though I fain would hope, unjust obser-

^g Exod. iii. 5.

^h 1 Cor. xiv. 40.

ⁱ Ps. ciii. 20.

vation; that pride, curiosity, and fashion, are most operative in filling the sanctuary. On the contrary, he will be rendered steadily attentive, and uniformly devout, by the emphatic declaration, with which our own Church wisely opens her service: "The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him^k." Nothing can justify light or improper behaviour in the house of the Lord. It is shameful in itself; it is insulting to those, who are present; it is an affront to the majesty of heaven. A proper reverence for the sanctuary, will imprint on the mind, the pertinent admonition of Solomon: "Keep thy foot, when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil^l." To the discharge of the duty enjoined in the text, a due decorum should be observed, in retiring from the sanctuary. People should observe a distinction, between leaving a theatre, and a temple; between retiring from a play, and from social worship! There is a fitness of behaviour becoming place, as well as character. Far be it from religion to impose rigid restrictions; to tie up the limbs, and every social feeling. She forbids not the sweet interchanges of civility, and the amiable smiles of courteousness. But she suggests that, when the services are concluded, the sanctuary is still the Lord's; and, consequently, that it is meet to observe a decent respect, so long as we are in it. A society thus uniformly acting in His house, each striving to contribute his part, in support of the general reverence for the place; and all exhibiting one scene of devotion, regularity, and religious respect for the invisibly present Deity; must appear delightful to the angelic hosts, if they be conversant

^k Hab. ii. 20.

^l Eccles v. 1.

with the things of this world ; and is, doubtless, as pleasing an exhibition in the sight of God, as any which He can behold among the children of men.

Having thus shown, how the sanctuary is to be revered, I proceed to state, briefly, the foundation, and importance, of the duty enjoined in the text.

This is briefly and fully assigned in the words, “ I am the Lord.” If we consider the nature of the Being, to whom the sanctuary belongs, and whom we there meet, this is sufficient to fill us with awe. It is none other, than “ the High and lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity, whose name is Holy ^m!” To be in His presence, and not to feel a solemn reverence, to approach Him in His house, and not be impressed with profound respect, may justly excite His displeasure. It is a privilege, that man should have intercourse with the Majesty of heaven ; and he must pay the honour due to the holy name. Shall the earth tremble at His presence ? Shall mountains quake in His sight ? And shall not man be afraid ?

Again. The authority of the Lord, as our Sovereign, renders an obedience to His law indispensable. One would think that a command, like that in the text, would not have been necessary for rational beings. There is something in a place dedicated to religion, which seems of itself, sufficient to inspire reverence and holy dread. But, alas, the thoughtlessness of man lulls him into negligence ; and his depravity has but too lately been proved sufficient, to denounce the Deity, and fill the sacred niches of His temple with Atheists and monsters ! Happy we ! if we listen to this positive law of Jehovah, and, by most sacredly reverencing the sanctuary, preserve a railing round its altar, and cover its services with

^m Isa. lvii. 15.

the protection of sincerity. This will be one sure way of checking the progress of irreligion : for a reverence towards the temple is one barrier against impiety.

Lastly. When we consider that we are sinners, that, at best, we must appear before the Most High, covered with imperfections, ought we not to be filled with respect, when in His holy temple ? The four and twenty elders of heaven worship Him, not without casting their crowns before his throneⁿ. The celestial Seraphim chant not the perpetual *trisagium*, till they have first veiled their faces with reverential awe^o. The Son of God, when He approached His Father in worship, bowed His knees to the earth. Shall “ man,” then, “ that is a worm,” shall “ the son of man, which is a” sinful “ worm^p,” tread the courts of the Most High irreverently ; or feel any, but sentiments of profound respect, when in the house of God ? Be it ours, my brethren, to feel, and exhibit always, a reverence for the sanctuary. Let us preserve for the temple of the Lord an appropriate respect. So shall our worship be decent and acceptable ; our conduct will be consistent with our character and situations : and we shall be better prepared for an admittance into the sanctuary above, where angels, and archangels, and the whole company of heaven, in perfect felicity and eternal duration, will unitedly worship God and the Lamb.

ⁿ Rev. iv. 10.

^o Is. vi. 2, 3.

^p Job xxv. 6.

SERMON XVIII.

ON THE SANCTUARY.

PSALM CXXXII. 7.

We will go into his tabernacles : we will worship at his footstool.

THE sweet singer of Israel, the holy David, was not more distinguished by any quality of his heart, than by his reverence and affection for the sanctuary. “ Lord,” says he, “ I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth ^a.” Separated from the sanctuary by civil occurrences, he could find in nothing, not even in the elevated strains of his private devotion, that pleasure he had tasted in the house of God. “ How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts ! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord ; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house : for a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand ^b.” Restored to the privilege of assembling with the saints, with what pious fervour does he express his joy ! “ I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem ^c.” “ We will go into His tabernacles : we will worship at His footstool.”

^a Ps. xxvi. 8. ^b Ps. lxxxiv. 1, 2, 4. 10. ^c Ps. cxxii. 1, 2.

It would be happy for the world, if all men partook of the Psalmist's love for the sanctuary, and its services. There is no duty of religion, enforced by more affecting considerations, and attended with happier consequences, than this of public worship: a duty, of whose sacred nature, some sentiment has pervaded the bosoms of mankind, in every age and situation. Man has every where possessed ideas of a superior power, and under whatever forms he may have represented his gods to his mind, has deemed it proper, to offer them public, social, expressions of homage and adoration. It is a shame in the Christian world, which has the purest knowledge of the being and perfections of the Deity, and the strongest motives to love and serve Him, that the ways of Zion should ever mourn, because any of her children come not to her solemn services. If, with half the interest which their temporal concerns excite, men would reflect upon the nature of public worship, its reasonableness and advantages, they would, with one mind, perceive it to be a duty which they cannot excusably, nor safely neglect.

Consider yourselves, in the first place, in your social capacity. The interest and happiness of society do very much depend upon a general reverence for the Supreme Being, and a knowledge of a future account. Free men from the restraints of religion, and leave them to the passions of nature, and the world will soon be converted into a scene of wickedness, debasement, and misery. But how is a general sentiment of religion to be preserved? Doubtless, one of the best means, perhaps that which is more conducive than any other to this desirable end, is, the consecration of a part of our time, to the holy purpose of recognizing the sovereignty of the Deity, and learning His will. There are many persons,

who, from want of leisure, or from habitual heedlessness, would never turn their attention to the Author, truths, and obligations of religion, were it not for the regular return of a period, appropriated to this very thing. For this class of people (and they form a large part of the community), the establishment of the Lord's day is a most merciful, and wholesome institution. There is a general, though it may not always be a definite, or efficient sentiment of the Deity and duty preserved by it, in the public mind, which, did all time lie in common, and no solemnities of public worship invite their attendance, would most undoubtedly be obliterated. Besides, it is the natural tendency of this duty, to civilize the manners and the affections. Ideas of subordination are cherished, when all feel that they are accountable to a superior power. Mutual regard and fidelity are promoted, when assembled together as brethren, before one common Parent, with sentiments of humility and hope. Even the decencies of dress, and decorum of behaviour, to which public worship leads, soften the character, and increase the courteousness, of mankind. In your social capacities, then, you cannot but view the services of the sanctuary of sacred importance. But it should be considered, that it is the exemplary attendance of every one upon them, that will preserve their respectability, and enable them to produce their legitimate effects. No man who regards the happiness of his family, the good order of society, and the improvement of his fellow beings, will unnecessarily absent himself from public worship. For if his neighbours should use the same liberty (and the example is contagious, the right the same,) we might, too late, learn the value of this institution by the deplorable abandonment of it.

But I will dwell no longer upon this point.

Powerful as it is, it is the least of the motives, which should recommend public worship to your regard. Let me request you to consider yourselves, in the second place, in your relation to God. We cannot look into ourselves and observe, how “fearfully and wonderfully we are made^d,” nor look around us upon the wonders and beauties which are every where displayed, without perceiving, that we have a relation to an intelligent God. It results from our moral capacity, that the glory of this Being, who hath given us existence, and so highly endowed and exalted us, should be the supreme object of our lives. Now He is glorified by our virtuous demeanour in His world; and by our private bosom acknowledgements of Him, as our Lord and beloved benefactor: but He is more especially and suitably glorified by us, when we unite together to offer Him in the presence of each other, and the universe, the devout homage of our hearts and lips. This is the greatest tribute we can bring Him; a tribute which nature dictates, and reason recommends. And methinks, such an assembly must be contemplated with delight by the angels of heaven; yea, if there be one scene upon the earth, more agreeable to the eternal Father than any other, it is, perhaps, the congregation of the saints, in the garments of humility and spirit of love, worshipping Him in the temples, which piety has consecrated to His name.

There are none in this assembly, I would anxiously presume, who doubt the existence of the Deity, or their dependence on Him, for life, health, reason, and happiness; ‘for the means,’ also, ‘of grace, and the hope of glory.’ But will you acknowledge such a Father, and have no communion with Him? When He invites you to seek His face, will you re-

^d Ps. cxxxix. 14.

fuse to come? Such conduct, even towards an earthly parent, would be considered as monstrous. Surely, none who would have the benediction of the everlasting Father, will be guilty of it.

There are general mercies, of which we all are partakers, which require a common acknowledgment. There are public evils, to which we are all exposed, which we ought jointly to deprecate. We are social beings. The worship which we render to God, must, to become us, be answerable to our nature. By our relation to Him we are related to each other, and therefore do but imperfectly serve Him, even by the best of our private devotions, if we come not with our brethren to the social worship of His name. This even nature dictates. The heathen and the savage neglect not the ceremonies, by which their deities may publicly be worshipped. Our God deserves and requires, as much at our hands. He gave the first pattern of the tabernacle. When the first temple was built, He filled it with His glory, and placed His name there. And upon Zion, a type of every place which should afterwards be consecrated to His worship, He promised His blessing, “even life for evermore^e.”

Consider, again, the demands of the religion you profess. What was the conduct of our blessed Lord, with respect to public worship? For our example, His custom was to go into the synagogue every Sabbath day. What was the practice of the primitive Church; the happy few who had been often with Him, and knew His will? On the first day of the week, they were always with one accord, in one place, and “continued stedfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers^f.” What are the express, or implied

^e Ps. cxxxiii. 3.

^f Acts ii. 42.

precepts of the Gospel upon this subject? We are commanded "not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is ^g;" but to exhort one another to this necessary duty. Why, indeed, did our Lord ordain holy mysteries, which are social in their nature, very forms of public worship? Why did He appoint a ministry in His Church, and promise to be with this ministry, "even unto the end of the world ^h?" Why, in the comprehensive, and beautiful prayer, which He has given us as a model for our petitions, did He altogether use a plural form? Are not these expressions of His will that His disciples should assemble together, to preach, and hear His word, and to worship the Father in spirit and in truth? The genius of Christianity is, indeed, liberal. It frees us from the ceremonies of the Law. It teaches that, "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath ⁱ." But it does not relax the ties of moral obligation. They are eternal. By these, a Sabbath is sanctified to God. And, surely, the Christian whom He has ransomed from death, and made an heir of everlasting life, has the strongest reason to bring the offerings of gladness to His house, and celebrate His marvellous mercies.

Let me urge you, further, to consider the advantages, which belong to a constant attendance on public worship. It is pleasant and profitable. The purest and most exalted pleasure of which we are capable, is a communion with the Father of our spirits. In that beauty of holiness, which the worship of the Christian temple exhibits, the devout soul can find more ravishing delight than in any earthly occupation. It is here he drinks of peace, and is refreshed with spiritual joy. Were he long

^g Heb. x. 25.

^h Matt. xxviii. 20.

ⁱ Mark ii. 27.

deprived of the pleasures of God's house, he would be ready to cry out with the Psalmist, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God^k." But it is profitable, as well as pleasant. We may reasonably conclude, that the Most High will annex peculiar blessings to a devout attendance in His sanctuary. If individual and private prayers avail much at His throne, great must be the efficacy of the combined devotions of His Church. If the light of His countenance will any where be lifted upon us, we may expect it in the places, where He is specially present to receive and bless His people. These sentiments are confirmed by facts. It was by His altar, that Noah received the covenanted mercies of God. It was to the devout eunuch, whom no distance nor employment could deter from going to Jerusalem at the appointed feasts, that the joys of the Messiah were eminently given. It was to the good Anna, who never absented herself from the temple at the hours of prayer, that the infant Redeemer gave a knowledge of Himself, and the rich consolations of His kingdom^l. And it is to be feared, that the catalogue is not small, which the recording angel will at the last day adduce, of wretched beings to be consigned to perdition, whose departure from the sanctuary lost them the favour and the knowledge of God. If reason were silent, and experience afforded us no instruction, respecting the advantages of an attendance upon public worship, we have the declaration of our blessed Lord, that "where two or three are gathered together in His name, there He is in the midst of them^m."

^k Ps. xlii. 1, 2.

^l Luke ii. 36—38.

^m Matt. xviii. 20.

Thus weighty are the considerations, which oblige us to an attendance upon public worship. From this obligation there are some, no doubt, who are exempted. The really sick, the infirm through age, and those who are occupied in the works of mercy, are doubtless excused by the Deity, for not coming into His tabernacles. But can all who stay from the sanctuary maintain these pleas? Let us, with all tenderness, but with that plainness which the subject requires, look into the reasons of their conduct.

In some is the sentiment, that they learn nothing new, when they go to church. But are any so perfect, as never to need to be reminded of their duty, nor prompted to the discharge of it? Can their hearts be right, who have so little relish for the truths of the Gospel, that it is tedious to them to hear them repeated? If God have given to any a knowledge of the whole counsel of His will, is not this an additional reason, why they should conform to it, and magnify Him in the assembly of the saints? The example of every one is claimed by religion, for the benefit of others, even if his time could be spent as advantageously to himself at home: and those whose religious attainments have been really great, do generally manifest it by exhibiting this example.

There are others, who are often detained from the sanctuary, by the consideration, that there will be no sermon. But, my friends, is it only to have your ears employed, and your minds amused, that you are called to the temple of the Most High? Is it not inducement enough to come hither, that you have sinned against the Almighty, and have need of His pardon; that you have been created, redeemed, and are daily preserved by Him, and owe Him your adoration and praise; Is it not an affront to your Creator, to prefer any object to the worship of His

name; and can any sermon, even if it were clothed with an angel's eloquence, be so worthy of your attention, as the sacred Scriptures which are read? Preaching is an important part of the employments of the sanctuary: but it is of secondary importance. Let sober reflection be indulged for a moment, and you will readily perceive, that the leading object, when we go into the tabernacles of God, should be to "worship at His footstool."

But, may it not consistently with the restraints of candour, be further observed, that many persons are detained from the worship of the sanctuary by an indifference to it? The services are tedious to them. They prefer to do their own will, and seek their own pleasure on the holy day. The heat or the coldness of the weather, or a lowering sky, neither of which would prevent them from pursuing their secular concerns, is sufficient to withhold them from the audience of the Most High. They stay at home, and a habit is formed, which indolence persuades them is favourable to their ease. If any such are now hearing me, let me beseech them to give this subject the sober consideration it deserves. Can we be worthy of the favour of the Almighty, if we are indifferent to the honour of His name? Do we deserve the blessings we enjoy, if we refuse the easy return of our praise? Can we expect to be made wise unto salvation, if we neglect the means of grace? Are we worthy or fit, to be admitted into His temple above, if we find it irksome here, to adore and serve Him? Those have certainly a solemn reason to be concerned for their spiritual state, in whom this indifference to the services of the temple exists. He hath said, and let all such lay His declaration to heart: "Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me, shall be lightly esteemed"."

It is among our most valuable privileges, a privilege which the best of us do but imperfectly appreciate, that we are permitted to tread the courts of the Most High. It is a privilege, for which we shall be called to strict account ; and dreadful will be our confusion, if, in the great day of retribution, the Almighty shall lay it to our charge, that we lightly regarded the services of His temple, and irreverently withheld ourselves from His presence, when we were upon earth. Of your privileges then, beloved, fail not to avail yourselves. Come to this sacred place, whenever it is set open for the purposes of devotion. When you come, come to worship your God. Come with hands washed in innocency, and hearts intent upon “ glorifying your Father which is in heaven °.” Come thus, and you shall soon love the habitation of His house ; you shall find it good for you to be here. From the humble confession of your sins, you will rise relieved ; from the proclamation of your Maker’s praise, you will sit down refreshed ; from the supplication of His mercies, you will go away satisfied. You will return to your homes, calm and happy in the consciousness of having done your duty : and the word of your God will, through His blessing, be productive in you, of peace, righteousness, and eternal life. “ Blessed is the man whom Thou chooseth, and causeth to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts : he shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple P.”

° Matt. v. 16.

P Ps. lxxv. 4.

S E R M O N X I X .

—
O N T H E L I T U R G Y .
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P S A L M x l v . 13 .

Her clothing is of wrought gold.

O F whom speaketh the Psalmist this? Of the Church, whom David, with the eye of Prophecy, saw in all that glorious beauty, in which, in the age of her maturity, she should be “brought unto the King,” and enjoy the choicest demonstrations of His affection and favour. What was meant by her clothing in the Psalmist’s mind, we may not be able indisputably to ascertain: but we shall not materially err, if we consider it as signifying those offices of devotion, in which she is seen by mankind sublimely attired; and on the days, on which He vouchsafes to give her a special audience, presents herself before the Lord her God. In this view of their import, the words of the text have been taken to introduce a discourse upon that excellent Liturgy, the public service of our Common Prayer, in which the Church is as truly seen by us, as she was by the Psalmist, in a “clothing of wrought gold.”

Should I attempt, in a single discourse, to treat fully of the Liturgy of the Church, I should wrong the subject, and fill your minds and my own with dissatisfaction. It is work for a volume. And the many excellent volumes in which its character is

analyzed, and its perfection developed, render unnecessary any efforts of mine to add to its celebrity, or illustrate its praise. All, therefore, that I shall aim to do, will be to point out to you some of its most distinguished properties; properties, an acquaintance with which is indispensably necessary to enable us to know its excellence, and to use it in such a manner, as will render it that pure and holy, that becoming and acceptable sacrifice, which it was intended we should offer in it to God and the Redeemer.

That you may the more fully see the importance of the subject, allow me, before I proceed to the discussion of it, to recall to your minds the important truth, that the great, the chief object of our assembling together in the sanctuary, is to worship God. Sermons have, in modern times, more admirers than prayers. But whoever considers the authority by which public worship is instituted, the reasons on which it is grounded, and the purposes for which it is designed, will perceive, that the first business for which we come together into the temple is, to acknowledge the Most High God our Redeemer; to recognize our relation to Him, and pay Him our homage; to seek of Him the mercies and blessings which we need, and in acts of adoration and praise to celebrate His glorious name. Preaching is undoubtedly an ordinance of the Almighty; and, so long as "faith shall come by hearing, and hearing by the word of God^a," must be an ordinance of very great moment to the salvation of men. But it is, nevertheless, secondary in nature and importance to that great, that leading, that most interesting duty of "worshipping the Lord in the beauty of holiness^b." This is the high-

^a Rom. x. 17.

^b Ps. xxix. 2.

est act in which our nature can be engaged. And the people who are furnished with the means of performing it most perfectly, are brought nearest to the angels in their privileges, and will, if they use them faithfully, be beheld in their public assemblies with most complacency by the Almighty. How important then, the inquiry concerning the properties of that service, which the Church has provided for us to perform, when we are gathered together in the courts of our Maker! What are these properties? I would call your attention to those which follow: that our Liturgy is social, that it is sensible, that it is spiritual, that it is complete, that it is well arranged, and that it is holy. Under these heads may be brought to view enough of its character, to confirm our attachment to it: we may find under each of them instruction concerning its excellency, and direction concerning its use.

Men are social beings; and when they are assembled in the temples of the Almighty, their *natures* and the *community* of their blessings and wants require, that they should offer a common worship. In order to this, a form of prayer and praise is necessary. Without it, they cannot *associate* in the performance of the service. And he, who is most averse to this idea, will upon reflection perceive, that even extemporary prayers are forms to all who hear them; from which they cannot wander, without relinquishing their part in the common business of the congregation. As a form is in the nature of the thing necessary, so *established* forms have, in all ages of the Church, been esteemed most conducive to the purposes of social worship. They were used by God's chosen people, in the service of the tabernacle and the temple: they have the sanction of our blessed Lord, they were adopted by the Apostles and primitive Christians, and are found in

the Church in every age, from their time to the present day. By such *stated* services the people know, beforehand, the sacrifice which is to be offered; they have it, as it were, in their hands; they *unitedly* bring it to the altar, and lay it thereon; it is *their* offering, as well as the Priest's. Here, then, may be observed the happy adaptation of our Liturgy to the social character, which should appertain to the worship of the Christian temple. Whereas, it is not easy for us to conceive, how, having no such established service, we could assent to that, which we had never contemplated; or offer that, which we never possessed.

But further. That the service of the sanctuary may be, as it should be, perfectly social, the people should have in it an active part. In the prayers, as well as the praises, with their bodies, as well as with their spirits, they should all, after an orderly manner, be engaged, that the service may be most truly the service of all.

Conformably with this principle, was our Liturgy constructed. The people have in it an active service, as well as the Priest: sometimes, as in the collects and the prayers, or adorations which have been offered, expressing their assent by an audible and devout Amen: sometimes, as in the versicles, echoing the petition which the Priest has made, or enforcing it with new considerations: sometimes, as in the Litany, when the minister has offered the suffrage, taking, as it were, with holy ardour, the words out of his mouth, and uttering the deprecation, or the entreaty: and sometimes, as in the holy hymns, the psalms, and the doxologies, responding in alternatè verse the praises of God, the desires of men, the holiness and homage, the faith, and hopes, and charity of religion: thus exhibiting an humble imitation of the worship of heaven; in which we are

told, the celestial beings *cry one to another*^c. How admirably is this arrangement adapted to exhibit, the perfection of the beauty of social worship! Allow me, then, to notice the importance, that, in order to the production of its due effect, the people should refrain, on the one hand, from repeating the parts which belong exclusively to the Minister, as the Exhortations, the Absolution, the Commandments, the Benediction, and those prayers which are to be said by him alone; and, on the other hand, that with pure hearts, and humble, yet audible voices, they should perform the parts, which belong exclusively to *them*. The responses are a beautiful, very ancient, peculiar, and most useful part of the Liturgy of our Church. By the solemn performance of them, the people may keep their own attention engaged, may animate him who is ministering among them, and may kindle devotion one in another. Yea, if the little children were taught to pronounce with attention, and proper solemnity, these parts of divine service, it would add to the beauty and utility of public worship; and, in our assemblies, would be exhibited the verity of the inspired declaration, “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise^d.”

To excite you to join diligently, and with reverence, in the service of the common prayer, I need only guide your attention to the sublime extent of the application of its social character. It is not only in this house, in which you assemble, that in all its parts it is sociably performed. The same prayers and praises, in the same words, are offered, perhaps at the same hour, with the same faith, by ten thousand tongues, to the same God and Father of all. From all Christian parts of the globe the Amen re-

^c Is. vi. 3.

^d Matt. xxi. 16.

sounds, which you here utter; and the doxology is raised, in which you are here called upon to bear a part. It is not in this age only, in which you live; that this service conveys the devotions of Christians to heaven. In some of the ejaculations it contains, the first disciples breathed their praises and their wishes to the Most High. Its collects have, many of them, for many hundreds of years, been the vehicles of the public devotions of the Church. And upon some of its apostrophes has the last breath of distinguished Martyrs trembled, whose piety, during their lives, was refreshed with its hymns, and its psalms. It is not under the Gospel dispensation alone, that some parts of this service have been used, to express the common devotions of the faithful. There are hymns in it, which were sung by the saints under the Mosaic dispensation; and in the use of the psalms particularly, the Church of the New Testament is found in society with the Church of the Old: for in these sacred compositions, not the emotions of David's heart only were vented, but much of the worship of God's ancient people did consist. It is not only in the Church militant upon earth, that this service, in some of its parts, is used. We have borrowed from the Church triumphant in heaven, their gratulatory anthem, and their perpetual hymn, and have reason to believe, that their voices are in concert with ours, when they sing the song of the redeemed. How sublime is this view of the communion and fellowship of the Church, under the Mosaic and Christian dispensations, in different ages and in distant nations, on earth and in heaven, in the use of some part or other of that holy Liturgy, which it is our distinguishing felicity to have received from our Fathers! Who would not wish, in the temple, to bear upon his lips those psalms and prayers, in which ' the glorious com-

pany of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of the Prophets, and the noble army of Martyrs,' have uttered their devotions to God! How dead must he be to the finest associations, which can affect the mind, who is not animated to a devout and fervent performance of his part of the service of the sanctuary, by the consideration, that upon this same censer, which the Church holds out to him, incense hath been put by those hands, which are now extended before the throne of the Almighty: and that as its smoke ascended, those eyes were lifted up to heaven, which are now fixed upon the visible glory of God and the Lamb.

This social property of our Liturgy forms its most prominent feature; and endears it to us, as suitable to our nature, and friendly to the best feelings of the heart. Would to God, its beauty were noticed by every member of our congregations, and commended by his practice to others! Pleasant and elevating is the scene, which the Christian temple exhibits, when the Priest and the people are as one, to make one offering unto the Lord; and from every mouth, from the infant of days, and from the old man who hath not filled his days, there arises the alternate adoration or the assenting Amen.

But this leads me to the second property of our Liturgy to be noticed, namely, that it is sensible. By this I mean, that it has a body, as well as spirit; that it is adapted to the nature of beings who have senses, as well as souls. All worship to be becoming, must be suitable to the nature of those who offer it, as well as to His nature to whom it is offered. A worship wholly spiritual, would not be proper for man in his present state. It would be the act of but half of his nature. To be complete, all his faculties must be employed in it. With his body, as well as his spirit, he must worship; for

each is a part of himself, each is the offspring of Divine power, each a partaker of the Divine blessings, each is redeemed by the Divine mercy, each needs the Divine protection, and both are God's. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive, how, without corporeal acts, the important quality of sociality in worship, upon which we have already dilated, could be maintained. If the service be not sensible, the signs must be wanting, by which alone men can manifest their association in a common work, to the world, and to each other. Shall I be told, that the spirit may be engaged when the body is still? It may. But the spirits of men cannot in this present state evidence to men, what are their engagements, but by signs and deeds. If there be in the assemblies of the saints no sound of words, and no consentaneous posture of bodies, there may be sincerity in the individual, there may be an insulated altar in every bosom: but the visible chain is wanting, which should connect all together, and conduct the spirit, by which one is animated, through the whole. On these accounts mankind have been impelled, by the dictates of reason, in every country, to invest their public worship with rites and ceremonies: and with an eye to these principles, the wise compilers of our Liturgy have rendered it a sensible service. They have adapted it to our state of being upon 'this visible diurnal sphere,' guarding, with equal caution, against the impalpable reveries of the mystic, and the tedious mummeries of the formalist; on the one hand, avoiding to incumber the service of the sanctuary with such a mass of ceremonies, as would obscure, and overwhelm its spirit, and restraining themselves, on the other hand, from affecting a worship so abstract and imperceptible, as would not become man on the earth; and, indeed, we know not whether any such is offered in heaven. It is

here, then, you will be struck with the importance of the audible voice, with which the congregation, as well as the Priest, are to celebrate Divine service, that they may honour God with the best member which they have. Here, you will perceive the propriety of using, to enliven and beautify the worship of the sanctuary, that faculty, which is given to men, of clothing their thoughts and their feelings, their faith, their hopes, and their love in the ravishing charms of melodious sounds. Here, you will discern the fitness of that decent attire, which the church has prescribed for her Priests; of that adoration, which she expresses by the consecration to the honour of the Almighty, of temples meet for His service; and of those 'outward visible signs of inward and spiritual grace,' which she has received in the sacraments from her Lord, and transmits as hallowed to posterity. Here, you will see the reasons of those holy instructions, which teach us to fall low on our knees, when we confess our sins to Almighty God, or supplicate His mercies; and to stand upon our feet, when we declare the articles of faith, which we are resolved to maintain, or, with elevated emotions, proclaim the greatness and the goodness, whereby the Most High hath made us glad. These sensible acts, this employment of the faculties and posture of our bodies, the worshipping our Creator, how natural are they, how expressive, how becoming our condition in this state of being! To shew you in what value they were held by those, who were best able to estimate them, need I turn your attention to Solomon, kneeling upon his knees, when he offers his prayer to God; and rising upon his feet, and stretching forth his hands, when in the name of the Almighty he blesses the people? Need I bring to your view the congregation of Israel, the chosen and divinely instructed people, bowing their

heads, when they receive the benediction of the Most High ; and raising their bodies and their voices, when they magnify His name ? Need I call to your recollection the striking picture which the spirit of revelation hath given us, of the inhabitants of heaven, vailing their faces and casting down their crowns, when they worship Him who sitteth upon the throne ? Need I take you to Gethsemane, and show you Jesus, the pattern of all that is perfect, thrice kneeling down before his Father, while He thrice utters the same earnest supplication ? No ; I need not. These, and other examples, are familiar to your minds. And whenever you have pondered seriously the import of prayer and praise, conscience has testified to you the wisdom of the rubrics which teach us to do likewise. They are but repetitions of rubrics of nature. Is other evidence of their fitness needed, than that which is furnished by reason ? You hear it in the voice of the Almighty Himself, calling upon you in His holy word, “ to glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s^e.”

This leads me to a third property of our Liturgy, worthy of observation, namely, that it is spiritual. Important as it is, that our religious services should have a sensible form, this form would be of no worth, if it were destitute of life. The audible voice is of no value, but as it expresses the thoughts of the heart. The bended knee is of no significance, but as it represents the humbled soul. “ God is a Spirit : and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth^f.” And as a Spirit, He is truly worshipped in the service of our church. No image of the Godhead is contemplated by our minds. By no attempt to represent the Almighty to our senses, is the Divine nature dishonoured, and

^e 1 Cor. vi. 20.

^f John iv. 24.

our own weakness betrayed. As the Great Spirit, who pervadeth all space, and inhabiteth eternity, we address Him, “whom, having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory^s.” The worship which is rendered to Him is, too, in a high degree spiritual. In every part of it there is life. Within the beautiful and holy form there is a *soul*, fraught with the treasures of Divine truth, and pure as has been found on earth, since the transgression of man. Is it said, that it is cold? Where is manifested more fervent affection than in its addresses, or more intense devotion than in its Litany and hymns? Is it said, to confide too much in its exterior? The faith which it implies is seated in the spirit; the blessings which it most celebrates and deserves, are spiritual; and it is skilfully contrived to engage *our souls* in the acts of it, and to carry them on a stream of sacred emotions, perpetually flowing, to the foot of the mount of God. Is it said, that it affords not scope for the feelings, which are sometimes kindled in the heart, when it approaches its Maker; nor freedom to the action of the soul, when the spirit of devotion comes upon it? Which of the affections or dispositions of man, that is proper to be engaged in the worship of his Maker, may not find employment and vent for itself, in the psalms, and in some or other of the collects? And in what production of the most rapturous being, has piety taken a loftier flight, than in her favourite *Te Deum*, the hymn so eminently spiritual, so wonderfully sublime, that one can scarce forbear to believe, that the lips which first uttered it were touched with a coal from the altar of heaven? Is it said, that it is formal? What faculty of our nature, meet for

^s 1 Pet. i. 8.

the work, is not brought into action in the due performance of the Common Prayer? Our souls, and all that is within us, our understanding, our will, and our affections, all in this service have their part and occupation: and he, who engages in it as he ought, cannot fail to enjoy a very near communion with his God. In short, humility, and faith, and love, and gratitude, and sincerity, have all here a place, that they may come and adorn the worship of the sanctuary; and the propensity of our minds to wander, even when our tongues are engaged, is checked with the happiest skill, by those variations and acclamations, which now relieve, and now quicken attention; and by those sudden breaks, and frequent apostrophes, which remind us of the nature of our work, and of the presence of the Almighty. It is true, all this may be overlooked, or disregarded. In our temples, with all the spirituality of our service, they may pass from our lips an empty sound; our hands may offer an unhallowed oblation. But who, that would worship the Lord his God as he ought, will not be careful to engage the powers of his mind, and affections of his heart, in this his highest duty? To what purpose shall we, as taught by our Redeemer, address the Deity as our Parent, if we have none of the feelings which the idea of a father, of a "Father in heaven," of a Father who is God, ought to excite? With what benefit are we so often reminded, in the beginning and end of our prayers, of the attributes of God, and mediation of Christ, if we do not exert that reverence and fear, that faith and hope, that affection and confidence, which the very frequent recurrence of these great ideas was designed to inspire? Where is the propriety, when we have said; (we trust with simplicity and sincerity) 'the Lord be with you,' in replying, 'and with thy spirit,' if the heart do not

wish what the lips express? What honour can result to the Almighty; or what advantage to ourselves, from pronouncing the customary Amen, if we thereby assent to that, to which we have not listened; or ratify that, about which we are indifferent? Can we expect that the doxology of the tongue will be reported by the spirits that minister about the throne, if it be unaccompanied by the Hallelujah of the soul? O let us not separate the life from the form; the soul from the body of our excellent Liturgy! With its *sensible*, let us combine its *spiritual* property; that thus we may offer to God a reasonable service. With us, who in this respect are so signally blessed, what apology can be found, if the Almighty shall have occasion to say of us, “This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me^h!”

But it is time for me to pass to another distinguishing property of our Liturgy, its comprehensiveness, or fulness. Here was the labour, this was the difficulty, in compiling a book of Common Prayer, to provide for the claims and expectations of God, and for the conditions, and wants, and wishes, and duties of all estates of men: so that of such honour, as we unworthy creatures can render unto our heavenly Father, there should be no deficiency; and none of His worshippers be left without such instructions, as they would need to receive; such oblations, as it would become them to offer; and such supplications, as they might wish to make. And when we consider, how successfully the framers of our Liturgy have accomplished this, we must look upon it, as among the most wonderful achievements of wisdom and piety, which the world has

^h Matt. xv. 8.

known. They have recurred to the oracles of truth, and have brought the Old and the New Testament to stand daily, and always, as parts of the Liturgy ; that thus, it might be enriched with perennial sources of wisdom, and instruction, and peace. They have gone to the Jewish Church ; and have brought thence the wonderful psalms, and many hymns, which the Spirit of God seems to have inspired His servants to indite, for the use of His people. They have had recourse to the first Christians, and the first churches ; to the Fathers, and to their immediate descendants ; and, from their precious stores, have obtained parts of the primitive Liturgies, venerable for their antiquity and holy simplicity. They have looked among the Christians of the Eastern, and of the Western Empire ; into the Greek church, and into the church of Rome ; and from them have taken many most excellent prayers, versicles, and Litany suffrages, which they have rendered of great value and utility, in the accomplishment of their work. To these rich materials, they have added many productions of their own pious and enlarged minds ; productions, which, in purity of language, sanctity of sentiment, and true character of devotion, are not inferior to the generality of those, with which they are combined. From this mass of materials they separated whatever was gross, discordant, or unnecessary ; and with the rest composed the service which enriches and adorns our church. Thus you perceive, that from the richest mines, there has, from time to time, been collected in large abundance, for the perfecting of the work, the choicest gold ; and under the following head, which will treat of the arrangement of the service, will see, that the gold has been wrought into this clothing of the church, with exquisite skill, and finished effect. At present, our concern is only with the fulness of the Liturgy.

Let us consider it with respect to the Being, to whom its adorations are addressed. He is recognized and worshipped in his great characters of our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. His glorious attributes, as far as they are known to us, are all of them celebrated. That confession of sins, acknowledgment of dependence, thanksgiving for blessings, adoration of His greatness, supplication for His favour, and avowal of allegiance to Him, and all those dispositions and affections towards the Deity, which man should possess and manifest, are provided for in this Liturgy: and, conformably with the divine canon, God in all its parts is glorified, through Christ Jesusⁱ.

Consider it with respect to the beings, by whom it is to be used. How admirably adapted to instruct the ignorant, and remind the well informed, in what they are to believe and do, is the *reading of the holy Scriptures*, in order, throughout the year; the rehearsal *in the creed*, whenever they assemble and meet together, of a summary of the truths, which God has revealed to be embraced and cherished by them; and the declaration *in the decalogue*, of His will and pleasure concerning their conduct! Who that attends stately upon this service, can long be ignorant, what is good, and what the Lord his God doth require of him? So full is it with respect to the truths of Christianity, that it has been well observed, a complete body of divinity might be easily framed out of the words it contains. With what felicity, also, are its prayers and praises so framed, as to embrace, almost without an exception, the wants and the blessings of every human being! Is there a lust or passion, a vice or misery, an evil or danger, common to mankind, which is not in it de-

ⁱ 1 Pet. iv. 11.

precatèd and deplored? Is there a grace of Christianity, a virtue which can adorn and bless the human character, a thing essential to life or godliness, which is not celebrated in it, and devoutly sought? Is there a condition of prosperity or adversity, of joy or sorrow, to which man can be brought, in which he may not find vent for his wishes, in that eminently complete production, *the Litany*; and for his praises, in the thanksgiving, and the psalms? As was the case with the food furnished for the Israelites in the wilderness, there is in this service provision made for every man, according to his necessities, and the necessities of his household.

But that which renders this property of our Liturgy very admirable, is the skill with which it is so framed, as to be adapted to the use of all classes and orders of men. The high and the low, the rich and the poor, the old and the young, the ruler and the subject, the master and the slave, the saint and the sinner, may each find in it an oblation, meet for him to offer, and a blessing worthy to be thankfully received. It may be used without perplexity by the mean and the ignorant, and by the wise and the mighty without disgust. The plainest may understand it; and it may entertain all the faculties of the most refined. With a felicity rarely to be found in any human production, its fulness is such, and so continued, that the prince and the beggar may use it together; and both find in it becoming devotion, instruction, and delight. It has been objected to it, that it is too long. But when, with serious deliberation, we have considered the matter, we shall discover unexpected difficulty in selecting the parts, with which we would most willingly dispense: and shall perceive, that no part can be removed from it, without impairing its strength, disturbing its proportions, and diminishing its fulness.

From the fulness of the Liturgy, we pass to the arrangement of its parts. A mass of materials, however great and valuable, can excite but little admiration, and be of but little utility, till it is reduced to some form and order. It has been said, that order is Heaven's first law. All the works of God, from the disposition of the parts which form the humblest flower of the field, to the disposition of the planets and stars which form the magnificence of unbounded space, are, doubtless, conformed to the principles, and exhibit to the eye, which can ken the whole, the beauty of order. And man, who was made originally in the image of God, and is taught in the Gospel to aspire after a recovery of that image, should in all his concerns, but especially in the worship which he renders to the Being, who is the Author of beauty and lover of harmony, observe and cherish order. Without this, the service he renders must produce a jargon with the very nature of the Being, to whom it is addressed. In the prophetic vision, which the Psalmist had of the Church, when in the age of her maturity she should be espoused to her Lord, he remarks, that "she should be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework;" intimating not only, that her attire should not be plain, coarse, or common, but that it should be costly, and adorned by the skilful, according to the unchangeable principles of art and excellency. We have mentioned, as a fifth property of our Liturgy, worthy to be noticed, that it is well arranged: and if we advert to it, we shall find, that the golden materials of which it is composed are not thrown together in splendid confusion, but disposed systematically, and in such a way, as to produce the great ends of arrangement, convenience, pleasure, and the best accomplishment of the effect proposed.

The parts of our service are so proposed, as to pro-

duce a variety, which is, at once, convenient and delightful to the worshipper. “The corruptible body” too much “presseth down the soul^k ;” and the mind itself, in the present state, is too weak to be long continued upon the same stretch, with much satisfaction. On this account, with wise adaptation to the infirmities, as well as powers of our nature, and in humble imitation of the economy of the Great Creator, in the production of His works, our Liturgy is rendered *various* :

* * * * * ‘ that the mind
Of desultory men, studious of change,
————— may be indulged.’

This variety is, in a happy manner, produced by the division of the service into many short prayers ; whereby the thoughts and affections are concentrated a little while upon one subject, and then relieved by transition to another ; excited afresh in each by the new address with which it begins, and resting a moment upon the Amen at the end. These frequent addresses direct our attention, each one of them, to a distinct attribute of God ; and thus, in the course of the service, all the parts of the glory of His character, with which we are acquainted, in grateful succession pass before us. Nor is it with an idle volatility, that this transition from one attribute of the Deity to another, is so frequently made : but every address is, with great felicity, adapted to the subject of the prayer, which begins with it ; a thing worthy to be observed, that when in the use of these various collects, we “pray with the spirit,” we may “pray with the understanding also^l.” Thus, when we are about to confess our sins, and implore the forgiveness of them ; that we may be filled with that

^k Wisd. ix. 15.

^l 1 Cor. xiv. 15.

union of fear and hope, which becomes sincere penitents, before ‘ the throne of the heavenly grace ;’ we are directed to contemplate and address Him, before whom we bow, as an ‘ Almighty and most merciful Father.’ Thus, when about to beseech Him at His holy table, to prepare us, by cleansing the thoughts of our hearts, perfectly to love Him, and worthily to magnify His holy name, we look up to Him as the Being, ‘ unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid.’ Thus, when, in obedience to the instructions of the Gospel, we are about to offer supplications for the rulers of the land, we address Him, as ‘ the high and mighty Ruler of the universe, who doth from His throne behold all the dwellers upon earth.’ And in like manner, when, with the comprehensive benevolence of our holy religion, we are about to pray for all sorts and conditions of men, or to offer thanks for all the blessings enjoyed by us, and by all men, we, in the former case, approach Him as ‘ the Creator and Preserver of all mankind,’ and, in the latter, as ‘ the Father of all mercies.’ And all this is in conformity with the example of our blessed Lord, who, in the inimitable prayer He hath given us, that we may be filled with the filial reverence and affection, which we ought to feel, when approaching God, hath taught us in the beginning of it, to call upon Him, as “ our Father ;” and that He may have confidence in His power to do what we ask, hath reminded us, that He is in “ heaven.”

The variety, however, which so much enlivens and beautifies our service, does not consist wholly, nor chiefly, in the division of it into many prayers. However numerous the parts of worship may be, if they be all of the same kind, without change or variation of their nature, the mind would become satiated with the sameness, and wearied with the

repetition. The humblest penitent might be oppressed by prolonged confession, if no recollection of the promise of absolution gleamed upon his heart. The most devout suppliant would have his fervour abated, if no recollection of past mercies animated his hopes, and no acts of praise enlivened his spirit. On this account it is, that there are introduced into our Liturgy, those changes of occupation, of subject, and of posture, which by diversifying our business render it more interesting. Indeed, variety in our acts of worship is not less answerable to the claims of the Almighty, than to the necessities of man. 'The church, therefore, diversifies and variegates her service with friendly exhortations, humbling confessions, comforting absolutions, fervent prayers, hymns and psalms of cheerful praise, and with the writings of the Prophets and Apostles; to a participation of the benefits of all which, her children are admitted by the initiatory sacrament of baptism; as afterwards they are promoted to the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus, by the repeated communications of His Holy Spirit in the blessed eucharist.' In this view of it, our Liturgy is as a well furnished garden: in which are shades of the deepest verdure, and flowers of the liveliest hue; waters flowing from perennial fountains to fertilize and delight, and seats, at which, at proper intervals, we may rest and be refreshed.

* But I hasten to observe, that amidst all this variety there is a perfect order. The different materials are not thrown together without design. Every part is placed according to principles of fitness. Each has a relation to, and dependance upon, others. And the pleasing effect of the whole is the result of that happy union of order with variety, which is the source of the beautiful, in all the works of nature and of art. It would be instructive and pleasant, to

contemplate the beauty of the arrangement, in every part of the Common Prayer, and administration of the Holy Sacraments. But to do it completely in a discourse is impossible. I must content myself with pointing out to you, some of the most prominent features of the felicity of this arrangement, in the services which we most frequently use. Attentive observation in your retired hours will discover equal beauty and utility, in the disposition of the parts of all the several offices; and many excellencies in the order of the *daily* service, which the lapse of time will compel me to leave unnoticed.

Interesting is the scene, when a congregation are assembled, as a people whom the Most High hath redeemed, to worship Him in His holy temple. How solemn the moment, when they are about to present themselves before the Almighty! To collect their thoughts, and excite in them a due solemnity, the service opens with some passages of Scripture, peculiarly impressive. These are followed by an address, in which the Minister, while he sets before them the great purposes of their assembling together, aims chiefly to excite in them humility, and confidence in 'Almighty God, their heavenly Father,' and invites them to accompany him, with their hearts and voices, to 'the throne of the heavenly grace.' After this decent preparation, they are ready to bow before His footstool. With what shall they begin? Angels, ye, first and last, utter only adorations! Spirits of the just made perfect, ye break forth at every approach to your Creator, in acts of praise! But sinful men, should they not first propitiate their Maker, before they offer Him any oblation? Accordingly, the first act of our devotion is the confession of our sins; a confession, so comprehensive, that under some one or other of its general clauses every fault, with which a man can charge himself,

may be included; and so very affecting, that his heart must be dead to all religious emotions, who is not humbled by it before his God. To the pious penitent, who has made this confession, how joyous would it be, could he hear immediately from the throne of the Almighty, “Thy sins be forgiven thee ^m!” This he cannot hear, till Jesus shall personally present him to the Father. But, behold, for their comfort and encouragement, while they continue in the flesh, God ‘hath given power and commandment to His Ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins.’ This declaration, therefore, the Priest, rising from before the throne, makes to the people, directly after their confession. And of the comfort of it, every Christian who is conscious that he ‘truly repents, and unfeignedly believes the Gospel,’ should with faith avail himself, to the quieting of his conscience, and perfecting of his gratitude and joy. Being now reconciled to God, according to the promises declared to our race in Christ Jesus, we, as children adopted anew into His family, extend our affections, and lift our grateful eyes to Him as “our Father;” and address to Him that summary of our homage and desires, in which He, who purchased our forgiveness, hath taught us to pray. Our spirits being relieved from the burthen of their fears, and revived by the tenor of this prayer, which His Son hath authorized us to address to our Maker; we rise upon our feet, and with hearts glowing with devotion, in a most ancient doxology, an animated hymn, and a portion of the sacred psalms, ascribe everlasting glory to Him, in language of inspiration celebrating His praise. This first part of the service, how beautiful it is! How

^m Matt. ix. 2.

proper the order ; how natural and significant the transitions ; how happy our minds, when we sit down ; how well prepared to listen to the instructions of God's holy word ! A lesson is read from the Old Testament. At the close of it, we rise, and cherish the flame of our devotion by celebrating, in suitable hymns, His character, and works, and grace. There is then read a lesson from the New Testament, and by this arrangement, the Law and the Gospel, the Prophets and the Apostles, are brought, at a suitable time, to adorn and bless our service : and the important truth is inculcated, that, throughout the Bible, there is but one scheme carried on, issuing in the redemption of the world through Jesus, the Son of God. To the lesson from the New Testament, there follow appropriate hymns, in which we express our adorations and joy. And then, having heard the Scriptures, we, in the presence of each other, of the world, and of God, with great propriety rehearse a summary of the truths, which have been received from revelation ; by our Amen, declaring our assent to them, and our resolution to maintain them. Knowing in whom we may believe, and what are our interests, and for how great mercies we are indebted to the Most High, after a reciprocation of holy wishes between the Priest and the people, venerable for the antiquity of its use, and for its Christian courteousness, we prostrate ourselves again before the Almighty, and in a series of prayers, engage in acts of supplication ; in which spiritual blessings are magnified above temporal ones ; the church is regarded more than the world ; the less is sought after the greater : and sometimes, as in the Litany, which was originally a separate service, but now is incorporated into the Morning Prayer, there is a regular transition from invocation of mercy, to deprecation of evil, and from deprecation of evil, to sup-

plication of favours : in all which, the concerns of the soul are remembered before those of the body ; the concerns of the church before those of the world ; the concerns of the world, and the powers whom God hath ordained to rule it, before those of individuals : and yet, there is not a thing, needful for the body, which is forgotten, nor an individual, who may not find a petition adapted to his own case. As we draw towards the close of this service, we are called upon to exalt our gratitude to the highest point of fervour ; and to expand our charity to the utmost extent. In a prayer for all sorts and conditions of men, we, as we would ask an alms for the dumb beggar, supplicate appropriate mercies *for all our race*. And in a general thanksgiving, which burns with the holiest and most ardent spirit of praise, we honour God for all His mercies to us, and to all men. An excellent summary, from the pen of the pious Chrysostom, of all for which the Christian can be solicitous, follows : and the benedictory prayer which the Spirit of inspiration hath hallowed, closes the daily service.

I must forbear to enter at present upon the office of the communion. This is, perhaps, the most finished piece of devotion, which exists in the world. In a hasty manner to speak of its excellence would not satisfy my admiration of it. Happily, its beauties are so striking, and impressive, that they who use it, need not to have them described. No good Christian can join in the celebration of this office, without discovering in it as high perfection of the beauty of holiness, as he can expect to behold upon earth.

It is objected to the arrangement of our Liturgy, that the many variations, and frequent risings and sittings, diminish its solemnity. But to those who have studied the principles by which it is framed,

these changes have a lively significance ; and while they are calculated to keep attention awake, give to the service a becoming character of activity.

It has also been objected, that the apostrophes and short ejaculations, which abound in our Liturgy, produce confusion, and are useless. But they are of precious value, as relics of primitive devotion ; are, many of them, important, as connecting ligaments in the system, or powerful expressions in themselves of true piety. ‘ In these connections,’ says an admirer of the Liturgy, ‘ the wisdom of the church hath imitated the skill of nature. For as in framing the body of man, nature has not only formed the limbs in proportion, and placed them in order, but has also fastened them with joints, which seem made no less for beauty than necessity ; so, in composing the body of our Common Prayer, the church hath not only framed the several offices of a due length, and ranged them in a just method, but has likewise united them with versicles, as it were with joints ; which, though less regarded, are yet the no less beautiful than necessary parts of our Liturgy : so that we shall find as great comeliness and art in these connections, as there are in the compositions themselves.’

After this manner, are wisdom and propriety displayed throughout the service, in the arrangement of its parts. The choice gold, which with so much care was collected for the foundation of it, is not thrown together in a promiscuous heap. It is “ *wrought* ;” and wrought with such skill, as to produce in the system all the charms and advantages, which are found in what is significant, orderly, and beautiful. And the effect proposed in instituting the service, is by the arrangement most surely accomplished. The church is enabled to present herself before her Lord, in a clothing suitable to her cha-

racter and condition: and her Lord, when He beholds her in this good and glorious attire, “hath pleasure in her beauty.”

† The last property of our Liturgy, which we shall consider is, that it is holy. Without this quality, no offering can be acceptable unto God. Into His ancient tabernacle and temple nothing, that had the least impurity, was allowed to enter. To His altar, no sacrifice that had any blemish was permitted to be brought. Upon the foreheads of the Priests, and upon the holy vestments, and upon all the utensils of the sacred place, was inscribed, “Holiness to the Lord.” And it is its most important commendation, that the service provided for us to offer in His sanctuary, is pre-eminently holy.

Shall I speak to you of its language? Much of it is the language of inspiration. All of it is grand and reverent. So pure and chaste is it, so free from imbecility and corruption, that perhaps there is no better standard of the excellencies of our tongue. If there be here and there an ancient phrase, or expression, this does not diminish from, but rather adds to its solemnity. Who would exchange any part of the rich, majestic, and durable clothing of wrought gold, for the fripperies of modern decoration; the tinsel and gaudy affectations with which some would refine it?

Shall I speak to you of its doctrines and sentiments? They are purely Scriptural. The pattern of them was brought by Jesus from heaven. Nothing is there among them, which has not affinity with the sacred truths, which God hath taught us to revere. They are holy, as the gold of the censers upon which the ministering spirits in heaven offer the prayers of the saints.

Shall I speak to you of its form and ceremonies? There is nothing in them to debase the worshipper, or offend his God. No tarnish of pious fraud rests upon them. No stain of human vanity defiles them. They are simple, pure, significant; wholly calculated to give an expression of sanctity to the *manner*, that it may correspond with the *spirit* of the holy service.

Shall I speak to you of the Object to whom it is addressed? He is the one only living and true God, in the Trinity of Persons, as He has graciously revealed Himself to mankind, in the oracles of truth: the Being, before whom the company of heaven “rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.”^o

Shall I speak to you of its tendency? It is to inspire us with an abhorrence of impurity; to sanctify our thoughts, and elevate our affections; to beget in us holiness of heart and life. He, who duly uses it, will be made more pious and virtuous by it. As Moses, by long contemplation of the Divine nature in the mount, caught a gleam of its lustre, with which his countenance beamed; so he, who shall long and constantly use this service, may, at length, in the temper of his soul, and conduct of his life, be changed into its glory.

In short, when I speak of the holiness of our service, shall I err, if I say, that no sacrifice more perfect, in this respect, hath been prepared to be offered to God, in this world, since the fall of man, except the sacrifice of His adorable Son? Let us bring to the use of it dispositions and affections, correspondent to its character; and we shall not fail to “worship the Lord with holy worship.”^p

I have now finished what I proposed to do, in

^o Rev. iv. 8.

^p Ps. xxix. 2.

treating upon the Liturgy of our church. In reviewing what has been said, you cannot, my brethren, but perceive that we ought to consider ourselves, as highly distinguished by the Almighty, in that we are furnished with such a pure, pleasant, and acceptable service, wherewith to present ourselves before Him in His holy temple. With what sacred care should we keep this treasure! Let us guard it vigilantly in its integrity, that those who come after us, when they shall look upon the church, may not have occasion to say, "How is the gold" of her clothing "become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!"^a Wisely has our church required of all, who are admitted to her ministry, a solemn promise which is made at their ordination, that they will conform themselves to this Liturgy in their official services. Let her clergy, then, under the influence of their vows, consider the care of its integrity as a part of their charge. Let not the hand of any individual disturb its proportions, or with additions or devices of his own, soil its beauty. In its excellent fulness let it be preserved inviolate, and it will be to our Church an invaluable barrier against the whims, and errors, and dangerous speculations of innovating ages, and restless men. Then should the Almighty, in awful retribution upon the world, for their unfaithful use of the Gospel of His mercy, permit a period to arrive, in which the doctrines of Christianity shall be changed, and His Son, should He come, would scarcely find faith on the earth, this Liturgy will be as the ark of the ancient temple; in which posterity may find samples of the manna, with which their fathers were fed; proofs, perhaps the only ones which will remain, of the substance and quality of that bread of life, which came down from heaven.

^a Lam. iv. 1.

SERMON XX.

ON PSALMODY.

2 CHRONICLES, v. 13, 14.

It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; so that the Priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God.

“WILL God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him^a!” Yet we here find Him, veiling Himself in a cloud, and descending into the temple in all His glory, to testify by His presence His gracious satisfaction in the choral hymns, and melodious sounds, which at the bringing up of His ark into His house, ascended unto Him from an hundred instruments, and a thousand tongues. The scene is sublime. And, perhaps, among all the achievements for which music has been celebrated, we have here the greatest. In the temple thus erected to the Almighty, King Solomon and his people

^a 2 Chron. vi. 18.

are assembled. The whole company of the Priests are in service. Singers in white, an unnumbered company, having cymbals, and psalteries, and harps, stand by the altar, and with them an hundred and twenty Priests, sounding with trumpets. And it “ came to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying, For He is good ; for His mercy endureth for ever : that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord ; so that the Priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud : for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God.”

The observations which these words will introduce, I am prompted to offer to your attention, by the laudable attempt which is now making to reform the music of our church : an attempt, the motives to which are, I am persuaded, as pure, as the end which it contemplates ; and the accomplishment of which would greatly conduce to the beauty and perfection of our religious services. Much need will the speaker have of your candour and indulgence. Though an admirer of this heavenly art, he is unskilled in its principles and its practice, and cannot, therefore, be expected to rise to all the raptures, which the contemplation of it by a proficient might justly inspire ; or to descend to any of the particulars which relate to its scientific and happy performance. But he trusts, he shall not be considered as going beyond his province, if he endeavour to show ;

In the first place, why, or for what end, music is used in religious worship.

Secondly, what are the examples and authorities for it.

Thirdly, how it was performed by the first Christians.

And lastly, after what manner we may best use it, to our own benefit and the glory of God.

The aim of all that shall be said, will be simply this, to excite your attention to the subject; and to engage you all to promote, as you are able, the improvement of this branch of public worship; which, as indeed may be said of every part of the service of God, if we perform it at all, we should endeavour to perform in the most excellent way.

Let us first consider, why music is used in religious worship; for what end it is introduced into the service of the sanctuary. For this there can be no other unexceptionable reason, than that it is a very powerful, and happy means of exciting, or increasing, or expressing, our devout affections. It results from the constitution of our nature, that music, by a mysterious and potent agency, awakens the heart, concentrates the thoughts, and elevates the soul. There are chords in human nature, which answer to its sounds. It touches, fixes, rules, relieves, delights the mind. The praises of God, the truths of religion, and the commendations of virtue, are, it would seem, most intensely dwelt upon, most deeply impressed upon the heart, and most agreeably expressed, when they are clothed with the accents, and followed through the windings of an engaging melody. * By reason,' says a venerable father of the church, 'by reason of the proneness of our affections to that which delights, it pleased the wisdom of the Spirit, to borrow from melody that pleasure, which, mingled with heavenly mysteries, causes the smoothness and softness of that which touches the ear to convey, as it were by stealth, the treasure of good things into men's minds; for this purpose, were those harmonious tunes of psalms composed.' † This, then, is the end,

for which music is used in religious worship; to assist our devotions, by an application to our affections of that, which has upon them a powerful action, to excite and direct them; by engaging us in an exercise in which sympathy has large scope, and every one acts upon the rest, to enable us to animate each other; to pour forth our praises, and adorations, in a way that is significant and edifying, delightful and impressive. Should we suppose it introduced into the church for any other purpose than this, we must first forget the sanctity of the place, and the business for which alone we here assemble.

A principle of such powerful action upon human nature, as music is known to have, ought unquestionably to be applied to the promotion of the best objects, which human nature can pursue. And hence, all nations have called to the aid of their religion, and expression of their joy, the measured hymn, and the tuneful sound. Hence, too, we may infer the propriety, with which instruments, designed for sacred use, are combined in our service, with the human voice: for both have a tendency to the same end; the elevation of the soul, and exciting and assisting of its devout affections. It may be added, that in the social performance of this exercise, there is necessarily in the concert a perception and expression of unity, which beautifully typifies and in Christian bosoms may happily promote, that unity of spirit and affections, which is so important a quality in the Church of Christ. And, moreover, as it is the glory of this art, to embrace and display only the principles of order and harmony, we may safely presume, that it is with great fitness, and very acceptably, brought into the service of that God, who is the lover of concord, and through all whose works, order and harmony do eternally pervade.

There is harmony in the movements of “the heavens,” whereby they “declare the glory of God;” there is music among the spheres, when they show forth “His handy work^b.”

How far the end of introducing music in religious worship, is actually accomplished, must depend upon many circumstances. But of its fitness and utility, who can doubt? Imagine a congregation assembled with sanctified affections, in the house of the Lord. They are conscious of the presence of God, their Creator and Redeemer; and their hearts glow with the love, their thoughts burn with the devotion, which the contemplation of His perfections inspires. Penetrated with a sense of His goodness, in having snatched them from destruction, each one is anxious to send from his heart, a tribute of admiration and praise. The full toned organ now breathes forth the majestic strain, concentrated to their feelings, and to the words they are about to utter. From every part of the sacred place there rises, from unnumbered tongues, the glowing hymn, “Our God is good; His mercy endureth for ever.” The voice of him, whose brow is whitened with age, as he looks back upon fourscore years of Divine protection, and forward to a better world, lingers with delight upon the strain. The lips of the youth whom education hath taught to adore the Divinity of the place, join with sweet concord in the strain of his sires. From every tongue, from the Priest and the people, from the learned and the illiterate, from the rich and mighty, and from him that hath no other helper, resounds the peal, “Our God is good; His mercy endureth for ever.” Methinks, if the Deity be present in His temple with His train, the host who compose His train would not disdain to join

^b Ps. xix. 1.

in the devotion, and the Almighty Father would condescend to listen to the creature's praise. Methinks, the fellow worshippers could hardly fail to catch new fervour from each other's song; and the unbeliever coming in would fall down and worship^c.

Before we proceed to the second thing proposed, it may be well to remark, that from the nature of the purposes, for which music is introduced into our religious services, there arises an absurdity in making it a matter of mere entertainment, or of vain show: and also, that all kinds of music, which have no tendency to aid and gratify devotion, ought to be banished from the house of God. Whatever charms such music may have, at suitable times, and in proper places, it is unfit in the sanctuary.

Let us now consider, in the second place, some of the examples and authorities, for making music an handmaid to religion. How long, or from how many worlds praise has arisen to the throne of Jehovah, in tuneful sounds, we, beings of yesterday and dwellers upon earth, are unable to ascertain. Probably, in all space, there are those who sing of His glory. The oldest anthem of which we have any account, was at the laying of the corner stone of this fair world, when "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy^d." Among the inhabitants of the earth, we may infer from such records as are left, it has been customary to call music to the service of religion and virtue, under the Patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the Christian dispensations. Man soon sought for himself the pleasure of forming melodious sounds. In a sixth person from Adam, we find Jubal mentioned and honoured, as "the father of all such as handle the harp, and organ^e:" nor can we doubt that the dictate of na-

^c 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25.

^d Job xxxviii. 7.

^e Gen. iv. 21.

ture, which has always led mankind to wed music with joy, especially when religion has owned the latter as her daughter, would induce them to bring the instruments, and melodies, with which they were delighted, to the assistance of their devotion in the Patriarchal age, when religious service seems very much to have consisted in adoration and praise. As we descend lower, we have surer information. In the very dawn of the Mosaic economy, music was engaged in the worship of the Deity. The most ancient song in the world, and one, than which there can be none more sublime and affecting, was a song to the Almighty, sung by the Israelites, on the bank of the Red Sea; in which Moses and the people took the lead, and Miriam, and the daughters of Israel, answered them “with timbrels and with dances ^f.” In the times of the tabernacle, when the ark of the Lord dwelt within curtains, hymns were appointed, and musical instruments provided, and singers set apart to thank and praise the Lord. The psalms of David, those wonderful compositions, which seem to have been breathed by the Spirit of God upon his harp, for the use of the church in every subsequent generation, were, most of them, as appears by their addresses and use, designed, originally, to be sung: and from the steps which the Psalmist took in providing for this part of religious service, it is incontrovertibly evident, that in his view, both the charms of poetry, and the powers of sound should be employed to animate, and aid, the worshippers of God, and give grandeur to the service of His sanctuary. After the erection of the temple, it is, I presume, almost unnecessary to observe, that to “show themselves joyful before the Lord, with trumpets and shawms ^g,” to “sing praises,

^f Exod. xv. 20.

^g Ps. xxviii. 7.

to sing praises upon the harp unto their King^h," was, after their sacrifices, the most important part of the Jewish worship. Here were sung, in course, the psalms of David, with accompaniments of instruments consecrated to the use: and we have, in the text, a fine specimen of their manner, and an evidence of the approbation it obtained from Jehovah. A pause there was in the psalmody of the Jews. When they were carried away captive, they hanged their harps upon the trees, and faintly, if at all, sang the Lord's songs in a strange land. But at their return from captivity, the musical instruments which Solomon had provided for the service of the temple, were restored to them: the good and zealous Nehemiah re-established, with great care, the order of this part of Divine service; and, at the time of the coming of our Lord, it was continued in the second temple.

If now we attend to the practice of the Christian era, we shall find this heaven-born art, the daughter of piety and delight, who has descended through so many ages, aiding and adorning the worship of the Almighty, still retained in the service of religion. It is among the precepts of inspiration, that Christians should "sing and make melody in their hearts to the Lordⁱ." Correspondent to the precept, has been the practice of the church, in every age. We find in the morning of Christianity, Apostles offering praise in social song. Pliny, in his famous letter to Trajan, describes the Christians chiefly, as assembling to sing hymns unto Christ. And since the establishment of the Gospel, I know of but one sect, and that of modern origin, among whose religious services psalmody has no place. But, above all, that which conferred on music her highest glory,

^h Ps. xlvii. 6. cxlvii. 7.

ⁱ Eph. v. 19.

and entitles her for ever to a place in the Christian temple, was the honour she received from the Son of God. The Author of our faith took her by the hand, as she was yet lingering about the Jewish temple: He introduced her to His church at the institution of His holy Supper; and from that day to this, she has been found in the church, in her purest and most exalted character. And who amongst us, whether skilled or unskilled in her mysteries, shall not here honour her for this? At the most affecting meeting they ever had, Jesus with His disciples “sang an hymn^k.”

Let us, in the third place, consider, after what manner the first Christians performed this service. For the nearer we come to the model of the primitive church in this, and in every part of faith and Christian duty, the nearer, in my estimation, we shall approach to perfection. It appears, then, from such an examination as I have been able to make, and I believe it is confirmed by the result of the most learned researches, that the psalmody of the first Christians was plain, simple, and solemn; and that the whole body of the church joined in the performance of it. Their tunes were, probably, easy and few, and the character of them such as expressed humility and love, and was calculated rather to melt, than to enrapture the heart. Afterwards, as piety declined, it became necessary to re-excite and re-animate it by more striking music; and the whole congregation was divided into two parts, which sang responsive to each other. Inattention and indifference increased; for, alas! with how much difficulty is our frail nature kept engaged, in the best services of God. We find in the fourth century, councils employed in devising means for reforming the

^k Matt. xxvi. 30.

music of churches ; and precentors, or choristers appointed, to lead and instruct in this service, such as were devoted to it. But it is evident from the sentiments of that age, and from the subsequent practice, that the end of this arrangement was to perfect the people in the art, and restore the simple primitive usage. The church returned again to the plain song, in which every member probably, with modesty, according to the degree of his skill, bore his part of the exercise. The consigning of this service wholly and permanently to a separate band, if we except the practice of some Egyptian Monasteries, was of more modern origin. The only difficulty is to conceive how, in the primitive psalmody, as all are not singers, the inconvenience of dissonance was avoided. Probably, they aimed more at the glory of God, than at the gratification of a very fastidious ear. I will give you the evidence and account of the practice, in the words of St. Chrysostom, an ancient father of the church. ‘ Women and men,’ says he, ‘ old men and children, differ in sex and age, but they differ not in the harmony of singing hymns ; for the Spirit tempers all their voices together, making one melody of them all.’ Nor may we think that their music was lifeless and insipid. It was of such singing that the celebrated St. Augustin, addressing his spiritual father, exclaims, ‘ O how I wept, in the hymns and holy canticles, being enforced thereunto by the sweet voices of thy melodious Church !’

I come now, in the last place, to furnish some brief suggestions, how we may use this part of Divine service, to our own benefit, and the glory of God. It is evidently desirable, that all the congregation should be able to unite their voices in the praise of God ; and to this end, the tunes should be few, plain, and calculated to move them to devotion. If any are utterly unable to sing, they should endeavour

to make "melody in their hearts;" to send their thoughts to accompany the voices of the rest, in bearing to the footstool of the throne, the burthen of the hymn. Those who sing with but indifferent skill, should not forbear, when they are able, to join in the exercise: and while the spirit is one, the affections one, and the psalm one, they may, it is presumed, in a moderate voice, avoid occasioning any intolerable discord, and add to the acceptableness of the service. With regard to the posture in which this duty may be best performed, (for posture, in beings composed of body and spirit, is not a matter of indifference), I am told by those who are judges, that if performers stand while they sing, they sing both with more ease, and more effect. And they, who are not singers, should they rise with the rest, might by this act express their union in the service. Indeed, as the example of Christ, the instruction of the Church, the practice of the pious of every age, and our own sober reflection, teach us, that we pray most becomingly when we kneel; so, standing appears to be the most suitable posture for praise. By the erection of the body, we express the elevation of the soul; and also our respect for the Being whom we address. Should these brief hints be attended to, and what is of more consequence than all, the duty be performed with a single eye to the glory of our Creator and Redeemer, I cannot but flatter myself, that they would aid the attempt to give new beauty, acceptableness, and effect, to this part of our public worship.

Let me first address myself to those of you who are singers. You are blessed with a talent above your fellows. Yours is a privilege which opens to you pleasures great, and peculiarly your own. It is a privilege which thousands would be glad to share. Shall no honour arise from it to Him, from

whom you have received it? What can be more ungrateful to the Author and Giver of "every good and every perfect gift¹," than to refuse, or neglect to employ, in His service, those talents with which He hath blessed you, while you willingly employ them for the gratification of mortals like yourselves? "He that planteth the ear," that wonderful organ, through which the delights of sound pass to the soul, and by which you are enabled to attune your voices to the concord of sweet sounds, "shall He not hear^m" the sweetest melody which your voices can utter, the most grateful hymns which your tongues can raise? If the Psalmist calls upon "every thing that hath breath, to praise the Lordⁿ," much more may we call upon you who, with breath, have the faculty of converting it to the production of significant and ravishing sound, to join in beautifying the services of God's temple; to bear for us our praises, on the wings of your melody, to Him unto whom the angels sing.

Those of us, who are unskilled in this art, may, I conceive, as well as the first disciples of our Lord, in due time be able to join, without making excessive dissonance, in the praises of our Creator and Redeemer. At least, the rising generation may be accustomed to unite always in this part of the service; and the sons, if the fathers are unable, may be taught to bear for them this homage to the Most High. Other offices are appropriate. It is in this, that the daughters of Zion should prophesy in the church. It is thus, that "in His temple, every man should speak of His honour^o."

To conclude. There is a brief address, which, in an age when an attempt was making to restore to

¹ James i. 17.

ⁿ Ps. cl. 6.

^m Ps. xciv. 9.

^o Ps. xxix. 8.

the church a psalmody worthy of it, was provided by a celebrated council, to be given to those, who were to take the lead in the work of reformation, and have the principal care of this part of the public service. The address might be given by a Bishop, or a Presbyter, and it is not less comprehensive and emphatic, than the most finished charges of antiquity. It is contained in these few memorable words: ' See that thou believe in thy heart, what thou singest with thy mouth; and approve in thy works what thou believest in thy heart.' This address, my brethren, allow me to impress upon you all. Vain is it to draw nigh to God with your lips, if your heart is far from Him^p. Vain is it to flatter yourselves, that you draw near to Him in your heart, if in your lives you dishonour Him. But when the faith, the life, and the voice are in unison, sweet is the offering unto God. The sounds of your praise will reach unto heaven, and He who sitteth upon the throne will hear it with approbation, and reward it with favour. Thus singing, your piety will be strengthened, your gratitude gladdened, your griefs relieved, and your affections raised: and you will be trained in the temple on earth, to join in the chorus which shall resound eternally through the arches of heaven, to the glory of the Being who there receives the homage of all perfect beings, and gladdens the hosts that worship Him, with eternal smiles.

^p Matt. xv. 8, 9.

SERMON XXI.



ON PUBLIC INSTRUCTION.



ROMANS, x. 14, 15.

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent?

OF the public means of grace provided by Almighty God, for the birth, nourishment, instruction, accomplishment, and final salvation of the members of His Church, there remains one, my brethren, as yet to be treated of, in the course of Sermons which are devoted to these subjects; and to this one, you will permit me now to call your attention. It is that of public instruction, which is pressed upon our notice in all its importance, in these words of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, which I have just read: “How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?”

With us there are three modes of instruction, each of which is a species of public promulgation of truth, having its distinct character, and peculiar utility;

by catechizing, by reading the Scriptures, and by sermons.

The young have the tenderest care of the church. For them is provided a particular system of instruction. And it is made a solemn, and most interesting part of the duty of her Ministers, to feed these lambs. To this system of instruction, with such advantages of preparation as can be given them, they should be brought. For how shall these little ones learn to call with sincerity on their God and Redeemer, in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in them, if of them they have never heard? And how shall they hear without instruction?

To the edification of the whole body of the church, is applied the public reading of the sacred Scriptures. Having discoursed to you at large, upon their high character and utility, at the commencement of these discourses, I need here only observe, that we shall greatly err, if to the holy instructions which come through these channels we give less diligent heed, than to those which come through any other. As means of public instruction, the Scriptures have the advantage of all other compositions. If I speak of eloquence, lo! these are convincing, persuasive, powerful, “piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow^a.” If I speak of taste, lo! these abound with the pure, the beautiful, and the sublime. If I speak of reasoning, lo! these are strong; and if of adaptation to the condition of the hearers, lo! every man from these may be “thoroughly furnished unto all good works^b.” But that which raises the lessons, which are read from the desk, to a pre-eminence above all Sermons which are heard from the pulpit, is this, that in the former are heard the words of God; in the latter the

^a Heb. iv. 12.

^b 2 Tim. iii. 17.

words of fallible men. To the Scriptures then, when they are read, should be given our most eager and devout attention. And let us not only hearken, but as one with much emphasis has recommended, ‘ apply what we hear ; if examples, let these lead us ; if precepts, let these teach us ; if commands, let these bind us ; if promises, let these encourage us ; if threats, let these warn us ; if mercies, let these comfort us ; if judgments, let these awaken us.’

By the means of public instruction, more generally sought, and of more general use, and which was probably in the view of the Apostle’s mind, when he wrote my text, is preaching, or the declaring, explaining, and enforcing, by the ministry of men, of the Gospel of God. And the words of the Apostle bring to our view some points of this subject, to which I am most anxious in this discourse, to draw your attention, having heretofore discoursed on the qualification, which should be found in every preacher *, implied in the words, “ How shall they preach, except they be sent ?” As first, the true end of preaching, to beget and cherish in the hearers a sound faith, upon the ground of which they may be led to call upon, obey, and confide in the God of their salvation. And, secondly, the utility and importance of this means of grace ; “ How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard ? and how shall they hear without a preacher ?”

Let us first advert to the true end of preaching. Is it, as it is frequently used, merely to entertain our ears ; to exercise our minds with ingenious disquisition ; or to promote the passing of an hour of holy time, in a rational manner ? Ah no ! The subjects on which we are to address you, admit not this sup-

* See pp. 56—59, in the Sermon on Religious Ordinances.

position. The fall, and sinfulness, and helplessness of man; the incarnation of the Son of God for his recovery; the humiliation and crucifixion, the resurrection and ascension of his Redeemer; his feebleness without, and his power with the assistance of the Holy Spirit; the solemn obligations of virtue; the transitoriness of this life; death, judgment, heaven, and hell; these are topics too momentous in their nature, too serious in their aspect, to be made, in the discussion of them, mere occasions of entertainment. Unhappy is the failure of one of the most gracious provisions, which the Almighty has made for the improvement of our race, if, when the fancy is gratified, neither faith is confirmed, nor the heart made better!

Let me not be misunderstood. Far be it from me not to encourage the most assiduous care, in bringing to the service of religion, every power and charm of mind, imagination, and speech, which may allure men to the contemplation of her holiness and beauty, and impress upon their hearts her blessed instructions. It is happy when, in any of her services, pleasure may be made her handmaid; and the opinion, that the aid of human accomplishments is useless in advancing her cause, if it have not been palmed upon the world by hypocrisy, is certainly the child of mistake. He who is emphatically denominated the wise man, “sought to find out acceptable words^c.” Prophets and Apostles present truth in a dress worthy of her majesty and beauty. And would. choose the figures of rhetoric, which should be constantly by me, to refresh and delight my mind, they should be gathered from the parables, and comparisons of our blessed Lord. For not more

^c Eccles. xii. 10.

truly of His doctrines, than of the power of His speech, and felicity of His illustrations, must it be said, that “ Never man spake like this man^d.”

But the great end of all our Lord’s discourses, and the end of every honest discourse, of any of His ministers, is, to lead men to the knowledge of God, and of the revelation of His mercy and will ; to allure them into the paths of truth and goodness, and to conduct them therein, to the attainment of the object of all God’s dispensations to our world, the salvation of their souls. Yes, my brethren, preaching has a higher object, than the gratification of your taste. There are assigned to it more glorious purposes, than the mere entertainment of your minds. It is its office to proclaim to you the only living and true God, and to make you acquainted with His character and laws, that you may believe, and believing, may govern your conduct as becometh the offspring of such a Being, the subjects of such a King. It is its office to raise before you the cross, to show you the sacrifice upon it, “ which taketh away the sin of the world^e,” and to entreat you to take of its blood, and sprinkle it upon all your raiment : that when the destroying angel shall execute the vengeance of the Almighty upon a guilty world, it may be to you the token of everlasting preservation. It is its office to open for you the oracles of truth ; and thence to bring to you the true knowledge of the foundation, and excellency, of every virtue ; the motive by which it should be consecrated, and the extent to which it should be carried ; and thence, also, to bring the probe which shall convict your hearts of sin. It is its office to go before you into the tomb, with the bright torch which it receives from revelation ; to disperse the blackness of dark-

^d John vii. 46.

^e Ibid. i. 29.

ness which hangs over its entrance, to show you the place where Jesus lay ; to wipe away the tears which are falling upon the mouldering relics ; and when the blood throbs at the heart amidst the horrors of the scene, to restore it to its sober, equal flow, by reminding you that Jesus is risen, and that this awful dominion, with its awful king, shall be finally overturned. It is its office to draw aside the vail which conceals from view the eternal world ; to show you hell, and all its torments, and beseech you to escape them ; to show you heaven, and all its glories, and entreat you to enter. It may, it must divide its work. At one time it declares the doctrines of the Gospel, and at another, the duties which spring from them. Now it dwells upon what is due to God ; and now upon what is due to men. But the object of all is the renovation of your nature, after the image of Him who created you ; that having been redeemed from death, you may be restored to the liberty and glorious privileges of the children of God. This is the object of preaching, which renders it an institution worthy to have had the Almighty for its Author. This is the object, by the pursuit of which alone, the faithful Minister may answer the instructions and charges he has received, and conform himself to the example of those holy preachers, who were the earliest, and most approved messengers of the Almighty to men. This is the object, without the attainment of which, the hearing of Sermons, whatever pleasure it may afford, yields not the fruit which is valuable to them who hear. If this object be lost sight of, or fail, our preaching is vain, and your attention is vain also ^f.

If, then, this means of grace be well adapted to the promotion of the object to which it is devoted,

^f 1 Cor. xv. 14.

the second point will become clear and striking; namely, its utility and importance. Now it must be acknowledged in the outset, that the effects of the preaching of the Gospel are fewer, and less satisfactory, than might reasonably be expected. For when we consider the strength of evidence, which God hath furnished for the foundation of our faith, it may well surprise the judicious, that the ministers of religion, should ever have occasion to exclaim, “Who hath believed our report^g?” And when we consider the importance of the interests involved in the discussion, and the evident adaptation of Christianity to the necessities and desires of man; it may well astonish the thoughtful, that there should so often be occasion to renew the ancient lamentation, “Ah Lord God! they say of me, Doth he not speak parables^h?” Much, we are sensible, of the inefficacy of preaching, is to be attributed to our feebleness and manifold imperfections, unto whom is committed the word of Life. For though this “ministry of reconciliationⁱ” be a treasure of inestimable value, yet, alas, “we have this treasure in earthen vessels^k.”

It is worthy of consideration, also, whether some of the reasons, why the great truths of the Gospel, which are so seldom inculcated, do not always produce their proper effects, may not be found in the disposition of mind, with which they are sometimes heard; and the quality of life, by which the hearing of them is frequently followed. Allow me to instance, in a few particulars. Are they always heard with a docile disposition? Our blessed Lord most strongly inculcated the importance of this disposition, yea, its absolute necessity to an obedient reception of His Gospel, when He took a little child,

^g Isa. liii. 1.

^h Ezek. xx. 49.

ⁱ 2 Cor. v. 18.

^k 2 Cor. iv. 7.

and set him in the midst of His disciples, and said, “Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven¹.” It was the predominance in their bosoms of very different qualities, which, while it was given to the humble fishermen of Galilee to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, caused all these things, in the view of the haughty Pharisee, and of the carnal Publican, to be done in parables.

Again. It may be inquired, whether the measure of knowledge or grace, which at any time we have received, has been faithfully used? Or whether, because we have, as yet, received but one talent, we have, with culpable indolence, and timid apprehension of our Master’s austerity, wrapped that talent in a napkin, and buried it in the earth? For it is a principle of the economy of the Divine government, in the spiritual world, which is not without its analogy in the natural world, “that whosoever hath, to him shall be given: and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have^m.”

With the same intent it may be inquired, whether men, when they hear Sermons, do supplicate the blessing of the Almighty to accompany His word? Man’s natural life is not sustained “by bread aloneⁿ,” and the viands which a gracious Providence furnishes for him, but by the attendant will of Him, who hath appropriated them to their use. In like manner, the means of spiritual life are inefficient, if they be not sanctified by benediction and prayer.

But after all the abatements which must be made, on account of the deficiencies of preachers, and negligence of hearers, there will remain a sufficient sum of good, resulting from this means of grace, to con-

¹ Matt. xviii. 3.

^m Luke viii. 18.

ⁿ Matt. iv. 4.

vince us of its utility and importance. Considered as the appointment of the Most High, it must be adapted to the purposes for which He hath ordained it. Considered as the instrument, by which the altars of Paganism were overturned, and their gods driven into non-existence, by the first Apostles of our blessed Lord, and the Jews and Gentiles gathered by them into one fold ; it is worthy of our admiration. Considered as a means of enlightening and civilizing mankind, the evidence of historic fact attests its importance. It was in the ages in which preaching was rare, that superstition spread her pall over the human mind. And it is in countries and ages, in which it has been enjoyed in an enlightened and holy character, and regular appearance, that the manners of men will be found softened, their minds instructed, their morals purified, their faith rational, their hopes constant, and their departure from this life more peaceful, and resigned. Shall I err, if I add, that, considered with regard to the condition and disposition of the mass of mankind, it is a means of religious instruction, without which many under the clouds of ignorance would become the prey of perdition, and for which we all have cause to be grateful unto Him that hath ordained it. How many of our fellow beings are there, who have neither opportunity, nor capacity, to discover and open for themselves the fountains of truth ; and who would perish in their thirst, but for the streams which they find in the sanctuary ! How many more are there, who, immersed in the business, encumbered with the cares, or surrounded with the beguiling pleasure of life, would have their minds wholly estranged from all consistent views of God and goodness, but for the weekly exercises, which, with the consideration and care of a parent, God has provided for them in the Christian world. And have we not all, as members

of a common family, cause to be grateful, that God hath committed unto men to be constantly exercised, “the ministry of reconciliation^o,” whereby His word shall perpetually be dispensed, and portions of the bread of life distributed to every one of the household in season.

I know not where, but in the Church of God, this mode of religious instruction is enjoyed. Paganism hath manifested no such concern for the instruction of its votaries. It was worthy of the free, liberal, and compassionate spirit of the Gospel, that its Author should have provided, by the appointment of a Priesthood to wait continually on this very thing, for the instruction in their faith, their duties, and their privileges, of all His followers unto the end of the world. And when I consider the special obligations to gratitude, which this kind provision for us begets, the incalculable advantages which we may derive from it, and the expectation from us of superior attainments in knowledge and virtue, which it authorizes; I discern a solemn import, of which we should never lose sight, in that pertinent injunction of our Lord, “Take heed how ye hear^p.”

We have now, my Christian friends, finished the consideration of the public means of grace, upon which, in a succession of discourses, our thoughts have, for some time past, been fixed. We have contemplated the Scriptures, the foundation of all our religion, and have considered their inspiration, their completeness, their use, and our felicity in possessing them. We have pondered the necessity and utility of rites and ordinances, in a religion designed for men; and the advantages of a Priesthood for the regular and valid administration of them. We have bestowed much thought upon the Sacraments of

^o 2 Cor. v. 18.

^p Luke viii. 18.

Christianity, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper; and have endeavoured to investigate their nature, and obligations, the qualifications with which they should be received, and the obstacles which, at any time, impede the observance of them. We have adverted to the institution of the Sabbath, and from its history, the Divine command, and divers other considerations, have deduced our obligation to hallow it; and have inquired concerning the proper methods of keeping it holy. We have contemplated the propriety of erecting sanctuaries for the worship of God; and have shown both how, and why, they should be revered. We have dwelt with pleasure, upon the excellencies of the Liturgy, which the Church, under the special goodness of God, hath provided for our use; and have attempted to bring to notice, and practical utility, some of its most striking, and important properties. Upon Psalmody we have bestowed a discourse; and have endeavoured to show the principles upon which it is introduced into the service of religious worship, and how it may be best used to our own benefit, and the glory of God. And to day we have contemplated the several methods of public instruction, particularly Preaching, of which we have wished to ascertain the proper end, and have remarked the utility and importance of it. I have been induced, my brethren, thus long and fully to address you upon these means of grace; by a conviction, that as bread, and the viands which God hath bountifully provided for us, are the means of sustaining our natural life, so these are the means of our sustenance, and growth in grace, and advancement to the stature of perfect men, in Christ. When I look abroad, and observe the declension of piety in some, the progress of irreligion in others, and the extension of fanaticism and false religion among more, I fear these evils are to be traced to a departure from

the simplicity of the Gospel ; a want of holy, and constant adherence to the way, which with wise and kind accommodation to our nature and present condition, God had marked out for us to walk in. In discoursing upon these divers and important subjects, I have often lamented my want of skill more fully to illustrate, and more powerfully to enforce them. But I know, that God is able to bless the endeavours of the humblest of His instruments, to the advancement of the cause, in which He condescends to employ them.

My brethren, beloved in the Lord, upon a topic more important than this, to your advancement in virtue, and your everlasting happiness, I could not have addressed you. It hath pleased our heavenly Father, after ample demonstration, that “the world by wisdom knew not God,”—“by the foolishness of preaching ; to save them that believe ⁹.” The instructions which this ordinance opens to you, were not obtained but by the incarnation of the Son of God. To procure the influences of the Holy Spirit, to render these instructions efficacious, and the fruits of them acceptable to the Almighty, your Redeemer shed His blood. For the right use of every Sermon which you hear, you may justly be called to account ; and it is most probable, that such as shall be the measure of your seriousness and care, in laying the word of God to your hearts, will be the measure of your faith and virtue here, and of your happiness for ever. Hear then, His word with meekness, and receive it, always, with pure affection. And God grant, that every seed of His word which shall in this place be sown, may be productive, as He shall see fit, of its thirty, its sixty, or its hundred fold ; that in the great day of retribution, when for the means of instruction

⁹ 1 Cor. i. 21.

which so highly distinguish us above a large portion of our race, we shall all be called to account, you may each one be able to say, “ Lord, Thy pound hath gained” two, or five, or “ ten pounds ;” and hear the ravishing words from the lips of your Judge, “ Well done, thou good and faithful servant : enter thou into the joy of thy Lord’.”

† Luke xix. 16.

* Matt. xxv. 21.

SERMON XXII.

ON ADVENT.

ST. MATTHEW, XXI. 5.

Tell ye the daughter of Sion, behold, thy King cometh.

THE Church is frequently spoken of in Scripture, under the title of “the daughter of Zion.” For this there are obvious reasons. Zion was her pristine abode. She dwelt, most especially, upon that hill where the Lord promised His blessing. There she stood collected, and there she went forth in her strength. There she received her richest dowry, and her costliest jewels; and there she sent out the distribution of her choicest gifts. There she met her Lord; and thence she is one day to hear the consummation of her renown; the loftiest celebration of her glory, and beauty, and victories.

But though from the holy mount she hath taken one of her titles, there is nothing restrictive in the appellation. She is the same in every age, in every country, and in every place. Whether she wait at Bethel, or at Shiloh; whether she tremble at the foot of Sinai, or rejoice on the sides of Zion; whether she be confined to Jerusalem, or extended over the whole earth, the Church is one, and her Head one, and her faith one, and the ground of all her

hopes, and services, and expectations, one and the same, for ever. And wherever she be dwelling, in whatever region of the earth she can be found, at this season of Advent, there is not a message, with which she can more suitably be addressed, than this in the text: "Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh."

If we contemplate some of the leading purposes for which, under this character, the Head of the Church cometh, we shall find, in this annunciation, matter of great joy, and serious reflection.

In the first place, the King of the daughter of Zion came to destroy her enemies; sin, and death, and hell. Subject to these is every descendant of Adam; and under the awful consequences of this subjection, must have for ever remained, if help had not been laid upon One "mighty to save^a." For this purpose was the Redeemer sent forth by the Father. The end of His coming was to take away the sins of the world, and be death's destruction. The sins of every true member of the Church He taketh away, by the most precious sacrifice of Himself, to satisfy the justice of Heaven. And by His own death, He hath virtually destroyed death, and "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil^b;" "and hath brought life and immortality to light^c" for all them that believe. This is the mighty conquest, achieved by Christ in our behalf; which commenced, when He "bare our sins in His own body on the tree^d," and will be completed in the day of the final consummation, when death shall be "swallowed up in victory^e." For this deliverance of His captive offspring, which God in His great mercy desired, the Son of God was invested by Him, with all power

^a Is. lxiii. 1.

^b Heb. ii. 14.

^c 2 Tim. i. 10.

^d 1 Pet. ii. 24.

^e 1 Cor. xv. 54.

in heaven and on earth. And “ He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed, is death. For He hath put all things under His feet ^f.” “ The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law ^g ;” but to the nations that are saved, there is given victory through their Lord Jesus Christ ^h. Of this victory every living member of His church partaketh; for them hath He purchased it with His blood. “ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion,” saith the Prophet, to whom the Evangelist in the text alludes, “ shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee; He is just, and having salvation ⁱ.”

Another object of the advent of Messiah the Prince, was to gather together the children of God into one kingdom; for the coming of which, in its completeness and universal establishment, we are taught to pray daily in the Lord’s prayer; and which, on account of its excellency, is styled sometimes in Scripture, “ the kingdom of heaven ^k.” “ To this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living ^l.” God hath set Him as His King upon His holy hill of Zion. And this is the Almighty’s great decree: “ Desire of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession ^m.”

It was one of the first acts of this King, after His appearance in the flesh, to break down the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, and of both to make one. And unto the Church, on the promulgation of tidings of salvation, the Gentiles were imme-

^f 1 Cor. xv. 25—27.

^g 1 Cor. xv. 56.

^h Ibid. ver. 57.

ⁱ Zech. ix. 9.

^k Matt. iii. 2.

^l Rom. xiv. 9.

^m Ps. ii. 6. 8.

diately seen flying, according to the beautiful simile of the Prophet, as “doves to their windowsⁿ.” The fulness of them is yet to come in. “All kings shall fall down before Him: all nations shall do Him service^o.” “He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS^p.” The events of our day show us the extension of His kingdom, and the gathering to Him of the people. To the occurrences in the East, one can hardly refrain from applying the prophetic words, “I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not^q.”

But though the wall of partition is broken down, God hath not cast away His people. The inscription on the cross, though Pilate meant not so, shall yet be fulfilled: “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS^r.” “He came” first “unto His own, and His own received Him not^s,” and therefore are scattered among all the nations of the earth. Yet they shall return: and “look on Him whom they pierced^t,” and “every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father^u.”

This, then, is a most interesting object of the advent of Christ: to enlarge the border of the Church; to extend the participation of the sure mercies of God; to open the kingdom of heaven to all believers; to make known the mystery “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body” with God’s ancient people, “and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel^x,” to bring both Jews and Gentiles into one fold under one Shepherd, giving them His peace: that thus the Church of the living God might be as extensive as the families of

ⁿ Is. lx. 8.

^o Ps. lxxii. 11.

^p Rev. xix. 16.

^q Is. lxxv. 1.

^r Matt. xxvi. 37.

^s John i. 11.

^t John xix. 37.

^u Phil. ii. 11.

^x Eph. iii. 6.

men; and in Him, the true and most eminent Seed of Abraham, all the nations of the earth be blessed.

And this leads me to observe another object of the coming of Christ, namely, to administer the government of His kingdom; promulgating its laws; dispensing its blessings; and protecting and ordering the subjects of it. "His kingdom is not of this world^y." It is that spiritual kingdom, which God hath had in the world in all ages. Its entertainments are "not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost^z." In it are found, not they who go about to establish their own righteousness, but they who have submitted themselves to the righteousness of Christ. To it resort, not they who never heaved a sigh under the burthen of sin and misery, to which they are heirs; but they who "labour and are heavy laden^a," grieved and wearied, and seeking rest. Into it are welcomed, not the self-complacent and vain-glorious, but the poor in spirit, the humble and penitent, who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and desire forgiveness. In it abide not the unbelieving and disobedient, but they who, with confidence in the word of the Most High, lay hold of His great and needed mercies in Christ Jesus, and are led by the contemplation of them to love Him, and all His creatures, and to endeavour to perform all such good works as are acceptable in His sight. For these His true and proper subjects, there are secured and deposited in His kingdom, the pardons of sin, the instructions and assistances of the Holy Spirit, and the title deeds of eternal life.

To deliver us from our enemies, to establish His kingdom and promulgate its laws, and to proclaim and evidence the certainty of His great salvation, He

^y John xviii. 36.

^z Rom. xiv. 17.

^a Matt. xi. 28.

once hath come in person to our world. But He remaineth not visible in the administration of its affairs. "For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods ^b." With His Church He hath left His word and His sacraments, by which, through the agency of His Ministers, the members of it are built up in the faith of His Gospel, and nurtured for the regions of glory. Nevertheless "the government is upon His shoulder ^c." Of all power in His Church He is the source; of all the gifts of His people He is the author, of all their attainments He is the strength.

When He ascended up on high, He, as their King, took possession of heaven; whence He dispenseth the gifts of the Holy Ghost to those who ask it; and where He is preparing mansions for all those who love His appearing. His throne is established in the heavens. He sitteth on the right hand of God; and hath the keys of death and of hell. All nature is subject to His control. The devils He hath subdued. The elements, and the hearts of men, He hath in His hands. And ten thousand times ten thousand of angels minister unto Him. In this plenitude of power which the Father hath given Him, He looketh upon His Church and upon every sincere member of it, and with undiminished affection for those whom He died to save, causeth all things to work together for their good.

After a long time, at the end of the world, this King, who hath travelled into a far country, returneth to take possession of His, and His people's inheritance. From His state of exaltation Christ shall come again, in glorious majesty, to judge the quick and dead. He returneth to execute vengeance upon

^b Matt. xxv. 14.

^c Is. ix. 6.

His adversaries: concerning whom He will say, in the great day, "Those Mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before Me^d." But for His faithful adherents He returned, to take them to His better country; to the mansions He went to prepare for them: that, changed and glorified, they may be presented faultless before the presence of the Father, and be for ever with their Lord. With His servants is yet left the message: "Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh;" just, indeed, as at the first, and bringing unto thee salvation; but "riding" now "upon the heaven in thy help, and in His excellency on the sky^e."

Such are some of the great ends of the Advent of our Redeemer. And now, brethren, "What think ye of Christ^f?" Who is this King and Head of the Church? "This that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength^g?" "Who is this King of glory?" "The Lord of Hosts^h:" the everlasting Son of the Father, the Creator and Upholder of all worlds, He, O daughter of Zion, He is this King. "The Lord of Hosts;" "The mighty Godⁱ;" the only begotten Son of the Highest; He is this King of glory.

In announcing to you the approach of the festival of His nativity, the Church, in some sense, repeats the message, "Behold, thy King cometh;" meek, for He shall be presented to you as a babe lying in a manger; "and having salvation," for He shall meet you at His holy table, with the pledges of pardon and eternal life. How should we meet Him? With faith in Him as our Deliverer, and songs of "Ho-

^d Luke xix. 27.^e Deut. xxxiii. 26.^f Matt. xxii. 42.^g Is. lxiii. 1.^h Ps. xxiv. 10.ⁱ Is. ix. 6.

sanna in the highest," with that gladness of heart, which caused the multitude to cut down branches from the trees, and strew them in the way^k, and that sense of our happiness in His salvation, which will fill us with benevolence to every fellow being. Take with you faith, and hope, and charity, and come to His temple, to offer Him your homage and your gifts ; and the celebration of His first Advent may prepare you for the great day of His second coming.

^k Matth. xxi. 8, 9.

SERMON XXIII.

ON ADVENT.

ST. MATTHEW, xi. 3.

Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?

THERE is no part of the economy of our Church more proper and excellent, than the appropriation of the four Sundays preceding Christmas, to the preparation of our minds for the celebration of that festival. The portions of Scripture, which she has appointed to be read during this joyful season, set before us the necessity of a Saviour, the nature and end of His mission, some principal prophecies relative to His kingdom, the annunciation of Gabriel to His mother and her cousin, and the birth and testimonies of His forerunner, John. To further the object contemplated in this arrangement, no passage of Scripture can be more suitable for our meditation, at our entrance on these days of joy, than that question of the Baptist which he sent to Christ, "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?"

The words will very naturally lead us to consider, in the first place, the singular and important truth, that before the nativity of Christ there was an expectation of some personage that should come, great, and greatly to be honoured.

And, secondly, that the Author of our religion was “He of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets, did write,” and for whose appearance the whole world was waiting.

The traces of the tradition of the promise, first made to man, that a Redeemer should be born of a woman, were never wholly effaced. We discover it in innumerable transactions and sentiments of the oldest families of the earth, whose history is preserved in the sacred volume: for which we can in no way satisfactorily account, but by referring them to a desire, that, of them, or their descendants, the promised Seed should be born. Remains of it are evident in the wish and the hope, expressed by many of the most ancient and respectable philosophers, that the gods would, one time or other, send a teacher into the world, who should remove the darkness which bounded their researches, and instruct them in many things, which it evidently concerned them to know. As the time approached for the advent of the Messiah, expectation looked more earnestly; and, whether it may be attributed to tradition, to inspiration, to what the Prophets had promulged, or, which is most likely, to all these causes, at the period when Jesus Christ was born, the eyes of expectation were fixed upon Judea. How far this was the case in the Gentile world, is evident from the testimony of two of the most eminent profane historians. One of them* says: ‘There was an ancient, and general opinion, famous through all the Eastern parts, that the fates had determined, that there should come out of Judea, those who should govern the world.’ The other† declares, that ‘a great many were possessed with a persuasion, that it was contained in the ancient

* Sueton. Lib. viii. c. 4.

† Tacit. Hist. Lib. v.

books of the priests, that, at that very time, the East should prevail, and that they who should govern the world should come out of Judea.' These testimonies are very decisive. Many others, of a similar nature, might be adduced from the expressions of the heathen poets, and the observations of other writers. But I conceive these are sufficient to confirm our assertion. I cannot, however, forbear to observe, that the conduct of the Magi, related in Scripture, evinces the existence of the sentiment in Persia, and Arabia, where they are supposed to have resided; for with what readiness and certainty, when they saw the star in the East, did they hasten towards Judea, to seek the extraordinary personage who was born King of the Jews?

While the rays of expectation were thus scattered throughout the heathen world, among the Jews, a nation ancient, distinct, and taught of God, they were strong and collected. A Messiah, a great personage to come, was a grand object of Jewish hope. They all looked for such a character. Led by the instructions of their ancestors, and by their sacred writings, it was part of their common belief, that some one should be born among them, who should be unequalled by any one before or after Him, in greatness, and in glory. So essential a part of their religion was this, that they still retain it, and having rejected the true Immanuel, according to the predictions of their Prophets, are yet looking for His appearance. But the time at which Christ was born, was the period when they universally expected Him. Tradition, and their Scriptures, had alike led them to this period, and innumerable evidences render it indisputable, that here they took a stand, and were "waiting for the consolation of Israel^a." If it had

^a Luke ii. 25.

not been for such an expectation, would multitudes, just about that time, have declared themselves Messiahs, and, with their flimsy pretences, have obtained followers? An age, when science, the detector of art, was at its acme, what could have made it advantageous for imposture? An age, when every thing was unfavourable to the introduction of a new religion, why should it have abounded with false Christs? If it had not been for such an expectation, would the jealousy of Herod have been excited by the visit and business of the wise men from the East? Holding his power by the will of the Roman Emperor, what had he to fear from a Jew? Naturally bold and confident, why should he have dreaded a rival in a babe? Yet, he immediately collected the Priests, demanded of them not when, but where the Christ should be born, and, to relieve his jealousy, dooms all the male children of Bethlehem and its neighbourhood, to bleed. Indeed the Jewish Rabbies inform us, that there was instruction received in the ancient school of Elias, a source to them of certainty, that at the end of the second two thousand years, the Messiah should come. There was also a computation made by a number of Jewish doctors, previous to the birth of Christ, the result of which confirmed the tradition from the family of Elias. These, together with a plain and common interpretation of these prophecies, which related to the time of the appearance of the Messiah, fixed their attention on the age when Christ was born, and held them in full expectation of a Deliverer. If this be not conclusive, there is a passage of their historian, Josephus, with which I shall close the evidence of this singular and important truth: ‘The Jews,’ says he, ‘rebelled against the Romans, being encouraged thereto by a celebrated prophecy in

their Scriptures, that, about that time, a famous Prince should be born among them, who should rule the world.'

Thus, then, we arrange our ideas upon this point. The gracious promise to the first human pair, that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head^b, was never wholly lost. In the heathen world, like the original sentiment of a God, it became faint, and was corrupted. But still, a glimpse of it sometimes appeared, especially in the mind of the studious and virtuous sage. In the family of Abraham it was kept alive. At intervals, it was renewed and unfolded. When the Jews were separated from all other people, and formed into a nation under a theocracy, the Prophets of the Almighty repeated the promise, more and more explicitly; till, like the dawn, obscure at first, and opening gradually, it expanded into full light: and all observers saw, that in the East the sun should presently appear. There was a full expectation of a personage great, and greatly to be honoured, when Christ was born; and John sent no unmeaning, nor untimely question to Him in the text, "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?"

How singular and wonderful was this expectation of an extraordinary person, to be born into our world! It could have come only from God. Would He have raised it, without intending it should be answered? Would the Most High sport with the minds of His creatures? No! It was intended by way of preparation. It was high presumptive evidence, in favour of any one who should appear with plausible credentials.

Let us, then, hasten to the second thing proposed,

^b Gen. iii. 15.

and show; that the Author of our religion was **HE**, “of whom Moses and the Prophets did write,” and for whose advent the world was waiting.

The first evidence of this which we will notice, is, that He perfectly answered the purposes, for which He was expected, in the Gentile world. The ground on which they hoped for an instructor from heaven, was their utter inability, satisfactorily to ascertain their duty, or answer the queries of the mind, respecting man’s extinction, or immortality. They wanted instruction in their duty. Of God, and the economy of His government, they had but imperfect knowledge. Of virtue, and the chief good, they could gain no full indubitable ideas. The systems of different teachers opposed each other. And when virtue appeared clear and indisputable, nature was so frail, that they fell before they reached it. But the Author of our religion has removed all these difficulties. Need any one now be ignorant of the true God, or of His attributes, and the nature of His government? Need any one continue doubtful, what is the measure of right, or wherein happiness consists? Is there one virtue undefined, or one vice un-reprobated, to which he is exposed? Can any disciple of Christ have his mind puzzled, like the minds of heathen sages, about his duty, the wonders that surround him, and the chief good? When he feels in doubt, whether the Deity is placable, and will assist his frailty, need he despond, or be at a loss, how to seek for and use the means, which will enable him to do what is required of him? Every point of duty is clearly and certainly made known by Him, who, coming from the bosom of the Father, understood His will, and, infinite in wisdom “knew what was in man^c.”

^c John ii. 25.

Further. The extinction or immortality of man was an interesting subject, upon which reason could discover nothing certain. It was of all points most important, and excited the greatest anxiety. But the most which heathen philosophy could do, was to maintain a dubious hope. Nothing but certainty upon this subject could give satisfaction to the mind, which nourished the desire of information from heaven. The Author of our religion, anticipating the anxiety of nature, has placed this matter beyond dispute. He "hath brought life and immortality to light^d;" and, familiarizing our minds with a rational account of death, teaches us how he is subdued, and that we are destined for future glory. What He taught, He exemplified; giving us, in His own resurrection, a sure earnest that we shall be raised to life. "Do we," then, "look for another?" What can another do, which Jesus hath not done? Can there be a greater atonement offered for the sins of the world? Or greater demonstration given by God, that He hath accepted the atonement? Can there be a purer morality preached, a more excellent path opened for human beings to walk in? Can the tomb be more joyfully enlightened, or the kingdom of heaven more satisfactorily opened, consistently with the nature of our probationary state, and with the existence of the vail with which God, in His infinite wisdom, thought fit to separate the visible from the invisible world?

Another evidence, that the Author of our religion is He who should come, is, that He, and He only, exhibited the fulfilments of the predictions, upon which the Jews grounded the expectations of a Messiah. Here a field opens before us of vast extent, and various productions. To notice every thing in

^d 2 Tim. i. 10.

it, which has reference to the point in hand, would require more time than we can spare: I shall, therefore, confine myself to the principal prophecies which respect the time, and the consequences, of the Saviour's advent. These are more explicit, and their consequences carry conviction into our minds, more forcibly than any others.

There are three memorable predictions which point to the time when the "desire of all nations" should come. The first, venerable for its author and its age, is that of good old Jacob, upon his death bed. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come^f." The Jews, and all paraphrasts, take this prediction of the Patriarch to mean, that the civil authority should not depart from the house of Judah, nor the Jews cease to be governed by their own political laws, till the time of the coming of the Messiah. Now, about the period when Christ was born, the first foreign governor was set over Judea, as a province, by the Roman authority; and not long after He had finished His ministry, the Jewish polity, with their city, was destroyed, and the people dispersed in all countries of the earth, where to this day they continue, without confederation or power, and subject to the government under which they happen to live. Surprising coincidence between the prophecy and events! Surely, in Christ, Shiloh is come!

Again. Daniel declared, that the time, from the giving of orders to restore and build Jerusalem, to the end of the Messiah's ministry, should be seventy weeks^g. That is, according to prophetic arithmetic, four hundred and ninety years. Now, if from the time at which our Lord closed His ministry upon

^c Hag. ii. 7.

^f Gen. xlix. 10.

^g Dan. ix. 24, &c.

the cross, which was in the nineteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, the Roman Emperor, we count backwards four hundred and ninety years, it brings us to the seventh year of Artaxerxes, in which very year Ezra received orders to repair to Jerusalem, make arrangements for rebuilding it, and restore the oblations of the temple. Here are a most definite prophecy, and exact fulfilment; and it is remarkable, that computations made by Jewish doctors, before Christ was born, place the termination of Daniel's weeks, just about the time when He was crucified.

There remains one other remarkable prediction, for ascertaining the period of the true Messiah. It is the declaration of the Almighty to Zerubbabel and Joshua, who regretted that, in point of magnificence and tokens of Divine favour, the first temple far excelled the second; that "the desire of all nations should come^h," and that "the glory of this latter house should be greater than of the former, and that in that place He would give peaceⁱ." This appeared so plain, that it was a prevalent sentiment among the Jews, that their Deliverer should come, while the second temple was standing. He did so; and preached in it the Gospel of peace, and by His presence filled the house with the Divine glory. Shortly after it was reduced to the ruins in which it has since remained; and one of their Rabbies, who saw it razed to the ground, declared, that the time of the Messiah was past. Thus minutely does the advent of Christ correspond with the time of His coming, who was expected; and thus did the Jews contribute to the establishment of the cause, which they were labouring to subvert.

The Jews having committed themselves by declaring that to be the time of the Messiah, which

^h Hag. ii. 7.

ⁱ Ibid. ver. 9.

elapsed while they were rejecting Christ, soon afterwards argued, that His advent was deferred because of the sins of the people. Strange ! That the conduct of men should derange the counsels of the Most High ! That He should not foresee what would be the situation of things at the time which He fixed and promulgated, for sending His Son into the world ! While we are amazed at the incredulity of those, to whom the Messiah presented Himself, let us adore the depths of the wisdom of God : for when we review what was previously written concerning Him, it must be a powerful confirmation of our faith, “ that blindness in part is happened to Israel ^k.”

Which leads me to observe, once more, under this head ; that the situation of the people to whom He was promised, is now, and has been for sixteen hundred years, what the Prophets foretold it would be, after the days of the Messiah, and unfitted for giving birth to any other, who can answer the descriptions of the promised Seed. As was predicted, they have rejected Christ. As was predicted, they have since been scattered through the earth. As was predicted, they remain unparalleled in the history of nations, a distinct people. And as was predicted, they seem reserved for that restoration, and fulness of dominion, which is to crown the second advent of our Lord. In this situation, it is not easy to conceive, how we may look for another, who shall answer the description of the promised Seed. Where, now, is the lineage and household of David, of which Immanuel must spring ? Who, now, inhabit Bethlehem, the town of promise, and where is the Jewish crown to which the Messiah shall be heir ? Where, now, is the second temple, in which He shall appear ; and where the hitherto unalienated sceptre to depart

^k Rom. xi. 25.

from Judah, when Shiloh comes? Where, now, is the Idolatry which, when He comes, the Messiah shall find in all the earth, when the Author of our religion has introduced the knowledge and worship of the true God? Where, now, are the sacrifice and the oblation, which Messiah, the Prince, is to cause to cease? And, who, after Jesus, can have any thing to add, to render the moral law complete? What spirit more holy can be poured out from on high, than that which hath been shed abroad by Christ: and how shall another challenge to himself the praise of taking away “the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations¹?” The work is done which Messiah was to perform, and, consequently, the time of His appearance is past. What Jesus hath done forbids us to wish, and the state of the Jews and other consequences of His coming, forbid us to look for another. With more than the ground of Philip’s faith we may adopt this declaration: “We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the Prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph^m.”

The last evidence which we will notice, that the Author of our religion is He, “of whom Moses and the Prophets did write,” and for whom the world was waiting, is the positive testimony which He brought with Him, and to which He Himself appealed. At His entrance upon His ministry, He declared Himself to be the Messiah, the person of whom the Scriptures testified. This He sufficiently proved to ingenuous observers, by descending from the family, being born in the place, enduring the hardships, leading the life, doing the works, and suffering the death, which the Prophets had foretold. But while He thus answered in every point the de-

¹ Isa. xxv. 7.

^m John i. 45.

scription, which had been given of the Saviour who was to come, He confirmed His right to that character, by fair and full displays of Divine power. Miracles are the most natural, and satisfactory credentials, which a messenger from heaven can be supposed to bring. Such they were always considered, and, as such, it was declared that they should accompany the Prophet who should come into the world. When our Saviour found Himself rejected by His own, that they would not receive Him as the Messiah, He pointed them to His works, arguing, that if they would give no credit to the words of one, who came under all the circumstances, and with all the marks, by which the prophetic Spirit had described their Deliverer, they ought to perceive, that His declaration of His character was attested in His miracles, by the power of God. "If I do not the works of My Father, believe Me not. But if I do, though ye believe not Me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in Me, and I in Him".

The miracles which the Saviour wrought, possessed every character of credibility, which could be required. They were wrought in evidence of a doctrine, worthy of God. They were wrought at no particular times, and in no set place, but before the eyes of any body, in the public streets, whenever occasion presented. They were such as were beyond the reach of any powers of nature, to wit, instantaneous cures of mortal diseases, and raising of the dead. They bore marks of Divine beneficence, in that they were promotive of the happiness of men. There was no collusion, for in performing them Christ was alone. There was no aim at profit or honour, for they subjected their Author to hatred,

ⁿ John x. 37, 38.

persecution, and death. Above all, to give them a twofold force, they were exactly those which, it had been declared for hundreds of years before His birth, the great personage who was to come should perform. "Behold," says Isaiah, "your God will come, —He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing^o." "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord^p." So that the miracles of our blessed Lord are, of themselves, sufficient evidence that He was the extraordinary character, who should come: and He gave a satisfactory answer to the Baptist's inquiry in the text, when He replied to the disciples who brought it, "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them^q."

You have seen to-day, Christians, that God at no time left Himself without witness of His benevolent purposes towards His human offspring: that, from the beginning, the promise of a Redeemer was given to them; and that at the time of His coming, all men were in expectation, and their attention turned towards Judea: that the Author of our religion combines in Himself and exhibited to the world, all the characteristics of the Messiah who was to come into the world: and that we should indulge an expecta-

^o Is. xxxv. 4—6.

^p Is. lxi. 1, 2.

^q Matt. xi. 4, 5.

tion, as unreasonable and perverse as it would be vain, if we should “ look for another.” How plain, then, our duty ; to receive and honour Jesus Christ, as the bearer of God’s mercies and will ; to enlist ourselves under His banners, and conform to His instructions : looking for and hastening unto the day of His second advent, with full confidence, that they who shall have lived according to His Gospel, will then be received into the fullest joy, which God hath designed for those who love Him.

SERMON XXIV.

ON CHRISTMAS-DAY.

ST. JOHN, iii. 16.

God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

THE deluded worshipper of the sun waits in the morning, prepared, we are told, with many ablutions, to prostrate himself before his god, and adore him at his rising. With how much more exalted joy, with how much happier worship, are we Christians assembled to-day, to hail at His dawn that “Sun of righteousness,” which, through the tender mercy of God, is rising upon our disordered world, with everlasting “healing in His wings^a!” The sun of the visible world rises but to set; this that we worship shall never go down. That sun affects only material natures, and dispels for a time the darkness which was spread over temporal scenes; this shines to give joy to the souls of men, and disperses for ever the darkness which covered eternal concerns. That gilds only the surface of life; its beams reach not into the valley of the shadow of death: this

^a Mal. iv. 2.

brightens the tomb ; it brings that “ life and immortality to light ^b,” which cheers the secret chambers of the bosom. The material sun is destined, one day, to have its fires extinguished for ever ; but this, when earth and the skies shall have passed away, is ordained to endure as the light of the celestial world, and to it angels and men shall everlastingly bow, as to the brightness of the Father’s glory, and image or manifestation of His Person. How pregnant, then, with joy, is the day of the rising of this glorious luminary upon our benighted world ! It is the commencement to us, of the years of the right hand of the Most High. Patriarchs saw it at a distance with the eye of faith, and were glad. Prophets have celebrated its coming. “ The morning stars have sung together” at its dawn ; “ and all the sons of God, have shouted” in heaven “ for joy ^c.” And we, if we are not still lost in the dreadful slumbers of the spiritual night, shall be abroad from the chambers of darkness, contemplating, and adoring this glorious Regent of the spiritual day.

I can think of no passage of Scripture, which more fully, plainly and affectingly unfolds the truths with which our hearts and minds should, at this time, be impressed, than these words from the gospel of the beloved disciple : “ God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Here is brought to our notice a most wonderful gift from God to the world ; even the gift of “ His only begotten Son.” Here is suggested to us the end or purpose of this wonderful gift ; “ that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Here is declared to us the motive which actuated the Almighty, to this most

^b 2 Tim. i. 10.

^c Job xxxviii. 7.

gracious and amazing deed; He “so loved the world.” Topics these, without a right understanding of which, we can have no adequate conception of the greatness of the event we celebrate; nor celebrate it, with any just degree of gratitude or joy.

Let us, then, in the first place, consider this extraordinary gift; the only begotten Son of God. Christ is said to be the Son of God, on account of His wonderful conception in the womb of the virgin. “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee,” said the angel, “and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God^d.” He is also invested with this title, as “the first-born among many brethren^e,” who are “the children of God, being the children of the resurrection^f.” But it is in a higher and more wonderful sense, that the text presents Him to our view. The phrase is peculiar and appropriate. You will observe, He is styled “the *only* begotten Son;” which implies, that in nature and character and mode of subsistence, there is no other such Being in the universe. After the manner in which Christ stands in this relation to the Father, God hath no other Son. You will notice, further, that He is said to be “the *only begotten* Son.” Other beings are created. They are formed by the hand of God. They are merely the offspring of His power. But unto the Son God hath communicated His own nature and perfections, His own life and glory. He is of ‘one substance with His Father;’ ‘begotten, not made.’ Let me also recall to your minds the sublime account of Him which you have just heard in the gospel of this day; that He “was in the beginning with God,” that “all things were made by Him;” and that “without Him,

^d Luke i. 35.^e Rom. viii. 29.^f Luke xx. 36.

was not any thing made, that was made^e." From this it appears that He had existence before all worlds: that He was eternally begotten of the Father; that, as the Prophet saith, "His goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting^h;" that like His great type, the wonderful Priest whom Abraham met in the valley of Shavehⁱ, He is without "beginning of days, or end of life^k." And now, if God only hath eternity; if the substance and perfections of God belong only to God: if to create, be the prerogative of God; if God only can be the image of Himself, it is evident, that the Son hath received of the Father a Divine nature; that He is 'God of God,' 'very God of very God.'

The manner in which the Son is derived from, and subsists equally with, the Father, I attempt not to explain. For in this respect, "who," indeed, "shall declare His generation^l?" It is not for us, who do not comprehend our own existence, nor the existence of the moth which we crush under our feet, to scan the existence or the operations of God. It is sufficient for us to know from that source, from which, alone, we can know any thing of the Divine nature with certainty; that God hath, in all time of His own existence, such a Son, the second person of a Trinity, in which, with infinite perfection and happiness, the Divine unity exists; and that this Son is the object of His utmost affection, and possessor of all His perfections and glory. "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily^m."

But how, then, is this Divine Person said to be given to the world? Amazing condescension! Mysterious event! He is given, to empty Himself of all the glory which He had in the bosom of His Father,

^e John i. 2, 3.

^h Mic. v. 2.

ⁱ Gen. xiv. 17.

^k Heb. vii. 3.

^l Is. liii. 8.

^m Col. ii. 9.

and for our sakes to be made man. He is given, to take upon Him the human nature, with all its infirmities and sorrows, but without sin. He is given, to be born of a woman ; come into the world a helpless babe ; to sojourn here in the humblest condition of life ; and to die a painful, and ignominious death. Yes ; in the babe at Bethlehem, God is incarnate. In this Son of Man, whom we find, to-day, lying in a manger, and shall behold ere long, stretched upon the cross, a Divine Being tabernacles in the flesh ! He, who before all worlds was the object of the Father's love, is surrendered to bear all the tokens of the Father's vengeance. He, who from everlasting was "in the form of God," and "thought it not robbery to be equal with God," is sent to take our nature upon Him, and, as a man, to dwell among the children of men. A virgin hath conceived, and brought Him forth, and His name is called **IMMANUEL**. The enraptured Prophet, having this mysterious union of the two natures in view, six hundred years before it took effect, broke forth, as if it were then present, in that blissful strain : "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given : and the Government shall be upon his shoulder : and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace °." And the holy recorder of my text closes his sublime account of the person of the Son, with that memorable passage, in which the Prophet and the Evangelist are found celebrating the same thing ; "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth ^p."

But, surely, it is for the accomplishment of no ordinary business, that God thus sends His Son into

ⁿ Phil. ii. 6.

^o Isa. ix. 6.

^p John i. 14.

the world, “in the likeness of sinful flesh[†].” Surely, it is for some great and most gracious purpose, that one of the Holy Three leaves the abode of glory, and is found on earth “in fashion as a man[‡].” And this we shall, indeed, find to be the case, if we now proceed to consider the end of this wonderful gift; “that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” These words do most clearly imply, that, but for the gift of the only begotten Son of God, the human race were exposed to perish. This was not the case in their original condition. Whatever comes from the hand of God cannot but be perfect in its kind, and altogether holy. Man, when he came from his Maker, was innocent as the angels of heaven, and designed for happiness and immortality. But “how art thou fallen,” thou “son of the morning!” We find an awful change in his nature, and a dreadful alteration in his condition. Instead of innocence, he is the slave of sin; how much so, let his deeds and his conscience testify. Instead of the favourite of his Creator, he is a child of wrath; how really so, let his sorrows and mortality speak; let the curse under which he groans declare. Who that observes his ignorance of his Maker, his stupidity, and brutishness, the uncleanness of his life, and the hopelessness of his death, where the light of revelation hath not dawned upon him, or the motions of the Spirit within him are quenched; can forbear to sigh at the thought, that the parent of the race to which he belongs, was once made after “the image of God[§].” The account of this awful change is contained in the mournful record, that “by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men,

[†] Rom. viii. 3.

[‡] Phil. ii. 8.

[§] Is. xiv. 12.

[¶] Gen. i. 27.

for that all have sinned^u.” Brought by transgression into this dreadful condition, alienated from the love of his Maker, his life forfeited, become carnal in his views, and vicious in his inclinations ; to raise himself from this low estate, to recover himself from this awful condemnation, was utterly beyond man’s power. He had become a debtor to the law, in a sum which he never could have paid. He was offensive to the Almighty for a guilt, which he never could have expiated. He was enslaved to sin with bonds and chains, which he never could have broken. He was doomed to death by a sentence, which he never could have commuted, nor repealed. Left to himself, his body must have passed to irretrievable corruption, and his soul to everlasting depravity and misery. In this chilling view of the condition of our race, how joyous is the assurance, that God hath given His only begotten Son to ransom us from it. This is the great, and most gracious work upon which He comes into our world, even to bring salvation and eternal life to all them that believe. “Thou shalt call His name Jesus ; for He shall save His people from their sins^x.”

Anxiously we shall inquire, how this is done ; and we can be satisfied, only, by adverting to the offices which He fulfilled in the flesh. He came as our great High Priest, anointed by God, to make atonement for sin, by offering Himself in the body, once for all ; and thus to turn away the vengeance of the law, and reconcile the Almighty to His apostate creatures. He came as our most Holy Prophet, on whom the Spirit of God rested, to preach to us in the Father’s name the glad tidings of this redemption, and, by His instructions and example, to restore the paths of righteousness, and guide our steps therein. He

^u Rom. v. 12.

^x Matt. i. 21.

came, too, as our omnipotent King, to take upon His shoulders the new, and most merciful government of peace; to protect and defend us from the power of our enemies, sin, death, and hell; to dispense to us from that inexhaustible treasury, which God hath committed to His disposal, all spiritual succours; and to crown us, after the manifestation of our fidelity and obedience, with the joys and honours of His eternal kingdom. These are the offices in which prophecy promised Him. These are the offices which He fulfils in the flesh. These are the offices in which the dignity of His person, and the perfection of His obedience, render Him acceptable to the Father, and all-sufficient for our salvation. And these are the offices, in which, if we turn not our backs upon Him, but receive and embrace Him, and comply with the terms of His gospel, He will not only snatch us from perdition, to which the first transgression exposed us, but will exalt us to everlasting life. “Behold the man,” saith Zechariah, “whose name is **THE BRANCH**; and He shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of the Lord: even He shall build the temple of the Lord; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a Priest upon His throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both^y.” “This is His name,” saith Jeremiah, “whereby He shall be called, **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**^z.” “In whom,” saith the Apostle, “we have redemption through His blood,” even “the forgiveness of sins^a.” “As many as received Him,” saith the Evangelist, “to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name^b.”

But I must haste to call your attention to what,

^y Zech. vi. 12, 13.

^z Jer. xxiii. 6.

^a Eph. i. 7.

^b John i. 12.

indeed, should never be out of your minds, the motive which actuated the Father to this wonderful gift;—He “so loved the world.” You will observe, that the Son is said to be *given* unto us; which plainly indicates, that there was no claim in the receivers, neither obligation upon the Giver. It is entirely to the free, and disinterested compassion and goodness of God, that we are indebted for this great salvation. For on the part of man, where was the least shadow of claim, to this wonderful mercy? He had rebelled against his Creator. Under an easy and equitable law, he had forfeited his life. And who can limit the degree of sinfulness, to which his depravity tends? Alas! it has been found sufficient to despise the humiliation, to which his Saviour condescended for his ransom; to dash back the cup of mercy upon his Maker, and prefer the servitude of iniquity. Had the Most High, then, left him to the fruit of his own devices; nay, had He erased him utterly from amongst His works, who could have laid any charge against the righteousness of God? And on the part of the Deity, what constraint of wisdom or interest could have caused our preservation? All angels that fill heaven are His; and so, for aught we know, are the inhabitants of a thousand worlds. What are we, and what is our origin, that we should by our being add any thing to His glory; or by our service, to His happiness! “He speaks, and it is done^c;” and were we removed for ever from the creation we have blemished, in the place we occupy beings of surpassing innocence would, at His fiat, appear. Nay, from everlasting to everlasting, without aid or benefit from any of His creatures, He hath, in Himself, the utmost plenitude of glory and bliss. Nothing, therefore, but that benevolence,

^c Ps. xxxiii. 9.

which induced Him, for the communication of happiness, to give existence to the creatures; nothing, but that ineffable love, which makes Him the fit object of the entire affection of every intelligent being, could have actuated Him to resign the beloved Son of His bosom, for the recovery of our ruined race. He saw the unhappy condition, into which His erring children had brought themselves by transgression; He saw and pitied them. He desired to rescue them from impending destruction. His own Son He would give to make atonement for their guilt, by the sacrifice of Himself; His own Spirit He would give to renew them in righteousness; His own nature He would permit to be united with theirs, that the dignity they had lost might be restored, and man be begotten again to the love of his Maker! In this way, He would commend both His justice and His mercy to all the subjects of His government; and a beloved part of His family be brought back from the paths of perdition, to the enjoyment of that happiness for which He created them. In the moment, therefore, in which He passed upon man the doom, which immutable truth required, He consoled the hopeless offenders, with the promise of a Deliverer. And when the fulness of time was come, the period which His wisdom had chosen, He sent forth His Son to appear in the flesh, and fulfil His gracious pleasure. It is difficult to conceive in what way, God's love to the world could have been so strongly manifested. What could He have given us that was dearer to Himself; what could He have given us of which we were more unworthy; what could He have given us, that would be to us a source of such felicity? "Made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption^d;" He is both

^d 1 Cor. i. 30.

the pledge and security to us sinful beings of the remission of sins, and eternal life. But we strive in vain, to rise to a full apprehension of the greatness of this mercy. We may perceive the benefit; we may rejoice in the bliss; but we must say, with the great Apostle of the Gentiles, that the love which produced it, “ passeth knowledge^e.”

Thus I have endeavoured to set before you, some of the great truths with which our hearts and souls should, at this time, be impressed; the exalted nature and character of the Being, who is given unto us, the only begotten Son of God; the blissful end and fruit of this gift; our ransom from destruction to everlasting life; and the gracious motive which actuated the Giver, His tender love to our sinful world. And, my brethren, if into this stupendous dispensation “ the angels desire to look^f,” we whom it so nearly concerns, ought not to hear it with unprofitable attention, nor to celebrate it with transient praise. The time would fail me to speak to you of the gratitude and love, which you owe to the Father, and to His Son Jesus Christ; to show you the danger and heinousness of neglecting this great salvation, through heedlessness or unbelief; and to enforce the obligation devolved upon you, by the incarnation of the Son of God, both to respect yourselves, and love one another. These are inferences, which I must leave to be deduced by you, in your retired meditations. And to the discharge of your present duty you need not any exhortation. The choral hymn of the angels has not yet ceased to sound in your ears. Your hearts yet beat with joy at the message, that “ unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord^g.” Come, then, to the manger, and behold

^e Eph. iii. 19.

^f 1 Pet. i. 12.

^g Luke ii. 11.

the babe. “ Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and so ye perish from the right way^b.” Let not the wise men of the East be alone, in their homage to your infant Redeemer; but bring ye your gold, your frankincense, and myrrh; your gold in charity, your frankincense in praise, and your myrrh in a devout commemoration of His death, at His sacred table. And may He smile on our feast; may we have joy and peace in believing; may we go on in our journey of life, filled with the comfort which springs from this blissful assurance, that God “ that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all thingsⁱ?”

^b Ps. ii. 12.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 32.

SERMON XXV.

ON CHRISTMAS-DAY.

NEHEMIAH, viii. 10.

Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

SOLEMN, and extremely interesting was the scene, which occasioned this animated passage of holy writ. After a long and dreary captivity, the people of Israel were returned to Jerusalem, to the city, the distinctions, and the hopes of their fathers. At the season when the feast of tabernacles was wont to be celebrated, they gathered themselves together as one man, both the men and the women, and all that could hear with understanding. To this anxious multitude, long scattered and deprived of their spiritual privileges, the Book of the Law was now produced; and they received anew, at the mouth of His Prophet, the covenant and statutes of God. It was an august spectacle. They wept, for the scene, and the complicated emotions it excited, softened into tenderness the most hardened heart.

But what is this scene, compared with that, which the Christian Church is this day assembled to commemorate! In one, a single people is recovered

from a temporary captivity; in the other, the whole human race from the captivity of sin and death. In one, the ransomed are returned to an earthly and perishable Jerusalem; in the other, they are brought to “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God^a,” and whose glory shall not pass away. In one, the law is renewed which is “the ministration of condemnation;” in the other, the Gospel is promulgated, which is “the ministration of righteousness^b,” pardon, and peace. In one, the messenger of the covenant is a frail mortal, and his attendants a few mortals like himself; in the other, He is the “Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace^c;” and His attendants are the Prophets of all ages “since the world began^d,” a multitude of the heavenly hosts, and a chosen angel of the Lord. In one the people wept with mixed emotions of sadness, gladness and fear; in the other, the tears which are shed are tears of ecstasy, flowing from the transports of the soul, while it contemplates a God, incarnate for its salvation!—Verily, to the Jewish Church, rejoicing in the returning favour of the Most High, the lively exhortation of the Prophet is not more pertinent, than it is to the Christian Church, called forth this morning to celebrate the birth of the Redeemer.—“Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Christians, indulge me with your attention, while in the sequel of this discourse, I endeavour to set before you, in the first place, what that joy is in Christ

^a Heb. xi. 10.

^b 1 Cor. iii. 9.

^c Isa. ix. 6.

^d Luke i. 70.

Jesus our Lord, which anciently consecrated this day to Him, and renders it a day of gladness and festivity to His people. And, in the second place, to illustrate the value and importance of this joy, by showing you its power and blessed influence, upon the disciples of the Redeemer, in the most interesting relations and aspects, in which man can be contemplated.

In the first place, it is the joy which springs from a knowledge of the reconciliation of God to His sinful creatures; by which our lives are saved from destruction, and we are brought into a condition to enjoy His presence and favour. We are by nature the children of wrath. The unhappy transgression of the first progenitors of the race, alienated them and their offspring from the love of the Almighty, and subjected them to sin, and its wages, death. Created in purity, invested with happiness, but little lower than the angels in honour and joy, they rashly trampled upon the law which was given them, and forfeited all their privileges. Had the penalty been executed, which they had awfully incurred, man must have been doomed to the hopeless dissolution of his body, the departure of the Spirit of God from his soul, and the everlasting exclusion of both soul and body from the presence of his Maker, and the realms of light and bliss. But at the moment, when the arm of justice was raised to strike the awful blow, the adorable Redeemer intervened, caught the falling victims from their ruin, and graciously became the propitiation for their sins. Between death and the offenders this prevailing Intercessor stood. By covenanting with the Father to come into the world, and do His will, He turned away the wrath of Heaven; and “now once,” in the fulness of time, “hath He appeared” in the flesh, “to put away sin by the

sacrifice of Himself^e." By being made man, fulfilling all righteousness in our nature, and offering Himself in His own immaculate perfection a sacrifice for us upon the cross, He satisfied the demands of the Divine government, and accomplished that redemption, by which we live, and live rich in the favour of a reconciled God. "As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life^f." "Thou shalt call His name JESUS," said the angel who announced His incarnation: "for He shall save His people from their sins^g."

Again. The joy which we have in our Lord, is such a joy as arises from the possession of a perfect revelation of the character and will of the Most High, and consequently of our interest, duty, and destination. Miserable, before the coming of Christ, was the state of this lower world. "Darkness had covered the earth, and gross darkness the people^h." Over the picture of human nature, encompassed as it was with ignorance, vice, and misery in the night of heathenism, the pious philanthropist as he looks will sometimes have his face covered with blushes, and sometimes bedewed with tears. Men were utterly unacquainted with their Maker. They were sunk in the deepest ignorance, and grossest pollutions. Idolatry reigned, and with it necessarily prevailed a general depravation of morals, and a total want of those spiritual excellencies, and comforts, which exalt and bless the human character. Some few sages, indeed, shed by their researches a dubious light upon the paths of life. But they were like the scattered and glimmering stars of a cloudy

^e Heb. ix. 26.

^f Matt. i. 21.

^g Rom. v. 18.

^h Isa. lx. 2.

midnight. They could neither impart the warmth, nor give the light, which the wretched traveller needed. Their occasional twinklings only rendered the general darkness more apparent and impressive. It was not till the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, that this blackness of darkness began to be dispersed from the earth. By His Gospel we are made acquainted with the true God, in the glorious unity of His nature, and endearing perfections of His character. Our origin, duty, chief good, and destination are satisfactorily explained. Means are provided in the instructions of God's word, and help of His Spirit, for assisting the feebleness of nature in recovering its pristine excellence and beauty. And we are assured of a righteousness, which shall supply our deficiencies, through which our sincerity shall be accepted instead of that innocence we have lost; and our imperfect obedience, for that perfection to which we are unable to attain. We no longer are left to err in vision, and to stumble in judgment. The Almighty hath, as it were with a sun-beam, marked out the paths in which we are to walk. "Through His tender mercy the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace¹."

Further. Our joy in the Lord is the joy which springs from the well-grounded hope of inheriting heaven and immortality. By the coming of our Redeemer, that dominion of death *is* destroyed, which kept the living in terror, and seemed to threaten to hold the dead in eternal bondage. Anxiously had nature looked into the tomb. With a heart overcharged with emotions, she endeavoured to look beyond it. But all she could with certainty discover

¹ Luke i. 78, 79.

was mouldering relics of what man had been. Amidst these she stood, listening in anxious awe, if from unseen forms any sound might be heard of departed beings, still in existence. But there seemed none to answer, neither any that regarded. Hope whispered to her, Listen more intensely, for that the spirits which had animated these relics yet did live. Again she paused; again she called; again she hearkened; but all was solemn stillness. She turned from the tomb, clinging to the consideration, that no voice had been heard unfavourable to her wishes. She looked back upon it, yet longing after immortality; but it was “a land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light was as darkness^k.” But before the power of Immanuel this kingdom fell. He ‘overcame the sharpness of death, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.’ Through His most blessed Gospel, we have the comfortable assurance from Him who holds the keys of life and death, that when the waves of this troublesome world have subsided, we shall find a haven where there shall be no more storms, nor fears, nor death, and the tears shall be wiped from all faces. “Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their life time subject to bondage^l.”

Once more. Our joy in Christ Jesus our Lord is confirmed and increased, by our knowledge of the greatness of the character and dignity of His person; whereby we have the strongest evidence of the Divine mercy towards us, and the fullest confidence in

^k Job x. 22.

^l Heb. ii. 14, 15.

all those glorious things, which He hath achieved or promised for us. It was not a conspicuous individual of our own nature, who in the form of man accomplished our salvation. No. No mortal had strength and worth, sufficient for the work. How, indeed, should one give to God a ransom for his brother, who needed the redemption of his own soul? It was not some chosen individual of the higher orders of created beings. No. "He took not on Him the nature of angels^m." Unto the angels the Most High "hath not put in subjection the world to comeⁿ." Nay "when He bringeth in the first begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him^o." Who, then, was the glorious Deliverer, who has performed such services for our fallen race? It was none other than the only begotten Son of the Father; the second Person of that ineffable Trinity, which mysteriously exists in the unity of the Godhead. It was none other than that pre-eminent Being, who was "in the beginning" and "was with God,—without whom was not any thing made that was made^p;" who is the object of the worship of heaven, and though found on earth in "the form of a servant," had in His glory "thought it not robbery to be equal with God^q." Yes; in the Author of his salvation the Christian beholds the heir of all the Father's power, and the image of all the Father's perfections. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth^r."

From the transcendent nature, and exalted character of the Redeemer, arises the fulness of the Christian's joy. The dignity, righteousness, and

^m Heb. ii. 16.

ⁿ Heb. ii. 5.

^o Heb. i. 6.

^p John i. 2, 3.

^q Phil. ii. 6, 7.

^r John i. 14.

spotless purity of Him, who offered Himself upon the cross in our behalf, furnishes a peaceful assurance of the sufficiency of the atonement, and of the greatness of the Almighty's love. Coming from the bosom of the Father, and having all the "fulness of the Godhead" dwelling in Him^s, His doctrines, we may be satisfied, are true, His precepts perfect and His promises sure. Having exalted our nature by assuming it to His own Divinity, and taken it with Him to the right hand of the Throne, He has hereby given us the most certain pledge, that He will not leave His redeemed to perish in the grave; but will make them partakers of the glory and happiness, which He had with the Father before the foundation of the world.

That "God" should thus be "manifest in the flesh"; that He who had existed from eternity should condescend to be born of a woman; that He who made the world should take upon Him a human form, and commence in a manger a life, which would be spent in poverty and terminate on the cross, is, "without controversy," a great mystery! But it is a mystery of joy; a mystery into which the angels delight to look; a mystery at which it becomes not those to cavil, who are benefited by it, and to whom nature teaches a lesson of diffidence and docility, in that, to their feeble powers, every thing which they see and know, is mysterious. Received in faith, upon the word and authority of God, it gives us the most joyful and affecting evidence of the Almighty's benevolence towards our race; and is calculated to beget in us a noble trust and stedfast reliance, upon His great and unchangeable mercy. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us

^s Col. ii. 9.

^s 1 Tim. iii. 16.

all things^u?" "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life^x."

Such, my hearers, is the joy which we have in our Lord; and to set before you its value and operation in all the extent of it, would require far higher powers, than your preacher possesses. It was in the contemplation of its greatness and results, that the enraptured Isaiah broke forth into the most animated apostrophe, of which we have record: "Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel^y."

Thus great is the joy which we have in our Lord; and I cannot do justice to the subject, nor to the occasion which has brought it under our consideration, without hinting to you, some of the most obvious senses in which this joy is our strength.

It is the foundation of our encouragement in approaching our Maker. For what are we of ourselves, that we should presume to look up to the holy and infinite God? Rebellious children! worms of the dust! "dead in trespasses and sins^z!" Without the merits and mediation of our Advocate, we might well be anxious, with our dismayed progenitors, to hide ourselves from the presence of the Almighty^a. But Jesus is our peace! We, who were afar off, are now brought "nigh by the blood of Christ^b." Through His worthiness we have boldness of access to the Father of our spirits, and hope for His love and heavenly benediction. For by this Messenger from

^u Rom. viii. 32.

^x Rom. v. 10.

^y Isa. xlv. 23.

^z Eph. ii. 1.

^a Gen. iii. 8.

^b Eph. ii. 13.

heaven, "we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but we have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father^c."

Again. This joy which we have in the character, instructions, and achievements of Christ, animates us in performing the duties of life. Arduous is the ascent to that holiness, unto which we are called. While we are encumbered with the infirmities of the flesh, who asks not for encouragement? who halts not on his way? Our assurance of pardon upon repentance, our satisfaction in the instructions we have received, the influences of the Spirit from on high, and the alluring power of that crown of life, which God, "the righteous Judge," shall one day give to the faithful; form together the only talisman, which can dissolve the difficulties in virtue's way, and render the discharge of our duties our satisfaction and joy.

It is our strength, in bearing up under the troubles and adversities of this transitory world. Vain is the expectation of the thoughtless, to laugh out of countenance the miseries of life. Fallacious is the attempt of the stoic to despise its troubles. We need an internal source of joy, a tie which shall connect us with God and a better world, in order to enable us to possess a rational and happy equanimity, amidst the disappointments and sorrows of this changeable state. And speak, ye sincere followers of the Lamb, tell us how truly, in this respect, the joy of the Lord is your strength. What but the power of your Redeemer have you found sufficient to enable you to walk without sinking, upon the unstable and agitated waves of this troublesome world? Is it not owing to the instructions and hopes, the pardon and promises, of the Gospel, that, when we see you trou-

^c Rom. viii. 15.

bled on every side, you are not distressed ; when perplexed, you are not in despair ; when cast down, you are not destroyed ; when chastened, you are not killed ; when sorrowful, you still rejoice ; when poor, you yet make many rich ; when you have nothing, you seem to possess all things^d ? Yes. This is the influence of the joy which we have in Christ Jesus our Lord, upon the troubles of life : Let the winds of adversity howl ; let the storms of misfortune rise ; let the clouds of sorrow obscure all external joys ; that peace of the Redeemer, which He hath left with His disciples, gives a sunshine and serenity in their bosoms, which nothing but the withdrawing of His countenance can interrupt. It is “ the peace of God, and passeth all understanding^e.” The world can neither give it, nor take it away.

Once more. This joy is our comfort in the approach, and will give us victory in the conflict with our last enemy, death. By our knowledge of remission of sins through the achievements of the Redeemer, at His first advent, “ the sting of death^f ” is taken away. By our assurance that we shall not always be holden by him, our horror at descending into the chambers of his prisons is abated. Peacefully we can submit to be bound by this mighty monarch. Resignedly we can surrender ourselves to be conveyed into his gloomy cells : when the Son of God, who for our deliverance was thus bound and thus buried, hath by His resurrection broken these shackles ; and by His passage from the grave thrown everlasting light into these cells ; and by His word hath left us to expect, that “ unto them that look for Him He will appear the second time without sin unto salvation^g.”

^d 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9. vi. 9, 10.

^e Phil. iv. 7.

^f 1 Cor. xv. 56.

^g Heb. ix. 28.

Which brings me to observe, in the last place, that the joy which we have in Christ Jesus our Lord, is the principal source of composure and hope, when we contemplate the final judgment. For when we look forward to the winding up of this present state of things, and the coming of God to judgment; when we realize in thought that solemn account, which every one shall give of himself unto God; when we contemplate the terrors of that final scene; when “the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll^h, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned upⁱ :” what, under the consciousness which we have of innumerable imperfections, even in our best attainments, can allay the fears of the humble, and enable them even to look for this coming of the Lord with joyful expectation, but the knowledge, that He who shall judge the world is also the Saviour of them that believe. In that great day, Jesus will be specially manifested as the strength of His people. To the wicked, and unbelieving, His coming in His glorious majesty will be unspeakably dismaying; to His saints it will be the day of their complete redemption; the fulness of their joy. Supported by the hope of salvation, they are not sorrowful when they ponder the future advent of their Lord, but are enabled to say, with meekness and faith, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus^k .”

Such being the foundation, the greatness, and the perpetuity of the joy, which we have in Christ Jesus our Lord, and so mighty and invaluable its efficacy; with what propriety is the day of His manifestation in the flesh consecrated to gladness in His church. Let your hearts overflow with gratitude to the God who devised, and to Immanuel who accomplished,

^h Isa. xxxiv. 4.

ⁱ 2 Pet. iii. 10.

^k Rev. xxii. 20.

your great salvation. In whatever ways are innocent and holy, manifest “your joy and peace in believing¹.” With undissembled praise unite your Hallelujahs with those of the heavenly hosts, and let your hymns of gratulation penetrate the clouds. Come, in an especial manner, “eat the fat, and drink the sweet,” at the rich banquet which the Redeemer Himself has provided for you, at His own sacred table. There press to your hearts the symbols of the body which He took upon Himself, and graciously offered in expiation of your sins. There too take the pitch of your gladness; and while, in the spirit of the text, you with virtuous moderation indulge in grateful festivity, evidence the enlargement of your joy, by your desire to have all men happy and by contributing liberally unto those, “for whom nothing is prepared.” This day is holy unto our Lord. Let there be no limits to your exultation, but those which modesty assigns. Let there be no restraints upon your cheerfulness, but those which sobriety ordains. Let the graces of the Christian life unitedly preside at this Christian festival. Come, Faith, and bend our knees before the incarnate God. Come, Hope, and spread above us thy many-coloured bow, the enlivening token of the Almighty’s covenant with the earth. And thou, the fairest daughter of heaven, the favourite virtue of the Redeemer, sweet Charity, come; come, and render our adorations acceptable to our King; come, and make glad the poorest of His brethren, with thy benevolent deeds; come, and begin in our hearts that work of love, which shall be perpetuated, under the smiles of the Almighty, in His glorious kingdom, when faith will be swallowed up in vision, and hope be forgotten in the full fruition of the promises.

¹ Rom. xv. 13.

SERMON XXVI.

ON CHRISTMAS-DAY.

ISAIAH, xliv. 23.

Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.

THE seraphic Isaiah was honoured with the clearest and most blissful views of the birth and achievements of the Messiah. To him it was shown, that “a virgin should conceive, and bear a Son, whose name should be called Immanuel^a ;” that is, God with us: and throughout his prophetic life, his spirit appears to have been constantly elated, with the contemplation of the certainty, wonders, and joy of Immanuel’s advent and reign. Borne forward on the wing of inspiration to the period when the unparalleled child should be born; when the adorable Son should be given; when, by His various acts as our Prophet, Priest, and King, He should proclaim Himself “Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace^b,” the holy Seer is wrapt into ecstasy; and in the text breaks

^a Is. vii. 14.

^b Is. ix. 6.

forth in the most natural, and animated apostrophe, to which transport ever gave birth; "Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel." The heavens, the earth, the inanimate creation, mountains, forests, trees, every thing of which he could think, is personified by the Prophet in his rapture, and called upon to exult at the glorification of God, in the redemption of His people. And if ever it becomes us, my friends, to feel, as the transported Prophet felt, and join in the exultation which he wished to excite, it is on this joyful day, consecrated from a very early age of the Church, to the commemoration of the nativity of the great Redeemer. In the spirit of the text, and of all the services of this day, yea, and of the notes which have resounded from angels' lips, through the arches of heaven, and been responded for ages, at this festival, by the Church upon earth, I would renew the declaration, that there is born unto you a Saviour, and call upon you to be filled with holy joy. And to this purpose permit me, in the ensuing discourse, to set before you, in the first place, the reasons why you should be glad, and rejoice in this festival of the nativity; and, secondly, to state to you the most suitable methods of expressing your joy.

The propriety of being filled at this festival, with grateful joy, will appear in an affecting light, if we consider, in the first place, the fruits of the event it celebrates. What are the consequences to us of the incarnation of the Son of God? What ends were contemplated in this extraordinary occurrence? They were, our redemption from death; our instruction in righteousness; and the exaltation of our nature to new, and most glorious honour, and expectations.

A leading and invaluable benefit of this event is, our redemption from destruction. Created in innocence, man was designed by his Maker for life and felicity. He fell. Deep and dismal was the abyss into which he was about to sink; even deep and awful, as everlasting destruction from the presence of God. The merciful promise, that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head^c, caught him upon the brink of ruin, and upheld him in life. And, in the birth and achievements of the Messiah; this promise was fulfilled. Though the event was not accomplished till four thousand years after the creation, it operated retrospectively to the date of the mortality of man. But for its efficacy, we all had perished in Adam. To it we owe the ransom of our race, from the sentence of perdition; virtually, a second gift of life, with the prospect, and means of immortality. Slain was the Lamb, in the council of Heaven, from the foundation of the world; by the anticipated efficacy of His blood, guilty man was delivered from the condemnation of death; and now in the end of the world He appeared in the flesh, to put away sin by the covenanted sacrifice of Himself.

But this is not all. Another fruit of this glorious event, is our instruction in righteousness. After man fell, his understanding became darkened, and his moral sense was corrupted. He nearly lost all knowledge of God. Scarcely could he determine what was duty. Ignorance, vice, and misery usurped the earth: impenetrable darkness obscured his path; gloomy uncertainty enveloped his destination. He did not more need a Priest to absolve his life, than a Prophet to instruct his mind. And one great end of the Messiah's mission was, to discharge this prophetic office. To it we owe that renewed knowledge

^c Gen. iii. 15.

of the nature and will of God, which is so essential to our happiness and safety; that acquaintance with our duty and prospects, which is so important to the wise management of life; and those improved sentiments of religion and virtue, which, alone, can smoothen the asperities of the present existence, and give worth and loveliness to the human character.

✓ There are, indeed, persons, who, without acknowledging any Master in Jesus Christ, affect the praise of civil, social, and personal excellence. But it is happy for them, that they live in an age, when Christianity has rendered the amiable duties familiar and respectable. They are unconsciously benefited by the diffusion of that instruction, which they profess to despise. Like erratic orbs, they shine with light borrowed from the same glorious sun, from which their eccentric whirl keeps them for ever wandering. Man is, by nature, ignorant and vicious. It is to revelation, shining in full-lustre upon some regions, and in untraced coruscations upon others, that we owe whatever of pure religion, sincere virtue, or exalted hope he possesses. The instructions brought by the Messiah, through whom the paths of wisdom are defined, and strength is proffered to enable us to pursue them, form the only system of pure and satisfactory, efficacious and consoling truth, with which the world has been blessed. And not till the period shall arrive, when His name shall be known, and His Gospel obeyed, from the rivers to the ends of the earth, can be realized again the reign of goodness, order, and peace; and the extent be perceived, in which the tidings of His birth are joy to all people.

✓ Still more; a capital fruit of this event is the exaltation of our nature, to new and most glorious honours and expectations. In his primeval state man was but the connecting link, between the animal and angelic world. And after he fell, how dreadful was

his debasement ! Gone from him was all claim to connection with the Almighty, and all title to the felicities of Paradise, and immortality. But by the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, we are begotten anew to the noblest relations, and most delightful hopes. “ When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman; made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law,” for this amazing purpose, “ that we,” lost and abased creatures, “ might receive the adoption of sons ^d.” In virtue of this adoption the only begotten of the Father, whom all the angels of God are commanded to worship, is not ashamed to call us brethren. In virtue of this adoption God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son in our hearts, authorizing and enabling us to cry unto Him, “ Abba, Father ^e.” In virtue of this adoption there are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, whereby we are partakers of the Divine nature. In virtue of this adoption we are made “ heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ ^f,” in the expectation and final possession of purity, immortality, and eternal bliss. In virtue of this adoption we have a Head, and King, to whom the Father hath committed all power in heaven and earth, that He may preserve and protect us, in our present state, educate us in the Church for the rank and condition which await us; defend us from every spiritual adversary, and bring us by the gate of death, through which we must pass, to a participation of His own glory and happiness, in His heavenly kingdom. All this exaltation, all these hopes, are implied in that memorable declaration of the Evangelist, that to “ as many as received” the Redeemer, “ to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to

^d Gal. iv. 4, 5.^e Ibid. iv. 6.^f Rom. viii. 17.

them that believe on His name^e." And what worth, what honour is conferred on our nature, by this adoption! What hope, what expectation, what assurance of grace, and immortality, does it beget in the bosom of every man, who is partaker of the heavenly calling! The exaltation is so stupendous, that it 'fills the sober with amazement.' The expectations are so august, that they humble the faithful by their greatness. "Lord, what is man, that Thou hast such respect unto him, or the son of man that Thou so regardest him^h?" "Thou madest him lower than the angels, to crown him with glory and worshipⁱ."

But I am encroaching upon what I wish kept distinct, and contemplated by you, in the second place, as affording additional reason for joy and gladness, namely, the character of the Person who is born in our nature, and becomes the author and bearer to us of such inestimable benefits. ✕ Who was the Personage by whom our nature was assumed, and redemption wrought? What being came to expiate our sins; to dispel the deepening shades of ignorance, and vice; and to raise us in the scale of being, even above the point from which we had fallen? Was it a man, some conspicuous individual of the species, who would himself be benefited in the general blessing? No. The most perfect of the sons of men had not strength, nor worth, sufficient for the work; and how could one stand forth as the saviour of a race, who, if he inherited only Adam's nature, must himself have needed salvation? Was it some higher created being, some generous spirit from the hosts of heaven, who compassionately sought our good? Not angels' love could have been adequate to the humiliation, and sufferings of Christ. Not angels'

^e John i. 12.

^h Ps. cxliv. 3.

ⁱ Ibid. ix. 5.

purity could have paid the ransom required for man's life. And, "verily, He took not on Him the nature of angels^k," but these holy spirits are His attendant servants in the mighty work. What being, then, was it, who was born of the virgin; and how were the benefits we have been contemplating, accomplished and made sure? Behold, no less than the Deity became incarnate to accomplish man's salvation! The mystery we celebrate is "God manifest in the flesh^l." For, verily, as you have heard in those sublime portions of Scripture, the epistle and gospel, which have just been read to you, He, who, as at this time was born of a woman, was "in the beginning, and was with God, and was God^m." Emanating, eternally, from the Almighty, and therefore styled the only begotten Son, He was "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His personⁿ." Being the wisdom, and the power of God, the active form and sensible demonstration of the Most High, it was He who laid the foundation of the earth, and of whose hands, the heavens are the works; who, when they have waxen old, shall fold them up as a vesture, and cause them to be changed; but who Himself is for ever the same, and His years shall not fail^o. This adorable Person, whom these and other inspired declarations of His nature and character, compel us to contemplate, as 'GOD OF GOD, LIGHT OF LIGHT, VERY GOD OF VERY GOD,' He it is, who hath taken our nature upon Him and became our Redeemer from death, our Instructor in righteousness, and the Founder of our exaltation and hopes. In the fulness of time, at the period appointed by infinite wisdom as most expedient, He left the regions of glory; was born un-

^k Heb. ii. 16.^l 1 Tim. iii. 16.^m John i. 1.ⁿ Heb. i. 3.^o Ibid. 10, 12.

polluted in human form of a virgin mother, and dwelt among us, both God and Man. To cheer the lowest vales of life and teach humility; to mark with contempt the vain pomp of the world, and commend the modest and resigned virtues, His chosen parents were indigent; He appeared at His birth in a manger; and though “foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests,” He had not in His humiliation “where to lay His head^p.” To give the utmost completeness to His instructions, He dwelt many years among us, exhibiting in His lectures and life the knowledge and the model, by which, through His grace, we may frame ourselves unto perfection. That He might “bear our griefs, and carry our sorrows^q,” He tasted every evil, excepting sin, to which flesh is heir; and, finally, to expiate our offences, and bring in for us an everlasting righteousness, He offered Himself a sacrifice upon the cross, of worth adequate to the claims of justice, and of efficacy unbounded in the Father’s sight. It was thus our salvation was accomplished by God the Son, “being found in fashion as a man, and humbling Himself and becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross^r.” In the infant Jesus you behold the “Word” of the Most High made flesh. The world is honoured by a visit from its Maker. He comes, like the sun, to chase darkness from the earth, and shake healing upon the nations from His wings.

Now the nature and high character of the Redeemer, together with the benefits of His advent in the flesh, render this day the epoch of their greatest felicity to the human race. When the Patriarch saw it with the eye of faith, even at a great distance, he rejoiced and was glad. When the Prophet contemplates it in holy vision, as already come, he calls

^p Matt. viii. 20.

^q Is. liii. 4.

^r Phil. ii. 8.

upon heaven and earth, to behold with admiration, and shout for joy. When the angels usher it in, their songs are wrought up to rapture by the view of our bliss; and the skies are rent by them with affectionate gratulations. . Indeed, on this day, “mercy and truth are met together^s,” the Law and the Prophets present themselves, Saints and Angels are assembled, God and Man are united, to manifest, proclaim and extol the wonderful goodness of the Creator, and the singular honour and happiness of His human creatures. And who, amidst the grandeur and the transport of the scene, can avoid partaking of the general glow? Who among the sinful offspring of Adam, has not cause to leap as an hart, at the tidings of redemption; especially, when assured, that his Redeemer is mighty, even the Holy One; and his Intercessor, the beloved Son, in whom the Father is ever “well pleased^t?” What heir of the ignorance and infirmities of men should not welcome to his bosom with transports of gratitude, instructions from on high, concerning his origin, his duty, and destination; especially when they are brought to him, not, as in unhappy regions to heathens by erring sages, nor, as in times past, to the fathers by imperfect Prophets, but by the Son of God, whose lips are full of grace, and unto whom alone of all beings, the spirit of truth is not given by measure? Where is the penitent child of mortality, borne down by sin and sorrow, and the fear of death, whose ears should not be ravished with the tidings of his adoption to a new sonship, by the reconciled God; and with the consequent promise of grace and immortality? An event, so wonderfully calculated as the birth of Christ, to give joy to faith, and confidence to hope, where is it to be found in the annals of the world?

^s Ps. lxxxv. 10.

^t 2 Pet. i. 17.

Here, in the incarnate Son is the richest pledge, the strongest assurance, which the Almighty has given, perhaps which He is able to give, of His compassion, love, and desire of our salvation. This pledge is the Christian's encouragement, in approaching the throne of the Most High. It is his support in discharging the duties of life. It is his consolation under the adversities to which Heaven may see fit to subject him. It is his strength in death. Soothed is his spirit in every condition, by the inspired reflection, "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Rich source to the guilty children of men, of hope and peace! Blest pledge of mercy from the everlasting Father, to the frail sojourners in this vale of tears! Transcendant mystery of godliness, by which consistently with all the requisitions of truth, and holiness, apostate man is restored to God, and God and heaven are restored to apostate man! "Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel."

From the contemplation of the reasons why we should be glad, let us proceed to consider what are the suitable methods of expressing our joy.

In the first place, then, we should call upon our souls, and all that is within us, to bless and adore Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, for contriving and accomplishing that stupendous mode of ransoming us from destruction, and restoring us to the joys of light, and grace, and expected immortality. Our hearts, to-day, should be altars to the Most High. Faith should be the

^u Rom. viii. 32.

ministering Priest in every bosom. The sacrifice we should offer is pure and fervent adoration, thanksgiving and love. And from the Angelic hosts we may take the words which should consecrate our devotions: "Glory to God in the highest^x."

Again. We shall becomingly attest our grateful joy, on the birth of the Redeemer, by availing ourselves of the benefits of His mediation. That for which we are sincerely glad, we should love to think of, to use, to apply to the ends, for which it is estimable. How unmeaning is our festivity, how empty these tokens of joy, how absurd our engagement in the services of this day, if we are not acquainted with Christ in His spiritual power, and devoted to Him as our Lord and dearest friend! Are you, my brethren, washed, are you sanctified in the name of our Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God? Are you, striving for the faith and hope set before you in the Gospel, able to say to its blessed Author, with His fond disciple, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee^y?" Without this your joy and praises are but a solemn mockery in the face of Heaven. To the ears of your God they are "as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal^z." O "kiss the Son, lest He be angry," and ye be cut off from your portion of His joy. Embrace, and obey Him with pure hearts fervently, lest He be incensed by your neglect of His blessings, and so "ye perish from the right way^a."

Once more. We should express our joy by expanding our souls with love and good will, towards our fellow beings. Sweet is the aspect of benevolence. Honourable is her name and character. She is related to joy, and meet to accompany the happy,

^x Luke ii. 14.

^y John xxi. 17.

^z 1 Cor. xiii. 1.

^a Ps. ii. 12.

whenever in devotion, in procession, or at the festal board, they celebrate their felicity. So natural is it to have the heart overflow with kindness to all about us, in times of distinguished blessedness, that courteous congratulations and distributions of gifts have prevailed at such seasons, even among heathens. But especially in the Church is benevolence lovely. She is worthy, supported by faith and hope, to preside among Christians on this holy day. The event they celebrate is the most wonderful display of love. Through the love of the Almighty they are made rich and happy beyond expression. And their love to the Author of their bliss they can in no way more acceptably show, than by showing it to His poor disciples. Whenever you come forth with joy to welcome and honour your Redeemer, at His birth, bring with you Charity. She is the grace upon whom, when He lifts his eyes, He never fails to smile.

Finally. Our grateful joy should be expressed by uniting in the celebration of the consecrated feast of love. To haste with the shepherds to the manger, and behold the infant Jesus, is not in our power. To go with the wise men to Bethlehem, carrying Him homage and gifts, we are not permitted. But on the altar of God, we may find the tokens of His presence. There we may pay Him our vows, and receive to our bosoms, the figures of the body and blood which He assumed, and offered for our salvation. And where at this feast should the Christian seek Him, but at His holy table? Who, amidst the tidings of mercy and peace which are gladdening all heaven and earth, can refrain in his gratitude from hasting with an oblation to the altar of God, with exceeding joy?

Thus I have shown you, why your hearts should overflow with gladness, at the celebration of your Redeemer's nativity; and what are the most suitable

methods of expressing your joy. Sacred, beloved, is this present time, to the improvement of all that has been said. Be not deterred from this special exercise of elevated affections by those, who would invidiously say, that the coming of Christ ought always, and constantly, to be remembered with joy. For this very reason do you keep this feast, that you may be reminded, and assisted to joy in the God of your salvation, throughout your lives. Let not the ardour of your devotions, nor the exultation of your spirits, be damped by any envious assertion, that this was not the season of the Messiah's birth. On this day did the good St. Chrysostom, and the holy St. Augustine, whose discourses have come down to us, celebrate the event in the early centuries, declaring it to be the custom of primitive times. On this day hath the church, for ages, come forth in the best garments of gladness, to receive and adore her new-born King. And if it were otherwise, vain would be dispute, forasmuch as the event sanctifies the day, not the day the event. If our souls are filled with hallowed rapture by the annunciation from the oracles of truth, that "unto us was born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord ^b;" and we express our joy by unfeigned ascriptions of adoration and praise to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for this unspeakable gift, by co-operating with the Almighty in this work of love, availing ourselves through faith and obedience of the benefits of this great salvation; by expanding our affections with love and beneficence towards our fellow beings, especially the poor "who are of the household of faith ^c;" and by going to the altar of God with an oblation of gladness, and there receiving with fervent gratitude and humble adora-

^b Luke ii. 11.

^c Gal. vi. 10.

tions, the symbols of the body and blood, which for our salvation His Son assumed: doubtless, we shall keep an acceptable feast to the Most High. The Redeemer will behold and record our love. And the recurrence of the day may be rendered by Him, instrumental in preparing our souls for His second Advent, when He shall come in all the majesty of the court of heaven, “to be glorified in His Saints, and to be admired in all them that believe^d.”

^d 2 Thess. i. 10.

SERMON XXVII.

ON THE CIRCUMCISION.

ST. LUKE, ii. 21.

And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus.

THERE is no part of our Saviour's life uninteresting, or that will not yield instruction. The Church, at this season, presents us with the account of His Circumcision; in which He began "to fulfil all righteousness^a;" to bear our sins in His own body; and to shed His blood for us. With the history of this rite your Bibles have, doubtless, made you acquainted. My object, therefore, in the following discourse will be to make some reflections upon our Saviour's compliance with it; that may, with the Divine blessing, be instructive and useful.

In the first place, why was He, who was born free from sin, and had come to introduce a spiritual system, made subject to the rite of circumcision? The law required a perfect obedience. By it, therefore, no flesh living could be justified. To walk without transgression was not in the power of fallen man. If the law had had its course, destruction must have come

^a Matt. iii. 15.

upon every subject of it; for it could never have “made the comers thereunto perfect^b.” The object of the incarnation of the Son of God was the salvation of the human race. To accomplish this, one office was to bring them under a new, and more gracious covenant, in which a spotless perfection should not be required of feeble man; but faith, with its fruits, repentance and love, be made the condition of his acceptance with God. In order to this it behoved the Saviour, who appeared for the world, to become our righteousness in honouring the law, and by His perfect obedience to all its precepts, to abolish its force, and condemning power over every transgressor. Circumcision was a rite instituted by God, when He renewed His covenant with Abraham, the venerable father of the faithful; and may not improperly be styled the legal baptism. As a part of that law, which He would abolish by fulfilling it, it became Him to submit to this rite. Not for Himself; the significancy of the ceremony in Him was lost. He needed not to be purified, or made a new creature. Spotless perfection belonged to Him, without this compliance with a hallowed ceremony. But for us He was circumcised; for us He was baptized; for us He exhibited entire legal obedience, that He might bring us under the tender, merciful, encouraging covenant of the Gospel, by fulfilling for us “all righteousness.” For the Jew He satisfied the law, that He might deliver the believers of that nation from the curse, which rested upon them in consequence of their inability to keep the whole law, to which they were debtors; and for us He satisfied the Divine requisitions, by a spotless obedience in our nature to all the commandments of God; that “as by one man’s disobedience many were made

^b Heb. x. 1.

sinner, so by the obedience of one many might be made righteous ^c.”

The circumcision of our blessed Lord was necessary to obtain for Him a hearing among His own people. The Jews looked upon every uncircumcised person, as unclean. Our Saviour could have had no access to them, without submitting to this ceremony of their religion. To manifest Himself of the seed of Abraham; to satisfy, in this respect, the requisitions of His nation; to substantiate His pretensions to be their Messiah, and deprive them of what would have been an unanswerable plea for rejecting Him: He graciously condescended to endure this painful rite. He needed not the sign of the “righteousness which is of faith ^d,” who had the perfect “righteousness of the law ^e;” He needed not the seal of the covenant of mercy, which God made with the faithful, being not an object of mercy, and Himself very God. But as that Seed of Abraham, in whom all “the nations of the earth should be blessed ^f,” He would take that mark, by which Abraham’s seed were known; and by thus complying with the Jewish ordinances, remove what might have been an insuperable obstacle, to the success of His ministrations among them. How amiable does our Lord appear, in thus accommodating Himself to the usages of His countrymen, for the better accomplishment of their salvation! What an example has He set us of the excellency of submitting to privations and pains, in advancing the happiness of our fellow beings! Did Jesus bear the marks of a humbling rite in His own most precious body, that His own, when He came to them, might not be offended in Him? And shall not we yield to all innocent compliances with the habits and feelings

^c Rom. v. 19.

^e Rom. ii. 26.

^d Rom. ix. 30.

^f Gen. xxvi. 4.

of others, which may facilitate our usefulness to them ; and bear with contentment the labours and crosses, the self-denials, expenses, and cares, which may be necessary in promoting their salvation, or their happiness ? Who shall refuse to descend to the walks of the poor, that he may benefit the poor, when the Son of God became a Jew, that He might save the Jews ? Who shall refuse to resign the pleasures of a day, the charms of an opinion, the value of a temporal right, for the advancement of his fellow beings in knowledge, faith, and goodness, when for the satisfaction of His countrymen, in ministering to their salvation, Jesus Christ was circumcised ?

Again. The institution of this ceremony, and the compliance of our Saviour with it, suggest to us the propriety and efficacy of visible rites and sacraments. Here was a seal of a covenant established by God. It was to be a token for distinguishing the faithful ; a sign of cleansing from pollution, and an assurance of blessing from Jehovah. Without some visible rite it is hardly conceivable how this or any church could be preserved distinct. Some sacrament is necessary ; and, if necessary, obligatory upon every one who would support the church, for which it is hallowed, and enjoy all its privileges. Accordingly, all systems of religion have had their rites, their mysteries, and their symbols. While the Law stood, our Saviour honoured its ceremonies that were of sacred institution, and when He abolished circumcision with the power of the law, by the introduction of the glorious Gospel church, ordained Baptism in its stead, to be the sign of discipleship, and the assurance of adoption by the Father. What circumcision was to the Jews, baptism is to Christians. Both were of Divine appointment. Both were significative of incorporation into the church of God. Both required faith, represented purification from the de-

filements of sin, and implied consequent self-denial, holiness, and obedience. Circumcision was obligatory upon every Jew, who could receive it, and baptism is obligatory upon every Christian, by whom it can be obtained. Special promises were annexed to circumcision, and special graces to baptism; and as the former was not rendered less sacred by neglect or abuse, so the latter cannot be lessened in its holiness and importance, because some who have been baptized have been bad men, and others have been good without it. Of circumcision baptism takes place, and if the wilful neglect or abuse of that was attended with fatal consequences, much more of this.

Which leads me to observe, once more, that in the circumcision of our Saviour we are strikingly taught the propriety of submitting to all the precepts, and institutions of the revelation, under which we live. He was made under the law. Consequently the law had authority over Him. With singular truth He might have asked, Can I be benefited by this rite, and by these simple ceremonies? With peculiar force He might have inquired, What connection can there be between these outward forms and My Spirit; what efficacy can they have upon My heart; With more propriety than any mortal He might have said, I can be safe and perfect without all these. But He did not stop to scruple their utility. He did not find fault with their nature. They were ordained by the Being who established the law, under which He lived. This was sufficient for Him. He wished not to contest Divine authority, nor judge the wisdom of its arrangements. He was circumcised, because it was enjoined by Jehovah upon the children of His people. Through life He exhibited the same humble obedience. He kept the passover, He observed the Sabbath, He went up to the feasts; He neglected no precept of the revelation which He

knew came from God, and was authoritative till superseded by His new and better dispensation. In this conduct of His life our Saviour has set an example, excellent in itself, and fit for His disciples to revere. It points to us the necessity of obeying every precept, and observing every rite, to which His Gospel gives the seal of Divine authority. When we behold Him receiving circumcision, asking baptism of John, because it became men "to fulfil all righteousness," going up to Jerusalem to the feast, eating the paschal lamb, how wrong, how lamentable is the neglect of baptism, and the sacramental supper, by His followers! Is it that, because these rites are simple, they are disregarded? This is to imitate the rashness of Naaman, who, scorning to wash in Jordan, would have retained his leprosy, and in a rage have left the Prophet, who had recommended the easy remedy. Is it, because persons think they may be as good without them, and as safe? This is taking a ground, which the all-perfect Son of God was too modest to assume. Is it, because they cannot see how there can be efficacy or importance, in these institutions? This is judging without knowledge, and arraigning the wisdom of Heaven. In short, whether men may be saved without these means, how they effect what is attributed to them, whether they are the best which might have been selected, are points with which we have nothing to do. They are quite foreign to our business. The questions which concern us are, whether Christ instituted baptism, and the eucharist; and, if He did, whether His injunctions are binding upon us, or not? On this plain ground, every man may easily form a just determination concerning the propriety of observing all the precepts, and institutions, of the revelation under which he lives. His observance of them should be a simple act of faith and

obedience, by which he should testify both to God and men.

My brethren, in calling your attention to this event of our Lord's life, the church exhibits Him, as you have seen, accommodating Himself graciously to the usages of His own people for their salvation, fulfilling for us "all righteousness," and leaving to mankind a declaration of the propriety and importance of observing the rites and ordinances of that dispensation of God, under which they live.

Let us adore His condescension and love. Even in His infancy, He bears the griefs and carries the sorrows of His people. A week only elapses from His birth, in the helplessness and tears of human infirmity, when His blood begins significantly to be shed, for the redemption of the human race. O kiss this Son, who, as at this time, was given to you; "made under the law;" that he might "redeem them that were under the law^s;" delivering His people from carnal ordinances, by His own fulfilment of them; and introducing them to a spiritual life.

Let us learn, also, to observe the sacraments of His Church, who, for our sakes, submitted to the sacraments of the Jewish Church, that He might bring in for us a better covenant. What believer will refuse to be baptized? What Christian will neglect to observe the Supper of the Lord, who properly considers, and consistently celebrates, the act of his Redeemer in submitting to be circumcised? From the manger He instructs us. In this event of His infancy Jesus says to you, "thus it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness."

Finally, let the name which was given Him when He was circumcised, induce you both to obey, and confide in Him for ever. "His name was called Jesus." He "was so named of the Angel, before

^s Gal. iv. 4, 5.

He was conceived in the womb^h.” The hosts of heaven knew it should be His name, and on account of it felicitated the world, when He was born. It signifies Saviour. What peace in the sound! He was a Saviour in His infancy, for then His blood began to be shed for His people. He was a Saviour upon the cross, for then his blood was fully poured out for their iniquities. He is a Saviour in heaven, for there His blood is pleaded in expiation of their offences; “He ever liveth to make intercession for themⁱ.” His name is the “consolation” of His people^k. Amongst the weary travellers through this sinful state, it “is as ointment poured forth^l.” They think of it, and are refreshed. Jesus! It is “a name above every name,” which God hath given Him^m. He is known by it in heaven. And to what name shall the feeble knees of men on earth, so devoutly bow; what name shall the tongues of sinners so gladly confess to the praise and “glory of God the Fatherⁿ?” Disciples of Jesus, take up His cross; and go on your way rejoicing. “Your help is in the name of the Lord^o.” “Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins^p.”

^h Luke ii. 21.ⁱ Heb. vii. 25.^k Luke ii. 25.^l Cant. i. 3.^m Phil. ii. 9.ⁿ Ibid. ver. 10, 11.^o Ps. xxiv. 8.^p Matt. i. 21.

SERMON XXVIII.

ON NEW-YEAR'S DAY.

EPHESIANS, v. 16.

Redeeming the time.

THE precept which touches a fault common to all men, and points out its remedy, is worthy of attentive consideration. The waste of time; the prodigality of being; the strange inconsistency of lamenting the shortness of life, and yet suffering many of its moments to elapse without obtaining from them any service, is more or less chargeable upon every one of our race. Where is the man, who has justly appreciated, and properly applied, every part of his past existence? Where is the man, against whom there has not been entered on the books of heaven, by some hour, some day, some year, that is gone, a charge of neglect, default, or abuse? We look in vain for him among the descendants of Adam. All men have perceived the ungracious rapidity, with which Time comes, and is gone; and many men have moralized upon his flight: but to have rightly estimated each hour as it passed, to have spent life without waste or loss of any of its parts, is yet unattained by mortals. Hence arises the value of the sacred maxims, which teach us the true economy of time; and here is

founded that solemn claim upon the attention of every man, which that passage of Scripture has, that I have just read ; “redeeming the time.”

Literally to comply with this exhortation of the Apostle, is not in our power. Sooner may we stop the revolutions of the orbs of heaven, and arrest the sun in his course, than recall the years that are past, the days that are gone, or even the moment which but now is vanished. Once gone, they are gone for ever : until we find them in the eternity of God, at the day of judgment, giving testimony to our fidelity, or witnessing against us. But we may review our past lives, and mark our faults, our follies, and deficiencies. We may observe in the years that are gone, the snares in which we have been taken, and the spots where we have fallen ; the temptations by which we have been seduced, and the paths which have led us from the way of life. We may consider how much time we have misimproved ; what part of our Christian work remains undone ; how imperfect our attainments are ; how utterly disproportioned to the opportunities we have enjoyed. We may seize the present time, and look forward to the future, with a holy resolution to double our diligence ; and, by increased fidelity, make some atonement to our Creator for past prodigality, and some return for His mercy in still prolonging our being. By thus quickening our pace in our Christian course, and increasing our industry in every good work, we may, in some sort, retrieve the losses of past time, and make up for the former tardiness, and waste of life. This is the duty to which the Apostle exhorts ; and a very solemn duty it is upon us erring and accountable beings. To the discharge of it, we have as strong motives as can affect the human mind.

Time in itself is the gift of God, produced for us

by His continual agency; and, therefore, not to be wasted nor abused. It is by the power of the Deity, that we are upheld in being. He is active in continuing us in life. From Him we received the years that are past; and it is He who gives us to call the present time our own. An end He contemplates in all His operations; and the end of this is His glory, in our improvement and felicity. If without profit to ourselves, and glory to Him, we bring our days and years to an end, what do we but squander a treasure, which the Most High God has been active to bestow. This thought of the Supreme Being measuring out to us, from His own eternity, the portions of life, is sufficient of itself to render us careful of every moment of our being, and, if any part of it have been spent by us to no proper purpose, anxious by future fidelity to redeem it.

Again. The importance and magnitude of the business of life gives infinite value to every moment of it. Is it to pass a few years here, to catch such joys as we can find, to meet such sorrows as we can hardly sustain, and then to sink into eternal death, that we are born? Or is it to undergo the trials of a probationary existence, to become acquainted with God, and do His will, and form ourselves by His graces for enlarged being in a better state; to pass through death, if we rightly improve the dispensation under which we live, to eternal life and joy? Which is most consistent with the character of God? Which is according to the faith of your holy religion? Which is most readily believed by your reason and your conscience? Evidently, to exercise faith and exhibit obedience, to purify our nature and to acquire divine habits, with a view to an immortal existence beyond the grave; is the primary object of our present being. How vast an object, and how momentous,—immortality to secure,—holiness to per-

fect in the fear of God! And is life too long for the work? Verily, every man at his best estate will find much to do. They who are farthest advanced in the course of duty, “count not themselves to have apprehended^a.” How anxious, then, should we be to redeem the periods of life that are gone, if we are behind-hand in our business, and have neglected the service which they were prepared to afford!

Once more. We should be moved to obey the Apostle's exhortation, by the solemn consideration that we are accountable for our time. Life is the first, the greatest, and the most wonderful talent with which we are entrusted. Nor is it given to us merely for our sport. It is something which we are to use for our own benefit and our Maker's glory. How we have employed it; what profit we have derived from it; to what purposes we have applied its precious periods; how we have served with it our God, our fellow-beings, our country, our friends, and our own souls; what we have gained that we can preserve; what we have acquired that we can show to our Maker;—we shall hereafter be called upon to declare. Every moment, as it is measured to us, is charged to our names in the chancery of heaven, and for it we shall one day be required to account. Are we ready to answer for the portions of life that are gone? Can we account, satisfactorily, for the years we have already received and spent? The golden opportunities we have enjoyed, having God's word for the light of our paths, and His Holy Spirit waiting to assist our infirmities; having the Son of God for our example, and the promise of immortality for our encouragement; having His Sabbaths constantly recurring to remind us of our duty; and His sacraments constantly offered to strengthen and refresh

^a Phil. iii. 13.

us:—these golden opportunities, have we vouchers to produce that they have been justly appreciated, and faithfully improved? I wait, trembling, for the reply. Alas! too many of our days have gone, we know not how, nor where; and some of them, we are conscious, we have squandered. We have passed from stage to stage of our being, with but little improvement of our knowledge, or our faith; and even many of the truths, many of the virtues, many of the opportunities of improvement, which have caught our attention, have been to us, like the sweet flowers of nature to the traveller's eye; we have looked upon them, and hasted away. But our inadvertence will not alter the government of God. For our time we must one day give account; and, by a standing principle of the Divine equity, “to whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required.” If then, there be any way of retrieving what we have lost, and making good what we have wasted, how eagerly should we avail ourselves of it! And merciful is our God, that He permits us to cancel, with future fidelity, the deficiencies of our past life. It is His voice speaking in the Apostle, that exhorts us, by a careful economy, and faithful use of the years which are yet allotted us, to redeem those which we have spent to little purpose; perhaps, have entirely lost.

And this leads me to observe, further, that we should be engaged to this duty, and excited to very great fidelity in it, by a sense of the goodness of God in yet prolonging our days. We live. But what claim have we to survive those, who are gone down to the chambers of the dead? Are we better than they? When the Almighty has walked through His vineyard, has He found more fruit upon us, than He did upon them? Might not, then, the breath before

^b Luke xii. 48.

which they faded, have justly lighted upon us? And oh! if it had, should we not have been found by our Lord unfaithful stewards of many of the years, that He has given us upon earth? “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not^c.” That He yet spares us, that our lease of life is still prolonged; that, notwithstanding our unfaithfulness, He measures out to us new portions of time, and defers to call us to account; should make us tremblingly solicitous to regain what we have lost, and atone for what we have abused. When the day and means of grace are continued to us, while so many of our fellow men have been gathered to the dust, thankfulness should excite us to increased fidelity; it would be ingratitude of the most heinous degree, not to “walk circumspectly^d,” “redeeming the time.”

Finally; we should be induced to an immediate compliance with this Apostolic exhortation, by reflecting upon the uncertainty of life; and that the longer we defer the duty, the more complicate and arduous will be the task. There are but few persons, who are not sensible of the importance of retrieving, in the future, the neglects and miscarriages of the past. Most men, when they allow themselves to think, perceive the wisdom of breaking from the shackles of vice and folly; and resolve that they will make the arrangements, and attend to the duties, which may promote their eternal peace. But the misfortune is, like the infatuated Felix, they for ever postpone this weighty concern to a more “convenient season^e.” By and bye, when they have gained enough of honour and of wealth, and can withdraw from the business and pleasures of the world, they intend to do all that they have left undone, and de-

^c Lam. iii. 22.

^d Eph. v. 15.

^e Acts xxiv. 25.

vote themselves, particularly, to the most serious business of life. Oh fatal delusion! This more "convenient season" is like to-morrow; for ever coming, and for ever distant. Could they assign it a certain period; could they fix it to a future year, what hold would they have upon the days that must intervene? A thread, which the least blast may break; a hair, which the passing gossamer may snap. To build on distant days, when the young, as well as the old, lie in the grave; when the robust, as well as the feeble, wither like grass; what is it, but to rely on the stability of a wave, or to trust to the gilding of a western cloud? Besides, if life should be prolonged through many years, and the period, at which we promise ourselves we shall redeem lost time, should arrive, the work will constantly increase as we advance, and our strength as constantly diminish. Will the task be more easy and pleasant, when we have a long run of squandered years to redeem? Shall we be more adequate to the work, when overtaken by sickness, or enfeebled by age? Can we most wisely and effectually balance our accounts in that period, "when the sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the clouds shall return after the rain?" No, my friends, no! The present time alone is certain. And sufficient unto the future, if we ever reach it, will be the cares and duties thereof. Enough, especially for the hour of sickness, will be the pains of disease; and enough, for the evening of life, will be the infirmities of age. It is while our faculties are healthy and strong, and our opportunity sure, that we should attend to the main business of life. When a man sees his brethren falling around him, and considers that upon his own conduct depends his everlasting happiness or misery; to defer

¹ Eccles. xii. 2.

to hearken to his Maker's voice, and "walk in His laws which He hath set before us," is a high pitch of human folly, and a dreadful evidence of human perverseness. Gracious God! when eternal happiness is at stake, that man, amidst all the evidences of the uncertainty of life, should defer his duty to a future period! Behold; while he is thus deferring, a dart from the hand of Death strikes him; and he is summoned to account for his time, while he is despising the forbearance and long-suffering of God, and neglecting to redeem it. "Make no tarrying," says the wise son of Sirach, "to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day: for suddenly shall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy security thou shalt be destroyed, and perish in the day of vengeance^b."

How many, and how weighty are these motives to the duty of redeeming our time! Does it not, my brethren, appear to you, too solemn a duty to be cursorily thought of, or carelessly discharged? It is a duty to which we are particularly prompted at the present moment. With noiseless steps and unwearied speed, Time has been spoiling us of another grand portion of life; and, through the goodness and forbearance of God, we are entered upon another New Year. Let us look back upon the year that is gone, and see how much of it we have to redeem. Have we improved the blessings we have enjoyed, and the dispensations of Providence we have witnessed? The services of the sanctuary, the sacraments of the church, and all the means of grace, whereby our merciful Creator would renew us after His own image, and fit us for His own presence, have we availed ourselves of them, and been made better by them? Has the New Year found us fitter

^a Dan. ix. 10.

^b Ecclus. v. 7.

for heaven, than the old one did; stronger in faith, more free from vice, nearer to God, and having less wasted time to redeem? Are we better, as well as older; nearer to heaven, as well as nearer to the tomb? These are inquiries, which we ought all to make; and if to them our hearts can give an affirmative reply, let us indulge that modest joy, which it belongs to the faithful followers of the Lamb to indulge. Let us go on to perfect holinessⁱ, and our God will prosper us. But if our hearts put a negative upon these inquiries, let us pause; let us consider the importance of time; the solemn magnitude of the true business of life; our responsibility to our Creator for the years He allots us; His goodness in yet prolonging our probation; and the utter uncertainty how long we may be spared among the living. Let us endeavour, by future obedience, to blot out the records of our past transgressions. Let us resolve that, through the grace of God, the year upon which we have entered shall not be brought “to an end like a tale that is told^k;” but shall carry, as it elapses, to the Author and owner of all time, good testimonies of our fidelity and improvement. Perhaps, my friends, before the sun shall return to the place from which he has just commenced his annual course, your probation will be finished, and you will stand at the bar of God. Oh! be induced, “while it is called To-day^l,” to secure yourselves the approbation and favour of your God. Let your loins be always girded, and your lamp burning; let your feet be always shod, and the staff of God’s word in your hands: that if He should come this year, to call you to your account, He may find

ⁱ 2 Cor. vii. 1.^k Ps. xc. 9.^l Heb. iii. 13.

you waiting for Him, with the vouchers of your fidelity in your hands. "Blessed," I say unto you, "are those servants, whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching^m."

^m Luke xii. 37.

SERMON XXIX.

ON NEW-YEAR'S DAY.

ST. LUKE, xiii. 7, 8.

Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none : cut it down ; why cumbereth it the ground ? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also.

I HAVE selected this passage of holy writ, not with a design to enter into a disquisition concerning its original respect to the Jewish nation ; but rather, to apply it to ourselves, as suggesting many pertinent and useful reflections to *us*, who, through the good Providence of the Almighty, have just been brought to the commencement of a New Year. God grant that it may be to you, my brethren, a year of blessings, in yourselves, in your families, in your church, and in the concerns of your common country ! As far as a wise improvement of our time is calculated to bring down upon us the favour of Heaven, it will, perhaps, be promotive of our happiness to attend to the truths, which are offered to our consideration in this beautiful parable of our blessed Lord. We may, alas, consider ourselves, as too justly represented under the figure of a fruitless fig-tree : and whatever was the design of Christ, when He spake

the parable, it will very naturally furnish us with admonition and instruction.

In the first place, it may be used to remind us that we owe our existence, and the prolongation of our lives, to Almighty God. The fig-tree was planted by Him who owned the vineyard. Though we were born of our parents, and seemed sustained by the nourishment we take, yet our bones could have been formed in the womb, and the secret subtile spark of life could have been kindled in these bodies of clay, only by that Being who is the source of all life, and accomplishes what He wills, by an unfailing omnipotence. His hand, too, upholds us in being. We live by His power, constantly exerted to continue us in life. Let Him withdraw His arm, and instantly we are no more. "If He set His heart upon man, if He gather unto Himself His spirit and His breath, all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust^a." We are God's by every right which can give Him a property in us. He has, too, and asserts an unlimited freedom to do what He will with His own. When He pleaseth, He saith to the dresser of His vineyard concerning any tree which He had planted, "Cut it down:" and who "can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou^b?" You will, therefore, consider yourselves, as wholly indebted to the Most High for the life you have received, and will attribute it entirely to His help, that you continue unto this day. The years roll on, and multitudes are constantly carried with them to the abodes of oblivion. To what power do we owe it, that we survive the wrecks of the years which are past, but to that invisible Almighty power, which gives to time both his victims and his wings?

Again. We may consider the parable as suggest-

^a Job xxxiv. 14, 15.

^b Dan. iv. 35.

ing to us, that God expects from us, every year, the proper fruits of the being and advantages, which He has given us. "Behold, these three years I come, seeking fruit on this fig-tree." In our feeble state of infancy and childhood, He has protected us. We have grown up under His care. While we were yet tender, His invisible hand often averted from us the wind and the blast; and the drops of dew which He begat, descended silently upon us. He expects, that in our youth we be ornaments and not blots, upon His creation; and that when we are come to years of maturity, we consider the station He hath assigned us in the scale of beings, appreciate faithfully the advantages, mercies, and honours, which He hath bestowed upon us, and bring forth, according to our abilities, correspondent fruits. And when we advert to our condition, great has been His favour towards us; ample the endowments we have received. He has given us more understanding than the beasts of the field; "and made us wiser than the fowls of heaven." We are exalted to be rational creatures; capable of knowing our Creator, of enjoying the pleasures of intelligence, and of giving a direction and meaning to the actions of our lives. He has instructed us fully in the ways of righteousness. We know what is good. Our duties, and all the excellencies which beings of our faculties are capable of acquiring, are clearly manifested to us. We have received from His love the Son of His bosom, to be an everlasting propitiation for our sins; and, through His merits, the kingdom of heaven is set open, the joys and glories of immortality are offered to all believers. Having thus qualified us for attaining high degrees of spiritual beauty, and achieving excellent deeds of virtue, He justly looks that

we should bring forth fruit, answerable to His exertions in our behalf. To be thus endowed, and yet to be cumberers of the ground! To be upheld in being by the power of God, and yet to be useless to ourselves, useless to our families, and useless to the world! To be enriched with the blessings, both of “the upper and nether springs^d,” and yet to bring no glory to our Maker, and no accession of virtues to His moral creation! Surely this would entitle us to the utter neglect of God. What then shall be said of those, who consume the years which are given them in wickedness and unbelief; who, instead of bringing forth fragrant and wholesome fruits, beautifully represented in the parable by the fruit of the fig-tree, yield in their vices and infidelity a noxious poison, odious in itself, and fatal, like the effluvia of the fabled Upas, to every thing within its reach? Verily it could attach no imputation of blame to the character of the Most High, if, anxious for the perfection of His works, and desirous of exhibiting to all the subjects of His moral kingdom, evidences of the infinite holiness, and justice of His government, He should at any time say to the dresser of His vineyard, concerning such, “Cut them down; why cumber they the ground?”

But great is the forbearance of God! The text brings to our notice and admiration His patience and long-suffering, in waiting for our fruitfulness. “Behold, these three years I come.” It is happy for the erring race of men, that the judgments of the Almighty seldom follow immediately upon the offence. He is a lenient and merciful God. Infinitely indulgent, and anxious that none of His creatures should perish, He comes not only one year seeking fruit, but year after year, unwearied by our barren-

^d Josh. xv. 19.

ness. Again and again He prolongs our probation, if haply His forbearance, His goodness, or any of the means He uses, may cause us to produce the virtues and graces, which He planted us in His vineyard to bear. And in how many ways does He endeavour to correct the waywardness of our nature, and to excite in us the love of righteousness and holiness. He reveals Himself to us in the works of creation, assuring us by them that He is good, and worthy of our affections and fear. He comes to us in the whispers of conscience, checking us at every entrance of the paths of vice. He approaches us in the ministry of His word, laying open the guilt of our hearts before us, moving us to embrace the offers of the Mediator, and imparting to us knowledge and strength. He descends as the dew upon our hearts, in the silent influences of His Spirit, to renew in us the virtues which are decayed, and to revive those which are perishing. He come to us in the dispensations of His providence, pruning us with the hand of affliction, hardening us by conflicts with the gales of adversity, and suppressing our attachment to the things of this deceitful world, by a thousand evidences of their transitoriness and vanity. And even in the flight of time, a voice is heard, calling, in language which none but the deaf and the rash can disregard, "That thou doest, do quickly ." But notwithstanding this patience and long-suffering, this careful cultivation and benign influence of God, sterile are the hearts of men. It is melancholy to reflect, how many human beings there are, fluttering amidst the vanities, and deceiving themselves with the follies, of life; whose removal, should it come suddenly, would take from the earth no Christian virtues, and cause no joy in

heaven. The best of us in reviewing our lives, shall find little cause to solace ourselves with our fidelity. We have consumed our days in vanity. "We have brought our years to an end as it were a tale that is told^f." One year has been given us after another, through the same indulgent mercy, yet we have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to make our hearts perfect towards Him. Still He waits to be gracious; still defers to terminate the day, or to withhold the means of grace. Full often when the lives of men have been prolonged, beyond the lives of their contemporaries, yea, when they have been brought to the hoary limit of human existence, full often, when all the means of fertility have been ineffectual upon us, and justice might well call for our excision, He listens to the entreaty of the kind dresser of His vineyard, our prevailing Intercessor, and grants the trial of another year. "Let it alone this year also."

But though this is a merciful, it is a most solemn indulgence. It brings me to remark, that there is a period, beyond which the Spirit of God will not strive with man. It implies an awful limitation. It is an observation of the wise man, that "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil^g." Too true a picture of the presumption of our race. By a strange calculation, because we have already wasted so much time, we trust that we have much more to waste. That very forbearance of God, which should lead us to repentance, through our perverseness confirms us in sin. The years which are gone have left us among the living; we have not yet felt the fatal consequences of deferring to do good; we therefore go on thoughtlessly

^f Ps. xc. 9.

^g Eccles. viii. 11.

in the same evil way, trusting that the years to come, will be as those which are past; yea, “and much more abundant^b.” But, says the wise son of Sirach, “Say not, I have sinned, and what harm hath happened unto me? for the Lord is long-suffering, He will in no wise let thee go.—Make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day: for suddenly shall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy security thou shalt be destroyed, and perish in the day of vengeanceⁱ.” Imperfectly has he considered the qualities, which must enter into the character of a perfect being, who, from his past experience of forbearance and impunity, goes on still in his imperfections, presuming upon the mercy of God, and repaying His patience and long-suffering with continued unfruitfulness. There is a degree of obduracy, at which the heart becomes reprobate. There is a stage of iniquity, at which intercession ceases. There is a year to every man, which must be his last. The joyful indulgence, “Let it alone this year also,” implies in itself the solemn and weighty consequence, which is afterwards expressed, “If it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that Thou shalt cut it down^k.”

We have now seen the impressive truths, which this beautiful allegory is calculated to suggest. The present is a season, when they should be brought home to our hearts. We have just finished another year. If in the course of it our God have looked upon us, how fruitless have we been found! Or if, indeed, we have at any time brought forth fruit, how little, how imperfect, how far short of what we might justly have expected! Have we sorrowed for our sins; and when we have sorrowed, have we not transgressed again? Have our defects been all corrected,

^b Isa. lvi. 12.ⁱ Eccus. v. 4. 7.^k Luke xiii. 9.

and all our vows and resolutions fulfilled? When called to attend on the ordinances of God, have we gone to them; and when we have been to them, have they produced in us increased faith and righteousness, more perfect purity and peace? Have the tempers and desires of our souls been refined, and, in the acts of our lives, have we done what we could for the glory of God, and the benefit of our fellow men? “He that was unjust, is he not unjust still? and he which was filthy, is he not filthy still¹?” The thoughtless unbeliever, does he not yet walk in the comfortless and dangerous paths of scepticism; and he who had espied a finger, beckoning him to an acquaintance with God and with the beauty of holiness, has he not, after half resolving to obey it, looked for it no more? If so, are we sure that we are not of the number, concerning whom it had been said in the councils of heaven, “Cut them down;” but for whom “the Dresser of the Vineyard,” our compassionate and prevailing Intercessor, has entreated, “Lord, let them alone this year also?” And ah! in granting His request, may not the Almighty have annexed the solemn condition, “If they bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that Thou shalt cut them down?” I tremble at the thought, that any who hear me should be in this case; and be found in the course of the year, barren and unfruitful under the forbearance and cultivation of God. My brethren, you are planted in the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts. His ministering servants are employed by Him to foster your life, and protect your growth. The dews of His Spirit are sent down from on high, to refresh and invigorate you. “The Sun of Righteousness^m” shines constantly upon you, to impart to you life and strength, and abundant

¹ Rev. xxii. 11.

^m Mal. iv. 2.

fertility. And if clouds of sorrow at times gather over you, they are gathered by Him to shade some tender grace, or to check some perverse inclination; and the rains which descend from them, even these are designed to add to your freshness, and to the number and the soundness of your fruits. Under these advantages, great is the product of piety and virtue, which Jehovah may justly expect you to yield. And is it possible, that this year may be the last in which He will come, seeking His fruits? How awful the thought! How precious the moments, which fly with swift and noiseless wings, notwithstanding they are charged with such important issues! Here, at the threshold of the year, consecrate yourselves anew to the service of God. Give to each day, as it passes, its devotion, and its duties. Grow every day in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Be pure from sin; and, in very deed, servants unto God, that ye may "have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting lifeⁿ." Then, when the Almighty walks through His vineyard, He will behold you with complacency. Your emblem shall no longer be found in the unfruitful fig-tree; but in those trees, seen in prophetic vision, which are called "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified^o." To "the Dresser of His vineyard" God will never say, concerning these trees, "Cut them down;" but at the proper time, when they shall have been fitted for the purpose in this nursery of the world, will take them up carefully, and freeing them from all unsound and uncomely appendages, will transplant them, to flourish for ever, into the garden by the river of His kingdom in the heavens.

ⁿ Rom. vi. 22.

^o Isa. lxi. 3.

SERMON XXX.

ON THE EPIPHANY.

ISAIAH, IX. 3.

And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

At the season of the Epiphany did these words begin to receive their fulfilment. Led by a star, there came soon after the nativity Magi from among the heathen, to worship at His rising “the Sun of Righteousness^a.” These were the first Gentiles who rendered homage to the Head of the Church. By some they are believed to have been royal personages, and thus to have accomplished exactly the ancient prophecy in the text. Be this as it may, at the promulgation of the Gospel the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles was broken down. God’s purpose was declared, to make all men partakers of His promises and mercy. Multitudes of the heathen flowed into the Church, whose kings and princes became its protectors; and, at this day the Gentiles are the inheritors of God’s most precious gifts, having, for a while, taken place of the Jews, through the blindness which hath happened to the latter, because of their unbelief.

^a Mal. iv. 2.

The rejection of the Jews and calling of the Gentiles is styled by the sacred writers, a mystery. And a mystery it is, the depths of whose fitness and utility we shall be unable to fathom, till we come to the place of the Redeemer's glory, and contemplate with enlarged powers the manifold wisdom of God. Some views of the subject, however, it becomes us to take : for all the dispensations of God are good and instructive, designed to display His perfections to the world, and to lead men, if they will be humble and docile, to a knowledge of His name, and an admiration of His work.

In the first place, we are not to think the Deity unjust, in leaving the Gentiles, a long time, in the darkness of heathenism. "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid^b!" Their blindness was the consequence of their transgression. God made man unjust and just. In the morning of the world He revealed Himself fully unto him. And He gave him a law whereby he might have lived. He foolishly transgressed, and became subject to sin. A spiritual and moral blindness justly ensued ; and having voluntarily departed from his Maker, his heart became more and more alienated, till he plunged himself into the deepest abyss of idolatry and iniquity.

God, however, left the Gentiles at no time, without sufficient manifestations of His being and presence. If they had searched after Him to find Him, He was not far from every one of them. The wonders of His hands surrounded them. His works, if pondered with attention, proclaimed His unity and glory. "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead ; so that they are without excuse^c."

^b Rom. ix. 14.

^c Rom. i. 20.

The Holy Ghost also did frequently strive in the hearts of the heathen. The blessed Spirit, which the mediation of the Son hath purchased for the children of men, lifts His “still small voice^d” in the bosom of every man. Whatever attainments in true wisdom or virtue we find in the heathen world, all was the fruit of the assistance of that blessed Spirit, by which we are sanctified. His motions enabled them to show “the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another^e.” And had they yielded to His gracious influences, He would, no doubt, have led them to God and virtue. But they preferred their carnal inclinations, and depraved lusts. They resisted and quenched the Spirit. And God, surely, was not obliged in justice, to preserve them supernaturally, from the consequences of their wickedness. No creature can claim any thing of Him, as a right; much less, sinners the interference of His mercy.

In many ways, also, there was some communicated knowledge of God diffused, in all ages, among the Gentiles. Though they were so wretchedly ignorant of Him, they might have been better informed. He had selected a peculiar people, to preserve in the world a knowledge of Himself, and of His will. This people was known to all nations. The wanderings of the Patriarchs, in the first ages, carried a knowledge of the true God among the Canaanites, the Egyptians, the inhabitants of Mesopotamia, and many countries of the East. The captivities of the Jews, under the Mosaic dispensation, made known the Divine name and character among the Assyrians, the Medes, and Persians, and many polished neighbour-

^d 1 Kings xix. 12.

Rom. ii. 15.

ing nations. The dispersion of the tribes, and, indeed, the commercial intercourse of the Hebrews with other nations, must have introduced the mention of the true God, among the inhabitants of Europe, and Asia, and of all places whither they went. The prevalence of circumcision among some heathen nations, and many parts of the mythology of others, are to this day vestiges, defaced vestiges, of the course of truth; monuments of opportunities afforded to all men, to become acquainted with the true theology. But as the sacred writers observe, and as profane writers prove, they were “vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful^f.” They “changed the truth of God into a lie,” hankered after idols and sinful pleasures, “and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator^g.” And forasmuch “as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God,” in just and awful vengeance, “gave them over to a reprobate mind^h,” and “suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless, He left not Himself” at any time “without witness, in that He did good, and gave them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladnessⁱ.”

Again. The righteousness of God, in the rejection of the Jews, is worthy of observation. To act in conformity with the requisitions of justice, is not to act inconsistently with mercy. The Jews had been a highly favoured people. “To them pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenant, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;” theirs were “the fathers, and of

^f Rom. i. 21.

^g Ibid. ver. 25.

^h Ibid. ver. 28.

ⁱ Acts xiv. 16, 17.

them, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever^k." Of a people so distinguished, the Most High might justly expect an eminent degree of holiness and fidelity. But their inconstancy and insincerity, their idolatries and impurities, had many times brought upon them His displeasure, and vengeance. Still He favoured them. Still He fulfilled His promises. His loving kindness He never took utterly from them, nor suffered His truth to fail. In the fulness of time, He sent to them His beloved Son, the bearer of the blessings He had promised to the Fathers, the Messiah, whom it was their nation's most glorious privilege to produce. But how did they receive this Author of salvation, for whom their Prophets had directed them to look? How did they receive this Son of the Highest, who came to them with the fulness of the blessings of the Gospel of peace? They were unbelieving and contumacious. They despised their Redeemer. "Dead in trespasses and sins^l," they could not open their eyes upon His spiritual power and glory. They were carnal in their affections and hopes. They were obstinate and rebellious in their hearts. Proud and presumptuous in their descent and privileges, going about to establish their own righteousness, and to justify themselves by external observances of the law, they scoffed at that righteousness of faith, by which Abraham and all the worthies were justified; and held in contempt the adorable Immanuel, in whom alone we have salvation, even the remission of sins. Though informed of His character, and the time of His coming; though He was the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believed; though He united in Himself all their types and prophecies, and exhibited the most stupendous evidences of His

^k Rom. ix. 4, 5.

^l Eph. ii. 1.

Divine authority ; though God had done every thing to turn their hearts to Him, and designed for them the highest mercies, and most glorious privileges in Him ;—they despised His humility and purity, and after embittering His life with most unjust persecutions, and impious mockeries, caused this most gracious Messenger of heaven, this blessed Saviour and Minister of reconciliation, to be barbarously crucified. In this they filled up the measure of their iniquities. And God, willing to show His wrath upon the impenitent and unbelieving, and to make His power known to all people, visited them with the awful judgments which befel their nation. He expected of His people fruits answerable to their privileges. They were filled with contumacy and sin. His word they had polluted. His beloved Son they had crucified. Therefore the hedge of their vineyard He hath taken away, and the wall thereof He hath broken down. “ The wild boar out of the wood doth root it up, and the wild beasts of the field devour it^m.” He hath laid it waste that it is not pruned nor digged. With dreadful vengeance He hath commanded the clouds that they rain no rain upon itⁿ. Let those who hope for the mercy of God, while they obstinately reject His counsels in the Redeemer, consider their fate, and learn from it the certainty, that He will avenge His Son of all His adversaries ; that He will not fail to recompense His enemies.

But in what part of the Divine government is not judgment connected with mercy ? “ Behold,” says St. Paul, writing upon this subject to Gentile converts, “ behold the goodness and severity of God : on them which fell, severity ; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness^o.” The call-

^m Ps. lxxx. 13.

ⁿ Isa. v. 6.

^o Rom. xi. 22.

ing of the Gentiles was, indeed, an infinite display of compassion in the Most High. Who can speak the greatness of the mercy, which brought the nations that had polluted His glory and their own nature, and lay in darkness and the shadow of death, to a knowledge of Himself and a participation of grace, and pardon, and everlasting life? “He was found of them that sought Him not: He was made manifest unto them that asked not after Him ^p.”

In this economy of His government, God has most strikingly displayed to the world both the freedom and the extent of His grace. We see Him bestowing His mercy, where in His sovereign wisdom He sees fit: and perceive that the greatest sinners may be partakers of it, if they will comply with the conditions upon which it is offered. The Gentiles, by embracing the Gospel, have attained to the hope of salvation, though they were buried in ignorance and sin; while the Jews, who rejected the counsels of God in Christ Jesus, and sought their justification in the deeds of the law, have come short of the felicity they desired. Herein is the sovereignty, and justice, and unlimited goodness of the Almighty manifested. While the rejection of the Jews shows His wrath upon the perverse and unbelieving, the calling of the Gentiles “makes known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He hath afore prepared unto glory ^q.”

It is worthy of observation, that God foreknew from the beginning, by whom His Son would be received, and by whom He would be rejected; and this wonderful restoration of the Gentiles to favour, in the kingdom of the Messiah, was proclaimed by prophecy in many a sublime strain, in all ages of the world. Who that ponders the primitive promise,

^p Rom. x. 20.

^q Ibid. ix. 23.

that in the Seed of Abraham “ all the nations of the earth should be blessed ^r :” who that hears old Jacob declaring in remote time, that unto Shiloh should “ the gathering of the people be ^s :” who that catches the strain of Hosea, “ I will say to them which were not My people, Thou art My people ; and they shall say, Thou art my God ^t :” who that listens to the enraptured Psalmist as he sings, “ the kings of Tharsis and of the Isles shall give presents ; the kings of Arabia and Saba shall bring gifts ; all kings shall fall down before Him ; all nations shall do Him service ^u :” who that hearkens to the seraphic Isaiah, uttering these wonderful strains ; “ Thus saith the Lord,—to Him whom man despiseth, to Him whom the nation abhorreth,—kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship:—for I will give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth ^v :” —who that recollects these, and many other predictions, and then turns his eyes to the wise men coming from the East, with gold, frankincense and myrrh, to worship “ the Sun of Righteousness ^w ” at His rising, and considers the subsequent recovery of the Gentile nations from their idolatry and ignorance, to a pure religion and elevated hopes ; and this, through the preaching of the Gospel by a few friendless and illiterate men, without the aid of wealth or power, and in opposition to all the prejudices and the inclinations of the age : who, that ponders these things as he ought, can avoid applying to the reception of the Gentiles into the bosom of the Church, the words of the king of Israel, “ This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes ^z ?”

^r Gen. xxii. 18.

^s Gen. xlix. 10.

^t Hos. ii. 23.

^u Ps. lxxii. 10, 11.

^v Is. xlix. 6, 7.

^w Mal. iv. 2.

^z Ps. cxviii. 23.

But there remains to be observed, in the last place, a yet more wonderful part of the economy of God. Behold the Jews; “a nation scattered and peeled^a,” and plucked up by the roots, yet living, and preserving their distinct character. Since their rejection of the Messiah the strong bands of their nation have been dissolved, and they are dispersed in all parts of the world. Every where they are associated with other people; but no where are they assimilated. Though they do not exist in any place as a corporate body; they are preserved a distinct people throughout the whole earth. Other people are soon blended with those, with whom they live. Other nations are soon lost in their conquerors. But, unparalleled fact! the Hebrews, though scattered by the Most High, and divested of all civil polity, are, to this day, preserved an unmixed and peculiar people. They are a monument of the truth of Scripture. They are a monument of the authority of Christ. They are a monument of the vengeance of the Almighty upon the faithless generation, by whom His Son was rejected and crucified. But let no man despise them. They are still the people of God. That they should reject the Messiah, and for a recompence be rejected of God, the prophets foretold with wonderful precision; but they have also foretold, that though in His wrath He has hid His face from them, He will, with great loving kindness, gather them. “As concerning the Gospel, they are enemies for our sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes^b.” We behold them reserved, doubtless not in vain, but for the accomplishment of glorious purposes. Though now “broken off” from the stock of the goodly olive-tree, into which, of God’s mercy we have been

^a Is. xviii. 2.

^b Rom. xi. 28.

“grafted.” “they also, if they abide not in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again^c.” Our duty is to derive from their situation, a confirmation of our faith, and an assurance of the truth and holiness of God. And verily if any man will not be convinced by this standing miracle, this daily testimony of the truth of Christianity, “neither would he be persuaded, though one rose from the dead^d.” With tenderness and awe we should consider their situation, and with brotherly love offer frequently the prayer of faith, that God would hasten the time, when His people shall say of their Redeemer, “Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord^e.”

I have dwelt so long upon the topics which the subject brought into view, that but little time remains for the practical remarks which it suggests. The manifestation of Christ to the heathen world, and this season in which the Church commemorates it, are peculiarly interesting to us. Remember that we were Gentiles, “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise^f.” But now are we partakers of the best mercies of the Most High. Great should be our gratitude to Him for “calling us out of darkness into His marvellous light^g.” Let us be what our Christian privileges oblige us to be; let us “walk as children of light^h.” There is nothing of absolute, unconditional, decree in our election to the blessings of the Gospel: “for unless we continue in His goodness, we also shall be cut offⁱ.” Look to the quarter of the globe, which first came to the brightness of the Saviour’s rising. Ignorance and superstition have

^c Rom. xi. 28.

^d Luke xvi. 21.

^e Luke xiii. 35.

^f Eph. ii. 12.

^g 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^h Eph. v. 8.

ⁱ Rom. xi. 22.

extinguished the light of the Gospel, and the Koran of Mahomet supplies the place of the Oracles of the Living God. And to what must we ascribe the melancholy change? The people were departed from the love of Christ, and held the truth in unrighteousness. Should we corrupt our faith, or dishonour it by iniquity, great will be the cause to fear, that our light also will be obscured. Let every one then be induced, by his own individual piety and virtue, and by the Christian education of His family, to assist his country, in retaining the favour of the Head of the Church; if haply from her land, which is now blessed with the light of the Gospel, the golden candlesticks may not be taken away. And while we rejoice in our happiness, let us cast our eyes upon the multitudes of our brethren, who are yet benighted; “having no hope, and without God in the world^k.” While their situation teaches us our own felicity, let it induce us, with holy and humble devotion, to offer, frequently, the prayer which the Church hath taught us, that God would have ‘mercy upon all Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Heretics; and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of His word; and so fetch them home to His flock, that they may be saved among the remnant of the true Israelites, and be made one fold under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ^l’ our blessed Lord and Saviour. Amen.

^k Eph. ii. 12.

^l Collect for Good Friday.

SERMON XXXI.



ON THE EPIPHANY.



ST. MATTHEW, ii. 9, 10, 11.

When they had heard the king, they departed : and, lo, the star, which they saw in the East, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him : and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts ; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

IN one of the sublimest prophecies which the Scriptures contain, respecting the advent of the Messiah, the Almighty is introduced as addressing His Son in these memorable words : “ It is a light thing that Thou shouldest be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel : I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth ^a.” The fulfilment of this glorious declaration commenced, as at this season of the Epiphany, when Christ Jesus was first manifested to the Gentiles as their Lord and Saviour, and received the first fruits of their faith and devotion. I purpose, therefore,

^a Is. xlix. 6.

to set before you, as proper topics for your attention at this time, the manner in which this manifestation was made, the conduct of those to whom He was manifested, and the consequences of the manifestation. Subjects these, in which are involved some of the most interesting wonders of the Divine economy, and from which we may derive some important instructions.

The manner of Christ's manifestation to the Gentiles is first to be considered ; and this, we are told, was by the appearance of a star, discerned by wise men of the East ; and by them understood to indicate the birth of an expected King and deliverer. This star was supernatural ; appearing and disappearing as the occasion required ; and never setting like other luminaries of the skies, but resting in a glorious hour, " over where the young child was ^b." Holy St. Chrysostom, in a discourse upon the Epiphany which has come down to us, supposes that it was an angel in the form of a star, traversing the skies as the guide of the wise men to the new-born King. Others have imagined that it was a new star, or extraordinary meteor, created in honour of the Saviour's nativity, and made the herald of His birth to the inhabitants of distant lands. The most probable opinion is that the Shechinah, or glory of the Lord, which shone round about the shepherds on the night of His nativity, was also seen distinct and elevated in the heavens, by the vigilant astronomers of the East, and that to selected individuals of both Jews and Gentiles, the same wonderful appearance announced the birth of the Saviour of all nations. Easily we may imagine it seen at a distance in the heavens, in the form of a star, as, anciently to the Israelites, in the figure of a pillar of fire. The wise

^b Matt. ii. 9.

men saw it, and set out in pursuit of Him whose birth it indicated. When it became needful for their guidance, lo, it again appeared, to their “ exceeding great joy^c.” It now went before them, their wonderful and most welcome conductor, till it came near the humble mansion where the Redeemer lay. There it rested: there it stood: at once an assurance to these faithful visitors of the certainty of the place, and the majesty of the Infant Jesus. But whatever opinion we may form of the nature of this star; who can avoid admiring, amidst the humiliation of Christ, the accompanying attestations of His extraordinary character? While He is wrapped in swaddling bands on earth, the heavens declare His glory. He sleeps in a manger; but a star, as a diadem of Divinity, is suspended over His head. It led the wise men to seek and honour Him as a King. It shadows forth to us the glorious office, which this neglected infant may challenge to Himself, even to be the “ light of the world^d.” It recalls to our minds the august figure, under which He once proclaims Himself, “ the bright and morning star^e.”

Before we proceed to the consequences of this extraordinary manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, it is meet we should bestow some attention upon the conduct of these distinguished visitors of our blessed Lord. Under the character of wise men, we are to consider them as belonging to that order of men among the Eastern nations, who gave themselves to the study of philosophy and the sciences, particularly, of the appearances and laws of the heavenly bodies. They were called Magi. Of them were sometimes kings and priests; and always, they were of high respectability and influence. The sign which the Almighty gave them, on this great occa-

^c Matt. ii. 10.

^d John viii. 12.

^e Rev. xii. 16.

sion, was kindly and wisely taken from objects, and exhibited in scenes, with which they were habitually conversant.

They might, too, be naturally inclined to give to the appearance of this new object in the heavens, the significance it was designed to bear. For it was a prevailing superstition, in many heathen countries, that a new star indicated the birth of an extraordinary person, and that they should be great, who were born under its influence, at its appearance. In this view, God may be considered as condescending to the weakness of men, and using a thing which is not, to illustrate and advance “things that are^f.”

Still you will ask, what connection is there between the appearance of a star, and the birth of Christ, or of any other person, that it should lead the wise men so earnestly to seek, so explicitly to inquire for “him who was born King of the Jews^g.” Here we must remember that there prevailed at that time throughout the world, an expectation of an extraordinary person who should come from Judea. This is testified to us by profane and sacred historians, and by occurrences at the time, which, without the prevalence of such an expectation, would be utterly inexplicable. That the Magi had received this traditionary expectation, and were also acquainted with the grounds of it, is in a high degree probable. Through neighbouring nations, the intercourse of the Jews would naturally promulge this leading and flattering article of their faith. The captivities, too, of the tribes of Israel, and afterwards of Judah, could hardly fail to diffuse through the regions of the East, a knowledge of their prophecies, and, especially, of this cherished hope, this consoling promise, of their peculiar religion. Balaam,

^f 1 Cor. i. 28.

^g Matt. ii. 2.

too, had travelled through some of those regions, and sojourned in others ; and from his lips, though a Gentile, came the prediction, “ I shall see Him, but not now : I shall behold Him, but not nigh : there shall be a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel ^h.” Above all, Daniel had dwelt in some of these countries, and his prophecies, it is reasonable to believe, had been known in many of them ; and who could be acquainted with the books of this learned Prophet, and not be open to the liveliest impression, which a current expectation of an extraordinary person, to appear among the Jews, could make ? From some of these sources, the wise men unquestionably had become possessed of the tradition, then so widely diffused, that about that time an extraordinary king should be born in Judea, who would rule the earth. When, therefore, they beheld the new and extraordinary star shining over the holy land, they would inquire what it portended, and might well infer from it, that the expected King of the Jews was born. Of this also we may be sure, that He, who gave this sign in the heavens, would render it effectual to all the purposes for which it was given. God has as easy access to the minds, as to the senses of men. By message to the wise men, or by vision, or by the secret movements of His Spirit upon their souls, He could inform them of the cause and signification of the phenomenon they beheld. And since by the last method, most of the means which He uses for our spiritual instruction are rendered effectual, we may safely conclude that His Holy Spirit, influencing the minds of these contemplative and inquiring sages, strengthened and confirmed their apprehension of the import of the star, and urged them on to the journey, which should

^h Numb. xxiv. 17.

accomplish, strikingly, many of the prophecies, and bring them to behold, and, as an earnest of the future homage He should receive, to adore at His birth, the Deliverer of men.

In the readiness of their faith, in their zeal and perseverance, in their humility, and reverent devotion to Christ, these forerunners of us Gentiles, it behoves me to remark, are both our example and reproof. Roused by the appearance of a star, they come from a distant land, to find and adore the “King of kings,” “the Prince of Peaceⁱ.” We have in the sure word of prophecy a light shining in a dark place, to guide our minds to the same great Deliverer, and in the Gospel and sacraments of God we may find and embrace, reverence and obey Him. But how slow of heart are we to examine and follow the one; how backward to embrace and rejoice in the other! Fearless of the danger of proclaiming to a corrupt king the birth of a rival, and regardless of the taunts of men, they demand at Jerusalem where Christ is born: and when they have heard the reply, they instantly depart, undetained by the allurements of the city, or the gaieties of the court, from prosecuting their journey to render homage and oblations to the great Messiah. Easy is it for us to inquire of “the law and the testimony^k,” all things concerning Christ. But how damped are our inquiries, how restrained our professions, by a regard to the opinions and sneers of men! And when “we have found Him of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets did write^l,” when the Scriptures, or the ministers of the sanctuary have pointed us to Jesus, how apt are we to loiter in the city, to be fascinated with the pleasures and vanities of the world, even when the Spirit of the Most High hath

ⁱ Is. ix. 6.

^k Ibid. viii. 20.

^l John i. 45.

shined in our hearts, and is ready to go before us till He brings us to the place, where we may behold the Redeemer surrounded with the glories of heaven, and enjoy His presence for ever! When the wise men had worshipped the infant Jesus, they opened their treasures and presented unto Him gifts; such gifts as were most significant for them to offer, and most honourable for Him to receive. ‘*Myrrh*,’ says some one, ‘as to a man who was to be delivered to death and the grave for our salvation; *Gold* as to a King, whose kingdom shall have no end; *Incense* as to a God, who was made known to them that sought Him not.’ With such gifts to approach Him in His infancy, is not in our power. But we may offer Him the oblations of our lips. We may own and adore Him, as our Redeemer, our King, and our God. We should “present” unto Him “our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto” Him, “which is our reasonable service^m.”

And that we may be excited thus to do, let us now proceed to consider, in the third place, the consequences of this manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. We behold, at His birth, both Jews and Gentiles in the persons of the wise men and the shepherds, brought together unto Jesus. Both render homage, and the homage of both is received. Here, then, they are made one; and “the middle wall of partition is broken down between themⁿ.” We see here a demonstration of the comfortable truth, that “there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him^o.”

From the time of Abraham, it pleased God to select unto Himself a peculiar people; to them to give His revelations, and covenants, and the knowledge

^m Rom. xii. 1.

ⁿ Eph. ii. 14.

^o Rom. x. 12.

of His mercies ; and to suffer all other nations to walk in their own ways. And, alas, their ways became most wretchedly dark and desolate. Ignorance and stupidity, idolatry and vice, darkness and corruption, overwhelmed all people. Depravity carried them into the dismal state in which they had “ no hope, and were without God in the world ^p.” To the Jew seemed confined the revelation of the Creator’s will, and the knowledge of the creature’s salvation and destiny. But the conducting of the wise men unto the Messiah, was the commencement of the disclosure of what St. Paul justly calls “ the mystery, which from the beginning of the world had been hid in God ^q ;” namely, “ that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel ^r.” And who are these that have flown unto the Church, as “ doves to their window ^s ;” these that have come out of darkness into marvellous light ; these that have seen the salvation of God, and compose the greater part of those inhabitants of the earth, who rejoice in the knowledge of His mercy, and worship Him in spirit and in truth ? They are successors of the Magi ; converts and subjects from the Gentile world. They are people, who were once “ aliens from the commonwealth of Israel ^t ;” having no part in the adoption and the glory, in the oracles of truth, the service of God and the knowledge of eternal life. They are beings, who were once strangers to the covenant of promise ; unacquainted with the ransom for their sins ; groping in darkness for the wall ; dwelling in the regions and shadow of death. But now, through the blood of Christ, they who were afar off are brought nigh. The end of the mystery,

^p Eph. ii. 12.

^q Eph. iii. 9.

^r Ibid. ver. 6.

^s Isa. lx. 8.

^t Eph. ii. 12.

of which this was the opening, will be the conversion of all Gentiles, in God's good time, from the ignorance, idolatry, and hopelessness, in which they have lived, to the knowledge of their duty, to the worship of the true God, and the blessed hope of everlasting life. The coming of the wise men to worship the Redeemer was the pledge unto Him, that heathenism should forsake her thousand polluted altars, and cast off her countless polluting delusions; and fly to the truth which He should diffuse, and to the altar and hopes which He should establish. In this event God embraced, as it were, all nations "in the arms of His mercy," and extended the limits of His Church to the ends of the earth. The language of the wonderful star was peace, "peace to them which are afar off, and to them that are nigh^u." While it designated the place where the Redeemer lay, it was, at the same time, a symbol of His glorious character; "a light to lighten the Gentiles^x," and God's salvation to the ends of the world.

Nay more; this calling of the Gentiles shall be, ultimately, instrumental in bringing the Jews to the faith of the Redeemer. God hath not cast away His people. "They are yet beloved for the fathers' sakes^y." Though scattered, you behold them preserved; and the Apostle intimates that, by the calling of us Gentiles, they shall finally be provoked to "jealousy^z;" that as we have "obtained mercy through their unbelief; even so they now have not believed, that through the mercy" we have found, "they also may obtain mercy^a." "Blindness, in part hath happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in^b." But they have not stumbled, that they might fall; they have not been cut off

^u Eph. ii. 17.^x Luke ii. 32.^y Rom. xi. 28.^z Rom. xi. 11.^a Ibid. ver. 30, 31.^b Ibid. ver. 25.

from the goodly olive-tree, that they might perish : but, “ if they abide not in unbelief, shall be grafted in ; for God is able to graff them in again ^c.” In His good time He will, through the instrumentality of the Gentiles, gather the tribes of Jacob, “ and restore the preserved of Israel ^d.” “ And so all Israel shall be saved ^e.” “ For He hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all ^f.” This is indeed a mystery, into the reasons and fitness of which we shall not be able fully to penetrate, till the consummation of all things shall declare to us the wisdom and equity of God. At present, we must wrap up our wonder in the language of St. Paul : “ O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out ^g !”

In improving this subject, let me first beseech you, my brethren, to consider and be thankful for your own condition. Remember that ye are of the nations who were Gentiles ; and rejoice, with grateful joy, that the “ day-spring from on high hath visited you” to chase away “ the shadow of death, and to guide your feet into the way of peace ^h.”

Let me, in the second place, exhort you, by a pure faith, and holy lives, to secure your privileges. From some countries which were once enlightened by the Gospel, the light is alas, departed ; and they are fallen from their felicity, to the debasement of Mahometan corruption, or Pagan delusion. The cause of their calamity was the inconstancy of their faith, and pollutedness of their lives. “ Thou standest by faith. Be not high minded, but fear ⁱ.” Re-

^c Rom. xi. 23.

^d Isa. xlix. 6.

^e Rom. xi. 26.

^f Rom. xi. 32.

^g Ibid. ver. 33.

^h Luke i. 78, 79.

ⁱ Rom. xi. 20.

member, that God's favourite people "were broken off" from the olive-tree of His planting, because of their "unbelief." And if He "spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee^k."

Once more. Let me entreat you, to look upon the multitude of heathens, upon whom the light of the Gospel hath not shined. While their dark, degraded, dismal condition excites your gratitude for your Christian felicities, let it prompt you, if you have means or opportunities, faithfully to use them, for extending to the benighted heathen the instructions and hopes, in which you are happy. Means and opportunities have you none? Yes. You may give them your prayers. And what Christian will neglect to do this, when he considers, that peace cannot be among men, till it is shed upon them by the Redeemer: and that "Jerusalem must be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled^l."

Which brings me, in the last place, to observe, that upon God's ancient people, our elder brethren, we should bestow the look and the wishes of an holy and anxious regard. "If the fall of them have been the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness^m?" They are kept yet to acknowledge the Messiah, whom they have rejected. They are reserved to be the crown of our Lord's rejoicing, the consummating triumph of His word and power. He came to our earth to be not only "the light which should lighten the Gentiles," but also "the glory of God's people Israelⁿ." Let us then as our Church teaches us, offer our prayers for 'all Jews,'

^k Rom. xi. 21.

^m Rom. xi. 12.

^l Luke xxi. 24.

ⁿ Luke ii. 32.

as well as ‘Turks, Infidels, and Heretics:’ that God would ‘take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of His word; and so fetch them home to His flock, that they may be saved among the remnant of the true Israelites, and be made one fold under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord °.’

° Collect for Good Friday.

SERMON XXXII.

ON THE EPIPHANY.

ST. JOHN, viii. 12.

I am the light of the world.

AMONG the most beautiful and important things which our eyes behold, is the effect of light upon the earth. When it dawns in the East, and the sun rises in its splendour, the whole face of nature assumes a new and joyful aspect. It dispels the darkness and the chilliness of night. Creation is awaked to new life by its beams. "Man goeth forth" cheerfully "to his work, and to his labour, until the evening^a." The beauty of every object is shown, and their uses and relations manifested. Earth and the skies are enlivened, and the glory of the Creator is sublimely proclaimed.

By a very striking metaphor, this principle of nature, upon which our knowledge, our joys, our life so much depend, is used in the sacred volume to represent to us, in figure, the Saviour of the world. Its fitness for an emblem of the Messiah could not escape the notice of those, whose minds were enlightened, and whose bosoms rejoiced, with the knowledge of His character and offices. Prophecy

^a Ps. civ. 23.

had scarcely opened the organs of her blissful vision, when a star was seen coming out of Jacob, and the light of the Lord in which we should see light^b. And when upon her harp she sent forth, in its most rapturous tones, the proclamation of His coming, she sang Him as a light to “the people that walked in darkness;” and as shining upon them, who “dwelt in the land of the shadow of death^c.” His har-binger’s errand was to give knowledge of the tender mercy of God, whereby “the day-spring from on high hath visited us^d :” and when piety first discovered Him in the earthly temple, she hailed Him as “a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Israel^e.” There is, indeed, no language, by which His greatness and our interest in His coming, can be more happily expressed. All the inspired writers, as it were with one mind, conceived of Him under the sublime imagery of a luminary shedding light and life, knowledge and joy, upon mankind; and He Himself invites us to contemplate Him under this figure, in those emphatic words of His own, “I am the light of the world.”

The situation of mankind before His rising; His wonderful appearance in the fulness of time; the realized and expected effects of His coming, are topics, which the words very naturally suggest to our consideration: and while an attention to them will show the peculiar propriety with which the glorious Being, whose visit to our sphere we are assembled to commemorate, is styled “the light of the world,” it may also lead us to such reflections, as will be pertinent to the joy and solemnities of this day.

The Scriptures represent mankind as in a state of

^b Ps. xxxvi. 9.

^d Luke i. 78.

^c Isa. ix. 2.

^e Ibid. ii. 32.

deplorable ignorance and wretchedness, before the appearance of the Messiah. If we advert to their religion, morals, and expectations, we shall be convinced that the picture is not too deeply shaded, but that the world was, indeed, overcast with clouds, and filled with blindness and debasement.

Dreadful was the ignorance of the Supreme Being, and consequently of all rational worship and correct views of life, into which men sunk during the night of heathenism. Nothing can surpass the crudeness of their ideas of the Deity, and the absurdity of their sentiments towards Him. We look among them in vain for any knowledge of the true God. Here the material sun was mistaken for Him, and honoured with a frantic worship and human sacrifices. There some departed mortal was raised to divinity, and his anger deprecated, or his kind influence sought, by the most monstrous cruelties and pollutions. Here some consecrated animal received the adorations of degraded man. There he prostrated himself devoutly before some idol which his hands had made, or some grosser divinity which his very vices had enthroned. In no country was there a pure theology. Religion, even in the most polished age and nation, was, at best a complication of absurdities. We find at Athens, where reason attained its greatest lustre, “an altar with this inscription, **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD** :” and the best of heathens, and greatest of philosophers, who amidst the errors of polytheism, had refined in some degree his sentiments of the divine nature, was there put to death by his countrymen, as guilty of impiety. How totally must the understandings of men have been darkened, when upon the subject with which every thing dear, ennobling, or joyful in the intel-

ligent world is connected, they were so grossly ignorant! How dismally wretched must have been their state, when none could guide them to the pure and benevolent author of their existence: but “the glory of the uncorruptible God was changed into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things^s!”

Proportioned to the correctness of the ideas which they have of the Supreme Being, and the purity of their reverence towards Him, will always be the elevation of the morals of mankind. We may not, therefore, be surprised that, before the promulgation of the Gospel, they were ignorant of holiness and enslaved to sin. Their sense of right and wrong, and all their affections were corrupted. Of a uniform, satisfactory, efficacious system of morals, by which they might regulate their conduct, and attain the true perfection and happiness of their nature, they were utterly destitute. What, though a few endeavoured to raise themselves to some degree of moral excellence? They differed from each other. By the brightest light which they could kindle, they were unable to guide their own steps; and it was a light, which their fellow mortals never felt obliged to regard, which they oft-times contemned. They, therefore, can be considered only as coruscations of the night, unsteady and transient, rendering the general darkness more awfully apparent, and vanishing, without any essential influence upon the morals of the people. The multitude grovelled in their vices. They were “dead in trespasses and sins^h.” There was nothing to elevate, to purify, to direct their affections; to enlighten their consciences, or to give energy and efficacy to the expiring struggles of virtue. Guided in this moral darkness only

^s Rom. i. 23.

^h Eph. ii. 1.

by corrupt inclination, they sunk into a depravity, over the picture of which, should I exhibit it to your view, you would blush for humanity, and with the great Apostle who drew it, cover it with your tears.

But with this dominion of sin was connected the dominion of death. If men reflected at all upon their conduct, they could not but be conscious, that they fell short of their duty. If they reflected soberly upon their condition they could not but be sensible, that they were the children of wrath. But in what way, as sinners, they could appease the unknown Deity whom nature taught them to fear, whether He would in any way be reconciled to transgressors, how they should make atonement for their offences, and propitiate His smiles, they were miserably ignorant. In the hour of superstitious dread, they might come before their imaginary gods “with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oilⁱ.” Under the confused apprehension of a judgment to come, they might offer “their first born for their transgressions, the fruit of their bodies for the sin of their souls.” But what could this avail? Where was the voice to assure them of pardon? Where were the means of certain acceptance with God? They found themselves subject to the law of death. Of their inability to deliver themselves from his awful dominion, they could not doubt. The wise and the ignorant, the virtuous and the vicious, were hitherto his mute and helpless prey. Whether the invisible power would raise them from the dust; whether their “corruptible” would ever “put on incorruption,” and their “mortal” be clothed with immortality^k, were questions enveloped in obscurity. With trembling solicitude they

ⁱ Mic. vi. 7.

^k 1 Cor. xv. 55.

looked into the tomb; but all which they there beheld, was melancholy evidence of its monarch's undisturbed sway. If they attempted to look beyond it, feeble were their conceptions of immortality; absurd and groundless were their notions of heaven. The measure of their wretchedness was filled by the awful consciousness that, from this perplexed life, they descended into "a land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light was as darkness¹."

Among the Jews, it must be confessed, the case was somewhat different. But how small a part of mankind was that nation! They, too, were perpetually prone to idolatry and iniquity. Their religion was but a system of shadows, which the multitude very imperfectly understood: and the law far from delivering them from the power of death, was itself "the strength of sin^m," and the ministration of condemnation. How destitute they were of that spiritual life, which is the light of men, may easily be inferred from their rejection of the adorable Messiah, because He did not answer their carnal expectations. "The light shined in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it notⁿ."

In a word: from the original apostasy, man was enveloped in the gloom of ignorance, sin, and death. A forlorn traveller he wandered, either in perplexity or stupidity, through a dreary state, without virtue or happiness, without God or hope. In the solemn language of Scripture, "darkness had covered the earth, and gross darkness the people^o."

Such was the unhappy situation of the world, before "the Sun of Righteousness arose, with healing in His wings^p." The time when He should appear

¹ Job x. 22.

^m 1 Cor. xv. 56.

ⁿ John i. 5.

^o Isa. lx. 2.

^p Mal. iv. 2.

was appointed by the Father ; and every preparation was made, to obtain for Him the attention and homage of mankind. From the Fall, a vast system of types and symbols had been put in operation, that the faithful might be assisted in their conceptions of His authority and offices, and behold, with wonder, the hand of God conducting the accomplishment of the same gracious purpose, in all the periods of time. Prophets, like the planets of night, while yet the Sun was unseen, glowed with His beams, and, in harmonious concert, proclaimed the certainty of His existence, and instructed the devout to be waiting for His appearance. The time when He should come had been precisely foretold. So well were the predictions understood, and so decidedly applied to a Messiah, that as the period of His coming drew near, all men were in expectation. At length, “ the night was far spent ; the day was at hand ^a.” Reason now stood at her zenith, in her proudest lustre, and all men saw her insufficiency to conduct them to their Creator or to holiness, or to the sure expectation of everlasting life. “ The sceptre ” was now about to “ depart from Judah,” and “ the lawgiver from between his feet,” which Jacob had anciently declared, should not take place, “ until Shiloh came ^r.” The second temple was shortly to be razed, never to be repaired, in which Haggai had proclaimed that the glory of the Lord should appear ^s. The “ seventy weeks ” were nearly numbered, which Daniel had ascertained should elapse, from “ the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem, unto ” the time of “ Messiah the Prince ^t.” The Baptist was now on the horizon in pre-eminent brightness, as Isaiah and Malachi foretold, announcing

^a Rom. xiii. 12.

^s Hag. ii. 7.

^r Gen. xlix. 10.

^t Dan. ix. 25.

like the morning star the near approach of “ the Light of the world.” At this eventful period, when the world had slumbered its appointed time, and attention stood turned to the East in expectation of a glorious appearance, “ the Sun of Righteousness.” rose upon the earth, “ to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace ^u.”

It has been objected by cavillers, if such a light was prepared for the world, why were mankind so long left in darkness, and why are its beams so partially distributed? But does it become us, with our finite powers, to scrutinize the wisdom of the arrangements of God? What are we, short sighted beings of a day, that we should presume to judge of an economy, which may have a thousand reasons, that we have not knowledge to discern; and a thousand relations, that we have not capacity to comprehend? When thou art conscious, O sceptic! that thou possessest all wisdom and virtue, and needest no instruction from thy Maker; when thou art ready to retire from the light of yonder material sun, and bury thyself in the dens and caves of the earth, because it may not rise at the hour which thou wouldest choose, nor shine equally and at once upon all the nations of the globe, then turn thy back upon the Sun of the spiritual world, because thou art not satisfied with the partiality of His course, nor with the time of His coming. But till then, be thankful for His light, and guide thy steps by His beams. It is surely enough for us to know, that He came at the time appointed by the Father. The devout mind will discover, in the equal duration of the Patriarchal and of the Mosaic economy, before the Christian dispensation, an evident adoption of an

^u Mal. iv. 2.

^x Luke i. 79.

order, whose significance and end it may not yet perceive, and will be fully persuaded that the future economy will harmonize with the past, and the time of the Redeemer's appearance be finally manifested to have been appointed, like all the dispensations of the Almighty, with infinite wisdom and equity. Instead of cavilling at the counsels of the Most High, it becomes us rather to consider, what are the realized and expected effects of the coming of the Messiah.

— And, in the first place, men are no longer in the dark with regard to the Supreme Being, and His intentions towards them. His nature and perfections are revealed. The purposes of His government are disclosed. They are taught, how they may worship Him acceptably, and find peace in His service. He is manifested as their Everlasting Father and friend, anxiously reconciling a guilty world unto Himself, through the gracious intervention of His beloved Son. Happy in a knowledge of His divine unity and unbounded mercy, they are no longer left to the absurdity of idolatry, nor to the awful dread of an unknown deity: but are enabled to elevate their souls to the true and only God, and with filial confidence to cry unto Him, “Abba, Father^y.” The appearance of His Son in the flesh is the great proclamation of His care for mankind, and they are assured by it of His readiness to grant unto them, through this Redeemer, remission of their sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost.

— But further: by the appearance of this “light of the world” the moral sight of mankind is purged, and the path of duty made plain before them. It is the office of light to exhibit things in their proper character, to give to the beautiful their hues, to

show the relations of the various objects, to enable man to choose what is good, and admire the excellency of the works of God. By the Sun of the spiritual world, the beauty of holiness is illustrated; the virtues are shown in their true characters and relations to each other; the soul is awaked from its state of delusion, and enabled to choose what to practice, what to cultivate, what to admire; and a general light is thrown upon all the situations and events of life. No longer need the children of men wander in the mazes of doubt, inquiring anxiously "what is good, and what the Lord doth require of them^z." By the moral information which the Saviour hath diffused, and by the Spirit which He sends into the hearts of the obedient, they are enabled to walk with safety, satisfaction, and happiness, amidst the devious roads, and perplexing difficulties with which they are surrounded. Their path is as the shining light; and by that increase of brightness which attends progressive holiness, it "shineth more and more unto the perfect day^a."

But above all, by this "light of the world," the darkness has been dispersed which hung over the final destiny of men. Heaven has been opened to the view of the faithful. They have received anew the adoption of sons, and to this adoption appertains the pardon of their transgressions, the immortality and pleasures of the Father's house. The awful dominion which death maintained over the human race was founded upon sin. This dominion the Son of God was sent to destroy. "In the end of the world He hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself^b." This done, He hath commanded the king of terrors to resign his sceptre; He hath rolled back the clouds which rested upon the tomb; and

^z Mic. vi. 8.^a Prov. iv. 18.^b Heb. ix. 26.

to the gazing eyes of the anxious children of mortality, hath exhibited beyond the confines of this transitory world “ a better country, that is an heavenly ^c.” “ Thou shalt call His name Jesus,” said the angel to His virgin mother, “ for He shall save His people from their sins ^d.” He “ hath abolished death,” saith the voice of inspiration, “ and hath brought life and immortality to light ^e.”

In short, to redeem men from destruction, and bring them back to God, to virtue, and to immortality, was the end of the manifestation of the Son of God. Effulgent in all the Father’s perfections, “ being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person ^f,” He was peculiarly qualified to be set in the spiritual firmament, as that “ light” which should “ lighten every man that cometh into the world ^g.” Before the brightness of His shining, all other lights have had their lustre quenched, and hidden their diminished heads. Whatever there is of pure religion, and elevated morals in the world; whatever consoling hope we have of the pardon of our God, and His grace and favour; whatever prospect there is of a restoration to man, of peace, dignity, and the Divine likeness; whatever beams of comfort come to the chambers of anguish and to the bosom of grief, from the well grounded assurance of immortality in a better world, all are the effects of that “ light,” which “ the Sun of Righteousness ^h” hath diffused. It is by the power of His beams alone, that the face of our desolate nature can be in any degree renewed. And only when they have had full course and operation, shall “ the wolf dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and

^c Heb. xi. 16.

^d Matt. i. 21.

^e 2 Tim. i. 10.

^f Heb. i. 3.

^g John i. 9.

^h Mal. iv. 2.

a little child shall lead them^l.” As yet, all nations feel not His blessed influence. The analogy of the Divine operations would lead us to expect, that His course would be progressive; and our knowledge of the corruption of the human heart, should prevent us from being surprised, if men “love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil^k.” But travelling on like the sun in the heavens, in the greatness of His strength, He is unaffected by the mists which rise from the earth to obscure His lustre, and laugheth to scorn their impotence, who hail Him only to tell Him, how they hate His beams. Upheld and guided by the power of God, He will not rest, till all nations have seen His glory. Prophecy, whose exact veracity hitherto is a sure pledge of the future fulfilment of her predictions, assures us that “in returning and rest” the Jew shall “be saved^l;” and that “the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in^m :” that under the benign influence of this “light of the world,” “the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the roseⁿ.”

✓ But I strive in vain to set before you the effects of the coming of the Messiah in their full extent, and vast importance. It requires a position, which would command a view of the number and glory of the redeemed, and a ken which would embrace eternity. Far short of this knowledge we must all remain, till the period of the consummation of the work of this adorable Being, “who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption^o.”

— It is the glorious nature, and blessed influence of this “light of the world,” which renders the day of

ⁱ Isa. xi. 6.

^k John iii. 19.

^l Isa. xxx. 15.

^m Rom. xi. 25.

ⁿ Isa. xxxv. 1.

^o 1 Cor. i. 30.

His rising, a day of gladness and festivity. You are assembled, I trust, to commemorate the event, with none but the feelings of Christians. As such, the first effects of your contemplations will be an overflow of praise to God, and joy for mankind. What stupendous love has our heavenly Father manifested, in giving such a source of eternal light and life to His fallen creatures! What a change is wrought in their condition and expectations, by the prospects which “the day-spring from on high^p” hath opened! Great should be our thankfulness and joy. The peal with which heaven rang on the morn of the Nativity, should animate our hearts, and to the song of the angels, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men^q,” we should respond with our utmost devotion, Amen; Hallelujah.

But while we rejoice in the rising of the Sun of Righteousness upon our benighted world, we should be individually grateful, that we are of the number who now behold His beams. What tidings so glad have ever reached your ears, as the tidings of a Redeemer’s birth? How valuable is the knowledge, that we are rescued from the doom of transgressors, and that, “if we sin, we have” a prevailing “Advocate with the Father^r,” in His own beloved Son! How precious is a clear information of the way, and a certain promise of the means, by which we may please our God, and arrive at the true end and perfection of our nature! How ravishing is the assurance, that the sceptre of death is broken, and that the hours which are bearing us from this world, are bringing us to immortality and heaven! Verily blessed are our eyes that they see, and our ears that they hear. If you have soberly considered the unhappy condition of those of your fellow beings, who

^p Luke i. 78.^q Ibid. ii. 14.^r 1 John ii. 1.

know not the Gospel ; if you have properly estimated the joy which you have in Christ Jesus, and your privilege in being brought out “ of darkness into His marvellous light^s,” you will be ready on this day, with the enraptured Seer, to exclaim, “ How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace ; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation ; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth^t !”

Finally. It should be our study to reflect in our lives the lustre of that glorious Being, by whom we are enlightened. In acts of humility, piety, and benevolence, we should put on the Lord Jesus Christ. To all the appointed means of instruction and grace, we should give heed, “ until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in our hearts^u.” Being made the children of God, and of the light, it should be our principal care, to walk answerably to our Christian calling, and as becometh the children of light. To no purpose do we admire the adorable condescension of our Saviour, in taking upon Him our nature, and being born of a Virgin, unless we are penetrated with His humility and obedience, and induced to copy it into our lives. In vain do we solace ourselves in the beams of that love, which brought Him from the bosom of His Father for our salvation, unless our bosoms are warmed with His benevolent spirit, and we are kind and compassionate to our fellow beings. Cold is our sense of His goodness, and imperfect our return, if we do not rejoice in every opportunity to eat of His bread, and drink of His cup, as He hath appointed, “ in remembrance of Him^x.” In vain do we come to His light, and rejoice in the brightness of His rising, unless we “ cast

^s 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^u 2 Pet. i. 19.

^t Is. lii. 7.

^x Luke xxii. 19.

off the works of darkness," and in all things "walk honestly, as in the day³." Impressed with a sense of the distinguished excellence, with which the Church under her peculiar advantages should appear, the Prophet calls to her, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee⁴." And doubtless, the moral scene would be grand, harmonious, and happy, as the order of the spheres, if every Christian shone in the brightness of the common Lord, and reflected His beams in every direction. Be it yours, my brethren, to imitate the Being you admire. The deluded Pagan, who worships the material sun, offers not his homage without many ablutions. Look to it that your hands be clean, and your hearts pure, when you come to prostrate yourselves before the Sun, whom it is no idolatry to adore. So shall you render an acceptable service to the Redeemer, in celebrating His gracious appearance among men, and it shall fit you for the eternal commemoration of His love in that "city," which hath "no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God" doth give it perpetual day, "and the Lamb is the light thereof⁵."

³ Rom. xiii. 12, 13.

⁴ Is. lx. 1.

Rev. xxi. 23.

SERMON XXXIII.



ON THE TEMPTATION.



ST. MATTHEW, iv. 1.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

THE Church, from her earliest days, has set apart the season in which the Saviour was tempted, as a time of special thoughtfulness, humiliation, and prayer. In happier times than the present in point of religious regularity, it wrought abundantly the peaceable fruits of repentance, and obtained a pious observance. A revival of the ancient zeal, without its superstition or its intolerance, is devoutly to be wished, but is hardly to be hoped. If Christians in the present age are induced in the Lent season, to present themselves frequently before the Lord, and to turn their thoughts upon such subjects, as may promote contrition for the past, and future rectitude, it is as much as can be expected. This easy observance of holy time is reasonable ; and its tendency is to produce good fruits.

Among the subjects which are meet for attention, at this season, that which it commemorates is a principal one. The temptation of the Saviour has been esteemed a very instructive, yet mysterious part of

the Gospel economy. Very many different opinions have been adopted concerning it. Some have objected to it; some have thought it attended with inexplicable difficulties. But all that it concerns us to consider may, I apprehend, be reduced to these two general heads; the end of our Saviour's temptation, and the circumstances of it. To these let me now invite your attention. They are serious, and instructive points, and deserve to be well understood.

Why, first, was our Saviour exposed to the assaults of Satan; why did He endure the abasement in the wilderness?

We may justly view it as one end of this surprising occurrence in our Saviour's life, that He who was to be the sacrifice for sin, should be shown to be without sin. The law required for the Passover a lamb without blemish. This was typical of the spotless purity which should be found in "the Lamb of God," who should "take away the sin of the world^a." The High Priest, who offered the Jewish atonement, needed expiation for himself; the sacrifice was made for him, as well as the people; it was offered every year continually, and could never have effectually put away sin. That our Saviour might offer Himself, once for all, and by the sacrifice expiate the guilt of man; it was necessary that He should owe nothing on His own account to the law, but be a pure and spotless Being. In the temptation He passed the trial. It was a furnace in which, if there had been one particle of dross in His nature, it would have been ascertained. But He came out of the fire, which He submitted to endure, unsullied and all perfect, a Lamb of infinite value for its infinite purity. As such, He was worthy to be accepted

^a John i. 29.

of the Father; as such, our obligation to Him is rendered the greatest possible; and that He, as such, was made the price of our redemption, should fill us with abhorrence of vice.

Again. It was desirable that as the Adam, who involved us in ruin, fell a victim to the artifice of the prince of darkness; the heavenly Adam, who was to restore us to life and blessedness, should triumph over the adversary and foil his arts. When man transgressed, he brought upon himself the tyranny of the tempter. The rebel angel exulted in his subjection. Temptation was the weapon of his success with the sons of men, and in his shrewd management of it, he placed his glory. To free us from the dominion, as well as the punishment of sin, was a grand object of the Gospel dispensation. The Saviour appeared, not only to save us from the death that awaited us, but to break the yoke which held us in bondage. Before His advent, the power of Satan was great over men: from possessions, he had power over their bodies: oracles and soothsayings attest his influence upon their minds. It was therefore necessary, that the Captain of our deliverance should break his power, and destroy his haughty triumph over fallen man. To have redeemed us, and left his sceptre unbroken, would have been a less glorious work, than crushing the rebel power that had beguiled man from God, and held him in ignominious servitude. Evinced Himself, every way, adequate to the salvation He had undertaken for us, He met the foe; He withstood the bold assault; He put the fiend to flight, and, "as in Adam all" fell, "so in Christ" all triumphed^b. Perhaps, this was the period in His life to which He alluded: "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven^c." If so, it

^b 1 Cor. xv. 22.

^c Luke x. 18.

was the foundation of that joy with which His disciples said to Him, “ Lord, even the devils are subject to us ^d ;” and of that promise, by which we are assured, that against His “ Church the gates of hell shall not prevail ^e .”

Another reason for the temptation which Christ submitted to endure was, that it behoved Him to be made in all things like unto His brethren, and to leave them a full and perfect example. It is one considerable part of the calamity to which the Fall reduced us, that we must meet such trials; that we must withstand such conflicts; that, with our extended prospect, the vigilance required is greater. Adam had but one alluring object to withstand: his offspring have thousands. No man, I believe, is insensible, how much his nature suffers from its liability to many and strong temptations. It is, undoubtedly, a just consequence of the first deviation from rectitude, founded upon that principle of the Divine government, upon which the strength of the faithful is increased, and the difficulties of the negligent multiplied, “ He that hath, to him shall be given; and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath ^f . The adorable Redeemer chose to share all our griefs, and taste all our sorrows. The conflicts of virtue with the foe are not among the least, and how these conflicts might best be managed, man needed to be taught. Infinite abasement! The Son of God consented, in order to “ bring in” for us “ an everlasting righteousness ^g ,” to be, like us, assaulted by temptation. In His resistance we see that man is not necessarily subdued by the greatest trials. He may resist, till the tempter shall flee. Our Saviour’s example and triumph are, in

^d Luke x. 17.

^f Mark iv. 25.

^e Matth. xvi. 18.

^g Dan. ix. 24.

this point of view, of inestimable value. The vicious they deprive of the blasphemous plea, “ We are delivered to do all these abominations ^b ;” and the good man they furnish with an encouragement, without which he might halt, and sigh on his difficult way, and perhaps despair. Life is indeed a wilderness. Innumerable temptations assault our frailty. They take us often in our feeblest hours. But with “ the Captain of our salvation ⁱ” before us, we are inexcusable if we yield without resistance. With His success recorded for our instruction, we cannot honourably compromise with evil, or be less persevering than the foe.

Once more. It was a principal object of our Saviour’s temptation, that we might thus be made happy in the knowledge of a High Priest and Judge, capable of feeling what our difficulties are, and making that tender allowance for our frailty, which the best men need. “ In that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted ^k.” Destined to be our Judge hereafter, as well as our Saviour already, nothing can more comfort us under the apprehension of His coming, than that He was in our nature, has a sympathy for all its sufferings, and knows the arduousness of the conflict which His disciples endure. Our Intercessor in heaven, as heretofore our visible High Priest, nothing can more inspire us with affectionate confidence in His offices, than the assurance, that “ He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ^l ;” and know from experience, what are the graces which He needs to ask for us of the Father. To give us hope in the expectation of such a Judge, and joy in the intercession of such a Mediator, our

^b Jer. vii. 10.

^k Heb. ii. 18.

ⁱ Heb. ii. 10.

^l Ibid. iv. 15.

Redeemer partook of all the trials of humanity, even of the strong and complex temptations, with which our adversary the devil seeketh to destroy. By this we are made sensible, that the laws He has enjoined us, are not severe, nor formed without regard to our weakness and exposures. It teaches us to trust, that acquainted with the struggles which those must have, who resist evil, He will adjust His gifts to their necessities. And it fills us with the composing thought, that He who shall come in majesty to allot our final doom, will be One, sensible of our frailty and difficulties, and capable of judging us with infinite mercy and truth. "We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need^m."

The other point proposed, as completing all that it concerns us to consider upon this subject, now solicits our attention; namely, the circumstances of the event whose end we have ascertained.

These are many, and of an instructive nature. We shall take them without reference to the order of time, and in our explication of them be guided by the best authorities.

In the first place, we observe the character of the being who assailed the Son of God. It was the devil, emphatically styled *the Tempter*. By this being, mentioned in the Scripture under different names, we are ever to understand the head of apostates from God; the contriver and finisher of all mischief. That angels and invisible beings are permitted to have interference with the affairs of this world, is a doctrine to be found in the ancient traces of tradi-

^m Heb. iv. 15, 16.

tion, and explicitly taught us in the word of God. These spirits are good and bad. While the hosts of God encamp around us, for our protection, the archfiend who left his holy state “walketh about, seeking whom he may devourⁿ.” No more is revealed to us of the history of these invisible beings, than is sufficient to inform us, that there are fallen ones among them, and that we are obnoxious to their malignity. Debased themselves, seeking by the conduct of other beings to apologize for their own villainess, envying the happiness of the upright, they seek to sully the pure, and have bent their arts for the destruction of man. The prince of these powers of darkness, too successfully, alas, assailed the innocence of Eden; and wishing to blast the means of restoration, he attacked the great Redeemer in the wilderness.

Here it is questioned, whether the tempter knew, that the person whom he assaulted, was the Son of God. Considering the temptation as part of the plan of redemption and instruction adopted by God, it to me appears a matter of no consequence, whether he did or did not. But says the objector, if he did, how foolish the story; the subtil fiend would never have attempted, where he could not have expected any thing, but defeat and disgrace. There is more of sound than sense in this remark. Bad men, whose understandings are perverted, and whose malice is intense, often essay the most foolish projects: and it will be difficult to conceive any thing too bold, or extravagant, for the devil to undertake. On many accounts, however, it is probable, that the tempter only suspected, but was not indubitably certain of the high character of Christ. Both his suspicions and his doubts seem to be ex-

ⁿ 1 Pet. v. 8.

pressed by his repeated address, "If thou be the Son of God^o." That the invisible spirits did not wholly comprehend the mysteries of the redemption, which God designed to effect for man, is evident from many passages of Scripture.—"Which things the angels desire to look into^p."—"That now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God^q." But, that man was to be redeemed, and that it was for this purpose Messiah was born into the world, they clearly understood. Witness their carols on the night of His birth, and the joy which, our Saviour assures us, they feel in heaven, when one sinner repenteth. Of this knowledge, it is probable, the tempter partook. He had observed the prophecies, for, a genuine deceiver, he could quote Scripture to conceal his baseness. He had seen the moment of Christ's birth, and heard the acknowledgment of Him by angels, sages, and men. He, therefore, could not but have had some conception of the office, and business of Christ, if he was ignorant of His character. Finding Him hungry in a wilderness, his suspicion of His high dignity, as the Son of God, wavered. He madly thought to prove Him. The moment was favourable. If he could draw Him into sin, he should triumph over the Being who was intended to "bruise his head^r," and confirm the mischievous work he had accomplished in the garden. Thus thinking, he entered the wilderness, and, doubtless in some friendly form and beguiling air, accosted the lonely Saviour.

This appears to be the truth of the case. The father of mischief, the chief of apostates, he who was

^o Matt. iv. 3. 6.

^q Eph. iii. 10.

^p 1 Pet. i. 12.

^r Gen. iii. 15.

thrust from heaven and had ruined man, in deceitful form assaulted Christ. Of His divinity he had suspicions. Of His designation to recover man he had no doubt. He thought by one mad effort to try Him, if, haply, he might again defeat the conditional counsel of Heaven, as it respected the happiness of the human race.

And what may we infer, from this circumstance of the event? First, a confirmation of the humanity of Christ. The Godhead, His divine nature, was unapproachable by temptations; especially, by such as were borrowed from earthly scenes, and addressed to worldly desires. The ancient heretics, who denied the humanity of Christ, were quite as inconsiderate, though not so impious, as the modern ones who deny His Divinity. They must have forgotten the hungering of the Saviour, and neglected to advert to the truth, that the Godhead cannot be tempted. In this incident, we have a proof that He was made like unto us, that He partook of the nature of her who bare Him.

From this circumstance of our Saviour's temptation we may also learn, that to such trials and assaults the best men are liable. The Author of our hopes was made "perfect through sufferings⁵." The adversary was not distanced by His excellence. He endured the conflict with inducements to evil. He waged the warfare with sin. Let none of His disciples, then, expect to be exempt. Can they be so faithful, as to merit no chastisement? Can they be so good, as to need no trial? Can they be so perfect, as to be above the reach of the prince of darkness? Let them, rather, expect to have severe trials allotted them, and while they stand, "take heed lest they fall⁶."

⁵ Heb. ii. 10.

⁶ 1 Cor. x. 12.

Lastly ; from this circumstance we learn the great malevolence of the tempter. This was sufficiently seen at the fall of man. Terrible must be that malice, which could set its eye upon innocence and happiness, like that for which our race was formed, and seek to destroy it. But when we behold the chief of the “ principalities and powers” with whom, St. Paul says, we “ wrestle “, assaulting the very Son of God, and endeavouring to overthrow the deep and gracious counsel of redemption ; nothing can give us a stronger sentiment of the turpitude and malignity of him, and his fallen race. Heinous must have been the apostacy, which could render an order of angels so depraved. It should keep us ever awake against his insidious wiles ; and alarm us at the depth of depravity, to which a nature become sinful, and left to itself, may sink. “ Be sober, be vigilant ; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour x.”

“ Eph. vi. 12.

x 1 Pet. v. 8.

SERMON XXXIV.



ON THE TEMPTATION.



ST. MATTHEW, iv. 2.

And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.

HAVING, in a preceding discourse, ascertained the ends of our Saviour's temptation, and considered the nature and views of the tempter, who assaulted Him; I now would turn your attention to another illustrious circumstance; one that, by churchmen, should be well understood. It is the fast, which Christ observed in the wilderness, previous to the open attack of the adversary. All three of the Evangelists, who have recorded this incident of our Saviour's life, inform us, that He continued fasting for "forty days," before the commencement of the temptations which they relate. St. Matthew's words, as being the most explicit, I have placed at the head of this discourse. "And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward an hungred."

It will first be asked by our minds, why the Son of God fasted at all? He had no sins to expiate by this penance; nor had He any unruly desires to re-

strain by this self-denial. Why, then, did He withdraw from the gay scenes of life, and subject Himself to this fast? Let us adjust our ideas of this attendant circumstance of His temptation, and, then, we may discover reasons to satisfy the mind.

By His fasting, we are not to understand the mere abstinence from food, or denial of gratification, to craving appetites. He was not "an hungred," till the forty days were ended. He felt no wish nor want for sustenance, during that time. His fasting, therefore, did not consist in a restraint put upon the cravings of nature. It is rather to be considered as signifying a withdrawing into retirement, that He might give Himself to serious meditation, earnest prayer, and the most ardent devotion. To assist Him in these, He became wholly free from the indulgences of life, sought the wilderness, and was absorbed in pious reflections and acts. This seems to be the true idea of His fasting. Indeed the word is often used in the sacred volume, to express humiliation and prayer, in conjunction with abstinence; and the latter, considered but as a help to the former. In this sense, there are purposes in a virtuous life, for which it is necessary. Our Saviour used it the night before He selected His disciples. He declared that one kind of miracle was not to be effected without fasting and prayer. We find innumerable instances of the use of it, by the servants of God, to His acceptance and their benefit. Mere abstinence itself can have no merit. Unless it be necessary to assist our devotions and virtue, it is idle "to afflict our souls^a." But in conjunction with humiliation and prayer, as their assistant, it is of high commendation in the word of God. If, with this idea of fasting, we follow our Saviour into the wilderness, we shall see satisfactory reasons for His miraculous fast.

^a Isa. lviii. 5.

These reasons appear to be reducible to two: that He might prepare Himself for the mighty work in which He was about to engage; and qualify Himself to withstand the temptations by which He was to be assaulted.

One object of our Saviour's fasting was to prepare Himself for the mighty work in which He was about to engage. He had just received baptism of John, and by a voice from heaven had been proclaimed the Son of the Most High. He now was to enter upon His ministry. A work of such solemnity and magnitude was not to be undertaken lightly nor rashly. It was a work in which infinite interests were involved; in which He had much to do, and much to suffer. Impressed with its magnitude, He withdrew. In solitude He sought the Father. He gave Himself to fasting, meditation, and prayer, that He might come forth with strength, and be prepared for the mighty business in which He was to engage. Thus had the Prophets and Saints done before Him. Thus did He before He chose and delegated His disciples. The Father had declared that a fast, which did not consist merely in afflicting the soul, was by Him approved. Our Saviour, therefore, exemplified in His fast the dictates of religion and reason, and in this example instructed mankind to forbear entering upon sacred or important sanctions, without serious reflection and communion with God.

But it may be considered, as another reason of our Saviour's fasting, that He would be in the best condition to meet the temptations by which He was to be assaulted. We read, that it was for the purpose of being tempted, that the Spirit impelled Him to go into the wilderness^b. It was impossible that, as Immanuel, He could be overcome by the tempter. But in His moral life He conducted Himself wholly,

^b Mark i. 12.

as man, that He might be our perfect pattern. The circumspection, self-examination, serious reflection, and humble prayer, which constitute the substance of the fast which the Lord hath chosen, are the best preservatives from vice and folly. “Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation^c.” To teach His followers, who, He knew, would be exposed to vice, how best to strengthen themselves against her assaults, He, as a man, prepared Himself for the temptations which awaited Him, by this timely fast. By collecting Himself in retirement, and seeking strength of the Most High, he was well qualified to meet and vanquish the foe, and in this point left “us an example that we should follow his steps^d.”

But notwithstanding these reasons do away the difficulty, which we conceived might be started, why the Son of God fasted at all; notwithstanding they show us the perfection of our exemplar, and an admirable wisdom in the selection of the time, there arises another question relative to this conduct of our Lord. Where was the necessity of His fasting “forty days?” The purposes which have been mentioned, might have been accomplished in a shorter period. Indeed, in this prolonged fast, He cannot be our example. Nature is not equal to it. In Him it was miraculous. Why, then, the unmerited solitariness and fast of Christ for “forty days?”

This question will unfold to us one of the chief beauties of the Divine dispensations. “Known unto God are all His works from the beginning^e.” They are all connected. Harmony pervades the whole. In the economy of nature, it is delightful to trace the analogies between different parts, to see one operation leading on another; to observe in the less,

^c Mark xiv. 38.

^d 1 Pet. ii. 21.

^e Acts xv. 18.

true emblems of the greater, and to mark, how all parts together form one august whole. In the economy of grace, most analogous to that of nature, it is not less delightful, to study the connection of remote parts, the gradations by which the uniform sublime whole is unfolded. Types, ordinances, prophecies, form links by which most distant events are connected: and doubtless, when our souls shall contemplate the reasons and completion of the whole scheme, they will behold a more affecting display of the Divine character, than even the august system of nature exhibits.

This seemingly strange circumstance of our Saviour's fasting, for no less nor greater time than "forty days and forty nights," acquires wonderful propriety and use, when viewed in conjunction with previous events in the Divine dispensations. When Moses, the promulgator of the Law, was preparing in Mount Sinai the two tables of commandments which God gave to His people, it is related of him, that "he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights, and did neither eat bread, nor drink water^f." He fasted that the people might be forgiven, and received into Divine favour: he was engaged in close converse with the Lord, who alone was with him in the Mount, and, having been miraculously sustained in life without food, he would descend to the people with a convincing attestation of his authority.

When Elijah, the restorer of the law, and recoverer of the people from idolatry and ruin, was qualified by the Deity for his arduous work, we are told, that he went through the wilderness "in the strength of" one refreshment "forty days and forty nights^g." Thus assured of the Divine power, with or without

^f Exod. xxxiv. 28.

^g 1 Kings xix. 8.

means, to strengthen and support him, he pursued his route “unto Horeb, the mount of God:” and having received the instructions of Jehovah, entered upon the delegation of officers, and the reformation of the people.

These two most eminent of the instruments of the Almighty, in conducting His Divine dispensations, were illustrious types of Christ. And as they each were in the wilderness “forty days and forty nights,” without eating or drinking preparatory to their work; it behoved Him, whose authority was greatly to be attested by His uniting in His life a wonderful fulfilment of innumerable prophetic types, to observe a similar fast. Why the term “forty days and forty nights” was preferred at first, we are unable to determine. The Jewish Rabbins have some vague conjectures about it. But it is best to refer it to the choice, and inscrutable wisdom of God. If we consider that the waters of the Deluge were “forty days and forty nights” coming upon the earth^h: that “forty years” the Israelites did penance “in the wildernessⁱ:” that “forty stripes” were the appointed punishment for malefactors^k: that “forty days” were allowed the Ninevites to repent^l: that forty years from the ascension of our Saviour, impenitent Jerusalem received her punishment: that Moses, Elijah, and Jesus Christ, fasted, each, “forty days and forty nights,” we must admire the uniformity of the Divine economy, and believe that this period was not without reason so singularly distinguished. It chiefly concerns us, however, to dwell on the fulfilment of the ancient types in Christ. This will satisfy us, why He fasted for this particular space of time. As Moses and Elias, by being

^h Gen. vii. 12.

^k Deut. xxv. 3.

ⁱ Numb. xiv. 34.

^l Jon. iii. 4.

thus sustained miraculously, were assured of the Divine sufficiency for their aid ; so Christ, in like manner, was animated to meet His temptations, and to fulfil His ministry, by the assurance of the power of the Divine, to sustain His human nature, without the use of food or rest. As their miraculous sustentation attested their mission, His qualified Him to enter on His work with high authority. By His fulfilment of remote types which, under the law, foretold in figure His advent and offices, we have a resistless proof, that it is He “ of whom Moses in the law, and the Prophets, did write ^m ;” in whom all the arrangements, symbols, and mysteries of the Divine economy meet their explanation and significance. When we thus see the connection between the parts of revelation, from the first communication from Jehovah to the promulgation of the Gospel ; when we behold little matters rising in consequence, as emblems of greater ones ; when we observe all tending to form one complex yet uniform, one stupendous yet clear system ; we cannot but infer, as we do, from the harmony, design, and order of the works of nature, that one is the Author, and one the end of the whole ; the Author God, the end His glory in the happiness of His creatures.

^m John i. 45.

SERMON XXXV.

ON THE TEMPTATION.

ST. MATTHEW, iv. 2.

And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.

UPON the subject of our Saviour's temptation, which has already occupied much of our attention, we come now to consider the particular enticements, which the tempter used, and our Exemplar withstood. From the contemplation of them many useful hints will arise, for they were such temptations as are common to man, most insidiously adduced and powerfully urged.

When the Messiah had ended His fast, the so timely, proper, and significant fast of "forty days;" the sacred records inform us, "He was afterward an hungred." Here some may stop to wonder that the Son of God should be capable of being hungry; especially after enduring, without wish or need for food, a fast of so long duration. But if He had suffered hunger before the forty days and nights, His fast, as to its typical and miraculous nature, would not have been complete; *He* would not have derived from it so full assurances, and its uses to *us* would have been curtailed. And if He had continued free from hunger, after nature was restored to her usual

course, and the Divine power withdrawn which sustained her without the usual or any means, we could hardly have believed Him man. He had taken upon Him our nature, with all its natural infirmities, liabilities to pain, and mortality. Without continual nourishment this nature fails, and craves, and feels indescribable torture. He then, after passing forty days and nights without taking any food, when the miracle which had supported Him ceased, if He were human, must have felt all the gnawings of appetite panting for nourishment with unmanageable cries. Besides, to wish and want for lack of food, to suffer pain, is one of the dire consequences of the first transgression. Before the Fall, if man felt the smallest inclination to solace his palate, he any where stretched forth his hand, and gathered salubrious food. Nature, the moment she indicated a wish for sustenance, was gratified. Hunger, that most wearisome of bodily sensations, that feeling which every man dreads, and no one who has not felt its tortures, and witnessed the horrid expedients to which it has sometimes driven men, can well express;—hunger was not known in Eden. It is an ingredient in the bitter cup, which fallen Adam devolved upon mankind, to be their portion while they continue in his nature. To drink the dregs of this cup, to carry all our griefs, was a determination of the Saviour's love. That He might be "in all things like His brethren^a," and by enduring all the painful consequences of sin open to man that heaven, whose inhabitants "shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more^b," nor be liable to any more death; the Son of God Himself, though "all the beasts of the forest" were His, and "the cattle upon a thousand hills^c," submitted to endure the pains of hunger. In a lone desert, without

^a Heb. ii. 17.

^b Rev. vii. 16.

^c Ps. l. 10.

one visible creature to commiserate and assist Him; nor any apparent possibility of immediate relief, His sensations of hunger must have been excessively keen. This species of humiliation and distress He experienced, in as great a degree, as any of the race whom He came to relieve, even the most destitute wretch in the humblest vale of poverty. But as He was led into the wilderness to be tempted, His experience of this kind of human misery, at that particular time, answered a useful end. It gave an opportunity to the tempter of making the trial of His obedience under the greatest advantage. And, accordingly, it was while Christ was suffering the pangs of hunger, in a most dismal, barren place, that he determined to accomplish his purposes.

“ And when the tempter came to Him, he said, If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread^d.” Never was a temptation more advantageously timed, or cunningly urged than this. Christ was experiencing uneasy sensations, for want of food to satisfy the cravings of nature. He had no immediate prospect of relief. The wilderness was barren, and uninhabited; save by ferocious beasts. Insidiously the tempter argues, Surely, if Thou art the Son of God, it is strange Thou shouldst be left thus destitute. Thou must have power to convert these stones into bread, and, certainly, Thy necessities will justify the act. Either Thou art unable, and a poor outcast from God, or Thou canst relieve Thyself as I advise, without incurring His blame who placed Thee in this situation. How many enticements to wrong can be gilded with plausibility by a depraved mind! But our Saviour discovers in this seemingly just and friendly expostulation, a temptation to gross sin. It would lead Him, with-

^d Matt. iv. 3.

out His Father's will, to endeavour, unnecessarily, to prove His Sonship, and to relieve His necessities by unauthorized means. The former was to distrust the truth, and the latter the good providence, of God. To render Christ guilty of this distrust, to shake His faith in God, and in His own character, was the object of the tempter's first proposal. Had he succeeded in this, the foundation of duty, of worth, of strength, of every thing excellent in Christ, would have been destroyed, and by this one blow the enemy would have defeated the counsels of Heaven, and destroyed the last, best hopes of man. Recurring to the real source of wisdom and truth for His defence, our Saviour with infinite dignity replied, "It is written," the word of God, the only proper rule of conduct, declares, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." By recurring to the Scriptures, He instructed us that they are the only proper rule of belief and life, and by recurring to the Old Testament, He taught us that whatever was morally right in the Jewish dispensation, as distinct from their ceremonial and political institutes, is binding upon Christians, and of perpetual obligation.

It is remarkable that the passage to which the Saviour referred, is a declaration to the Israelites, respecting the gracious appearance of the Most High for them, when they were an hungred in the wilderness, in which they sojourned forty years. Moses, recounting to them the events which they had witnessed, reminds them that the Almighty "humbled them, and suffered them to hunger, that He might prove them, and know what was in their hearts, whether they would keep His commandments or

* Matt. iv. 4.

no' ;" and that when they were hungry, and unable in the wilderness to obtain food, His providence came to their relief, in a miraculous supply of such bread, as neither they nor their fathers had known, " that He might make them know, that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord, doth man live^g." They were first left to hunger, and then satisfied, not by usual means, but by a supernatural supply, that they might be impressed with this grand eternal truth, that the providence of God should be man's trust in every exigence, by whose blessing alone food has power to sustain us, and who can by any other means, or by His word alone, as effectually uphold us in being.

From this passage our Saviour chose the reply with which He foiled the first attack of the adversary. It met and answered all he had advanced. Infinite and incessant are the truth, and goodness, and power of the word of Jehovah. It is this word, which gives to every thing its being, and its efficacy. This had declared Him His Son ; this had placed Him in a situation of hunger ; this could relieve Him when it was fit ; and, without this, no substance whatever could nourish or affect Him. To have attempted a miracle, then, without His Father's will, to prove His character or to relieve His wants, would have been indicative of disbelief and distrust in the word of God. To have done it, solely at the instigation of Satan, without prospect of any benefit, was incompatible with His Divine nature, and would have been an aggravation of the fault. He might justly have answered, Confirmation of My character, as the Son of God, I need not for Myself. No one is here to witness it but yourself, and on you it

^f Deut. viii. 2.

^g Ibid. ver. 3.

would be lost. But He deigned not to consider the suspicious suggestion, with which the tempter introduced and urged his expostulation. The thing he advised was in itself wrong, and ineligible; and nothing could make it right, or necessary. He, therefore, spoke immediately to the advice, and, instructing while He repelled His foe, answered to this effect: I am indeed distressed with hunger; it is an allotment to human nature; the Almighty can convert it to some good end; could I, without His will or blessing, obtain bread, it would be useless or injurious; He can supply My wants, and in His own good time will come to My relief; "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." The answer was as complete, as the temptation was insidious, and the tempter, confounded, urged his first expostulation no more.

Having now seen the point, at which the tempter aimed his first assault upon the Messiah; namely, His faith in the truth and good providence of God, he will pause and observe the instructive lessons it conveys. It has already been observed that the temptations which Christ encountered, were such as are common to men. With us, as with our Lord, the tempter's first effort and wish is, to excite our distrust in the promises and providence of the Most High, and thus destroy the foundation of all goodness and peace.

There are two ways, in which men are most liable to fall into this most dangerous temptation. The first is, when they are led to believe that they are outcasts from the Almighty, utterly excluded from His care, and reprobated from the beginning to misery. There are some, whose adversaries, whose gloomy imaginations, whose terrible apprehensions of the requisitions of the Most High, or whose un-

fortunate choice of books and company, have rendered them victims of this despondence. When those who strive to believe, and live according to the requisitions of the Gospel, thus droop under the thought, that they have not, and can have no interest in the care and mercies of God; we can in no way account for it, but that they are urged into this distrust by the adversary, who endeavoured in this way to destroy the integrity of Job^h, and, with a similar temptation, tried the Redeemer of the world. Such should consider, that the proffers of happiness depend not on their own feelings, but upon the infinite and unchangeable love of the Most High. They should reflect, that the offers of peace and joy are general, made to all, not excepting any but those who choose to except themselves. Let them seek and cultivate a sincere faith in Christ, and endeavour, in every duty, to walk uprightly; and, then, if distressed with the thought of being irrevocably, and unconditionally cast off by the Creator, and reprobated to eternal misery, let them consider it as suggested with evil design by the enemy of man's happiness and his Maker's glory, and recurring, like their Saviour, for an instrument of defence, to the storehouse of all truth, repel the insidious suggestion with, "It is written," "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast outⁱ." Can the sad victim of despair, in this way, gain no gleam of comfort? If we may hope, does it seem strange, why the thought which depresses him has such hold of his mind? Let him look up, and behold even the Immanuel urged by the grand seducer, to infer from His dismal condition when hungry in the wilderness, that His Father had abandoned Him, that He could not be the Son of God. If, notwithstanding this, he can see nothing

^h Job ii. 3, &c.

ⁱ John vi. 37.

but displeasure and wretchedness for himself, let him resolve, as the safest experiment he can make, and the most prudent conduct he can pursue, to comply with this advice of a venerable divine of our church, to the unhappy children of despair: ‘ In thy strongest encounter, wait still on Christ till He comes, and commit thyself in well doing into His hands, as into the hands of “ a faithful Creator ^k :” say with Esther, “ I will go in unto the king ;—if I perish, I perish ^l :” it may be he will reach out his sceptre graciously, and I shall live ; but if I must needs perish, I will perish under the wing of my lord and husband. This advice is inimitably tender and judicious. Would heaven, it were followed by every human being ! All men would then be, indeed, saved ; for none that shall be found under the wing of the Redeemer, can possibly be lost. They only shall perish, who, when with the most affectionate entreaties He would have “ gathered them, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, would not ^m ;” but gave themselves to follow their own devices, and to walk after the counsels of their own minds.

Another and more common way, in which men are led to distrust the good providence of God, is, when they are filled with dissatisfaction with their condition, and are prompted to the use of any unlawful means. If they are urged into any wrong, thinking that their necessities will justify it ; if they aim at the attainment of any good by sinful means ; if they neglect patiently to pursue the paths which the Deity has marked, and resolve to accomplish their wishes by their own devices ; or if, in their necessity, they look any where for help but to the Almighty, then are they guilty of that, to which the enemy tempted Christ. Dreadful is your situation ; loud are ~~the~~

^k 1 Pet. iv. 19.

^l Esth. iv. 16.

^m Matt. xxiii. 37.

calls of nature ; you must, and ought, to live and do well by yourself ; your situation will justify it ; are arguments which have led to many a nefarious act. Those who are influenced by them, might with equal rectitude in time of hunger, be led to despise the care of Providence, and induced to command stones to be made bread. It is Machiavelian morality ; it is among the basest of atheistical principles, that ‘ the end will justify the means.’ Nothing which is in itself wrong, can, by adventitious circumstances, be made right. Our duty is to consider all means as efficacious, only through God’s blessing ; and to seek them conformably with His will. In whatever situation we are placed, we should not have our assurance of His constant agency shaken, nor in a fit of despair murmur at His allotments, and think by our own expedients to anticipate His time. Are we pressed by most urgent reasons, the support of life ; the safety of reputation ; the care of a family ; the cause of benevolence ? If we cannot accomplish these or any other objects, without deviating from rectitude, it is better with virtuous resolution, to leave the issue to the providence of God. He allows not means to be improperly used ; it is not by bread alone but by His word we live : He can, therefore, come to our relief, in ways unexpected and gracious. With Christ, then, we should not prefer our own efforts to the power of His providence. Safe is our reliance on Him to the last emergence ; for if He smite the flinty rock, water shall flow to refresh the thirsty, and He can rain manna from heaven for His faithful people, when hunger seizes them in the wilderness.

SERMON XXXVI.

ON THE TEMPTATION.

ST. MATTHEW, iv. 5—11.

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

ALREADY we have considered the end of our Saviour's temptation; and among the circumstances of it, the character of the tempter, the fast which Christ endured in the wilderness, and the nature and issue of the enemy's first assault. Rebuffed, as we left him, in his attempt to draw the Messiah into a distrust of the truth and good providence of God, he framed another scheme of an opposite nature. Though vanquished, he did not desist from his purpose, but

pursued it another way : and on our Saviour's firm confidence in His Father grounded his second attack. It is thus that the best principles and motives, by being wrongly directed, are converted into causes of error and transgression.

The nature and issue of the second temptation, and the instructions it contains for us, now solicit our attention. The aim of it was to excite Him, who would not *distrust*, to *presume* upon, the word and power of God ; and, because He placed no reliance in the efficacy of means without the Divine blessing, to scorn the appointed use of them, and cast Himself against nature and reason, without any effort or precaution of His own, upon the misconstrued promises of the Most High.

To give opportunity and plausibility to this temptation, the sacred historian relates ; “ then the devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple.” Upon the mode in which Christ was brought to this situation, there have been many inquiries, and many opinions. Some expositors of high character, have supposed that the whole temptation was transacted in vision, and that the tempter only raised in the mind of Christ an illusive scene of Jerusalem, and the temple. But the narratives of all the Evangelists evidently give to the transaction the face of reality ; and the supposition of an ideal management is, at least, arbitrary, if not unnecessary. Other writers have understood that the evil spirit, by the permission of the Most High, had power over the body of Christ, and conveyed Him from the wilderness to the temple, miraculously, through the air. This opinion is the most general, and the commentators who advance it, are of the most respectable authority. But there is another solution proposed by an eminent divine, and adopted by many, which, though it has not the

greatest number of advocates, is to me, I confess, the most satisfactory. It is this; that the tempter, being in some friendly form, is said to take Christ up into the holy city, as a man is said to take his neighbour to any place, when he persuades him to accompany him thither; and to set Christ upon a pinnacle of the temple, as in common language we are said to seat a person, when we conduct him to his seat; or to place him when we lead him to his position. The word rendered in the translation "taketh," is used, by the best profane writers, to express the act of a person when leading a companion from one place to another. It often, too, has this signification in the sacred volume; and this use of it is indisputable in one passage, which is very analogous to the text. When the three favoured disciples were conducted by their Lord up a mountain, that they might witness His transfiguration, it is written, then, "Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain*." It will not be here supposed that they were supernaturally carried by Christ, but that, going Himself, at His instigation they accompanied Him to the spot, which He had selected for the august display of His character. In like manner, without the difficulties of conceiving the scene of this temptation to be only imaginary, or the Son of God to be transported in the hands of the devil, through a long tract of air; we may naturally, and in strict conformity with the usual, and almost invariable sense of the phrase, in the original of the text, suppose the tempter to have attended Christ from the desert to the holy city, invited Him into the temple, and conducted Him up to its battlements. This seems to be an adequate and natural way of explaining, how our Saviour was

* Matt. xvii. 1.

taken by His adversary to the holy city, and placed in the situation upon the temple, in which the text represents Him. It is objected, how, then, was He tempted in the wilderness? Though tempted there after forty days, none of the Evangelists say, that the wilderness was the only scene of the three particular assaults, which they have recorded. Nor is this objection avoided, by supposing Him conveyed in any other way to the pinnacle of the temple. It is also objected to this solution, that St. Luke, after relating the temptation, says, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee^b." He does so. But he must be considered as meaning, that He returned from the place where the tempter left Him. This was on the summit of the exceeding high mountain, where He repelled the last assault, respecting which there is no certainty that it lay in the wilderness; and, indeed, that mountain does not, to which tradition, at this day, points as the place, where the Messiah withstood the allurements of the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them. A greater difficulty arises, from the distance between the wilderness and Jerusalem, which upon the smallest calculation could not have been less than twelve miles. This is, indeed, a considerable distance for our Lord to have travelled, situate as He was. But, of opinions, all of which are attended with some difficulties to finite minds, a wise man will ever adopt that which has the fewest and least.

But I urge not the opinion, nor dwell longer upon the criticism. You will pardon the introduction of it. It originated from a desire to show to the thoughtless scoffers at this part of His life, in whom we believe, that it may, without force or sophistry, be so explained, as to appear neither so wonderful

^b Luke iv. 14.

as to be incredible, nor so strange as to be ludicrous. After all, more time, perhaps, has been spent upon this point than it required. I preach to believers, to whom it is of less consequence to know, in what way their Saviour was conveyed to the battlement of the temple, than how He converted His situation into a place of triumph.

Christ had repelled the first temptation, with His full assurance of the power and goodness of God. Having brought Him to the lofty battlement on the top of the temple, the tempter's second aim was to draw Him into sinful presumption, by inducing Him to cast Himself down headlong, that He might thus prove the readiness of the Most High to save Him, and publicly evince Himself the Son of God. To enforce his expostulation, this father of hypocrites, as well as liars, this most subtle seducer, feigns a reverence for Scripture, and impiously imitating the wisdom of Christ, urges his temptation with, "It is written." What cause of shame to those, who, deeply interested in the sacred volume, are yet utterly ignorant of its contents! What a plain lesson to all, to judge no man to be certainly right and good, because he is well versed in the sacred volume, and can quote holy writ upon all occasions. The best things may be abused. Even Scripture may be perverted by the wicked. "If Thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for," says the tempter, "it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee; and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone."

It is the unceasing artifice of the enemy, to make men err by urging them to extremes. If they are not prodigal, they may be covetous. Though they fly the pleasures and dissipations of the fool, they may sink into the selfishness and austerity of the

monk. Though they do not despair under the threats and frowns of the Most High, they may become arrogant in His promises and smiles. So subtle is vice, so beset are we with evil, that our speed in recoiling from one error, may hurry us into another. How few of mankind do we behold travelling on steadily in the path, equidistant from all extremes, where virtue generally sojourns and peace is found. The temptations of the Saviour were such in their nature, as are common to men. He had just withstood the most powerful solicitations to distrust; while, full of confidence in the truth and good providence of God, the tempter hopes to seduce Him into presumption. The Most High is able to preserve Thee. He has promised to do it; "Cast Thyself down." But the Author of our religion was too calm and considerate to vibrate to extremes. The velocity with which He avoided evil, was under His own control. He knew the narrow line where virtue borders upon vice. It was a vain expectation, that He would not distinguish between faith and vanity, between trust and presumption. His regard for the Scriptures undiminished by the abuse of them, He recurs again to the treasures of truth for a weapon of defence; He finds it in the reproof of Moses to those, who, in the wilderness, demanded miraculous tokens that Jehovah was with them^c: and He, at once, repels the subtle deceiver with "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." This passage from the records of revelation showed at once, that, great and infallible as are the promises and power of God, no one may safely expose himself to danger, for no other purpose, than to be miraculously preserved; nor urge Him to anger, by seeking to try the extent of His goodness, and to extort from Him unnecessary

^c Deut. vi. 16.

evidences of His providence and power. While the answer rectified the Scripture which the tempter had perverted, and gave him his rebuff, it keenly reprimanded him for the work in which he was engaged. Vexed with the reproof, as well as disappointed in his wishes, he could not defend his exhortation, but hoped, alas ! like the infatuated Balak, to accomplish his nefarious project, by trying, yet again, “ in another place^d.”


Such was the second triumph of our Lord. The instructions which we derive from what has been said, are the exact contrast to those inferred from the nature and issue of the first temptation. That cautioned against despair, and the use of unlawful means ; this against presumption and the neglect of those means which are appointed. If we take hold of His promises, we presume ourselves His elect, and that nothing we can do can injure our future fate ; or, if under the cover of relying on the mercy of the Most High, we are careless how we live, assuring ourselves that the Angel of the Covenant must preserve us ; if we demand unnecessary miracles, try vain experiments, or expose ourselves boldly to danger, to prove the being and truth of the most High ; if in the pursuit of any end, temporal or spiritual, we neglect the means He has ordained, yet throw ourselves upon Him, and expect His help, what do we in all these things, but cast ourselves down, because “ it is written, He will give His angels charge over us ?” Our business is to be regular in observing the order, which the Deity has established in nature and in revelation ; to depend, indeed, for all things upon His blessing ; not seeking to snatch it from His hands, but in the channels in which He has appointed it to flow, humbly

^d Numb. xxiii, 13.


to strive for our own safety, expecting no supernatural aid from Him, till we have used the powers He has already given us. Around the good man, thus holding the virtuous tenor of his way, the heavenly hosts do indeed encamp, his safeguards and his friends^e. He will experience more than the fulfilment of all the promises of Heaven.

^e Ps. xxxiv. 7.

SERMON XXXVII.



ON THE TEMPTATION.



ST. MATTHEW, iv. 8—12.

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, all these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

AMONG the allurements which beguile mankind, ambition and pleasure hold out the strongest. Power and fame, wealth and gratification, are objects of such infatuating influence upon the minds of men, that they even blind them to the worth of virtue, and entice them from the path of duty without persuasion. These dangerous seducers may boast more triumphs in behalf of vice, than all the others employed in her service. To these the tempter resorted, when he had twice failed in his malignant attempts upon the Author of our salvation. More indefatigable than better beings, in a worse cause than they have to promote, this deceiver is not discouraged by ill success. Temptations seldom come single. By varying them, and urging them in suc-

cession, he thought to exhaust the virtue, and vanquish the resistance of the Son of God. He had endeavoured to excite Him to a distrust of the truth and good providence of His Father, but had failed. Finding Christ filled with immovable faith in His Father's power and love, he had thought to draw Him into heedless presumption. Here, too, he was rebuffed, and his defeat had brought with it vexatious reproof. Still, if he could with dazzling promises persuade our Saviour, to yield to him one offering of that worship and service, which is due only to the Most High, he should both provoke the Almighty to anger, who hath said, "My glory will I not give to another^a;" and exult in the homage of Him, who was designed to "bruise his head^b," and save mankind. But how should he beguile the circumspect Jesus into idolatry like this? He remembered that ambition, and the love of pleasure, were powerful principles in the human breast. By the aid of these, he had seduced the first human pair. And from among their deluded descendants these had brought him full many a victim. Haply, they might be found in the bosom of this Personage, and haply, He might be decoyed by splendid allurements, and weighty bribes. Accordingly he expends his utmost power in gilding his bait; from his store of lies he selects the most imposing, and of every circumstance which can promote his design, he takes advantage. What a satire is his enterprise, activity, and perseverance, upon the supineness of men, in nobler and more profitable business! "Again," says the Evangelist, "the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them: and saith unto Him, All these

^a Isa. xlii. 8.

^b Gen. iii. 15.

things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me." Insolent spirit! that durst indulge such boldness and depravity. But it shall serve to burnish the character of the Messiah, and to teach the best men, that they may be tempted to heinous crimes. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall^c."

We left our Saviour, in our last discourse, triumphant upon the pinnacle of the temple. In the same way in which He was taken thither by the tempter, no doubt he was taken to the top of the mountain. The reasons which led to the conclusion, in the former case, that the mode of conveyance was natural, and not miraculous, are equally applicable to the latter case. As, when Abraham is said to take two of his young men, and Isaac his son, "unto the place of which God had told him^d," we understand only, that he induced them to go with him; and as, when Christ is said to take His disciples with Him to Jerusalem^e, we suppose no more, than that He conducted them thither: so it seems most natural, unexceptionable, and conformable with the use of the words, when the tempter is said to take our Lord from the holy city to the top of the mountain, to understand, that he conducted Christ thither, who was induced to accompany him by the impulses of the Spirit, which at first led Him into the wilderness to be tempted.

What mountain it was which the tempter chose as best suited to his design, it is not easy to determine. The Scriptures do not name, and but cursorily describe it as "an exceeding high mountain." From this circumstance, some have supposed it was Mount Ararat, on which the waters of the flood first

^c 1 Cor. x. 12.

^d Gen. xxii. 3.

^e Mark x. 32.

disappeared, and the ark rested ^f." But this lay quite in a distant part of the world; and there can be no reason for going so far for a mountain, when such lofty ones, with such august prospects, may be found in Palestine. Others have supposed that it was Mount Calvary, ever memorable for the place of the crucifixion of our Lord ^g. But Calvary was not a very high hill, and answers not the description in the text. Various other mountains, famed for some Scripture events, have been conjectured to be the same with that in the text: but the greatest number of expositors have resorted to the renowned Pisgah, from which Moses took his view of the extent, and glories of that promised land, which, alas! for his inadvertence, the anxious Prophet was not permitted to enter ^h. There is a mountain, which tradition has, to this day, consecrated as the scene of this temptation of Christ. It may be seen distinguished on the maps of the Holy Land, and is mentioned by the most reputable of modern travellers. This mountain, however, answers not to Pisgah, nor to any of those which have been mentioned. It is situate on the skirt of the plain of Jericho, about five hours moderate travelling from Jerusalem. There are, on its sides, the ruins of caves and huts, in which piety, shrouded in zeal, once passed an obscure life, but which now give a shelter to the wild Arab, who profits by Satan's expedient, exacting of superstition no small tribute, when she would take the view from its awful summit. This mountain, all travellers describe as exceeding high, and in allusion to Christ's temptation, the name it bears is Quarantania. Whether this be the real mount or not, I profess not to determine. It may, however, be generally remarked, that more credit is due to

^f Gen. viii. 4.

^g Luke xxiii. 33.

^h Deut. iii. 27.

ancient tradition, than to modern conjecture. But this benefit we may derive from having dwelt thus long upon this obscure, and, perhaps, unimportant point; it gives collateral confirmation to our belief. When places renowned for great, or singular events, are, from the time, distinguished; and through successive generations pointed at by tradition, as memorable for those very events, our confidence in the historian who relates them is strengthened: and, thus, even superstition is rendered serviceable to truth. Does it not increase our satisfaction in the life and works of Virgil, the Roman bard, that from the age when he is said to have lived, the classic genius was wont to tread lightly over Mantua? Does it not support our faith in the destruction of Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, that the place where they were overwhelmed, when pursuing Israel, has been for ages, and to this day is called, 'the pool of destruction?' It justly, then, may confirm our belief in the history of our Lord, that, desolate as is the country, and inhabited by heathens, the traveller yet hears at the foot of the Quarantania, the triumph of Christ upon its lofty summit; and finds almost an accurate account of His life, written by tradition, in the dust of the spots where the events of it happened.

But we must return to the evangelical narrative. When the tempter had brought our Lord to the top of this exceeding high mountain, "he showed Him," says the historian, "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them:" and saith unto Him, "all these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me." Here, the first inquiry of our minds will be, in what sense the tempter showed "all the kingdoms of the world?" From the orbicular form of the earth, it is impossible they should be brought into one view, to any person upon it; and,

if they could, no human eye would be adequate to the extensive survey. There are but two ways worthy of notice, in which this difficulty has been solved. One is, that the tempter presented to our Saviour's view, only an airy picture of the magnificence, wealth, and pleasures of "the kingdoms of the world;" something fictitious, which he was permitted to form for the occasion, and, which had all the effect of reality upon Christ. The other is, that the words rendered in our translation, "all the kingdoms of the world," being often used in a partial sense, here signify the kingdoms round about; and that the tempter, having taken our Saviour to a very lofty eminence, caused Him, at once, to behold a most delightful prospect of Palestine, which was "the glory of all landsⁱ;" its cities, palaces, riches and magnificence: and rendered them yet more alluring, by high wrought descriptions of glory and power, which could not be seen, and of honours and pleasures which would attach to him, who should have them in possession. Of these two expositions, the latter seems to me the best, and every way satisfactory. That the Greek phrase, which we translate "the world," is very frequently used, when the whole globe is not meant, is undeniable. Thus Augustus is said to have decreed, "that all the world should be taxed^k;" intending only, the dominions under the Roman empire. And Jehovah is said to have promised to Abraham, "that he should be the heir of the world^l," meaning the land of Canaan. If then we suppose the tempter to have placed Christ upon a mountain, from which He would, at once, be struck with the ravishing prospect of Judea, its pomp, its extent, and riches; and to have pointed out to Him the Roman provinces, and the

ⁱ Ezek. xx. 6.^k Luke ii. 1.^l Rom. iv. 13.

neighbouring territories: we shall do full justice to the original expression, without either forcing the passage, or finding ourselves perplexed. Upon a commanding situation the prospect would, at once, strike the eye, and the observer might well be said to see them in a moment, or instantaneously. And as power and glory seem to require to be described to the imagination, rather than placed before the sight, so the word "showeth," is very frequently used to convey the idea of description. When, thus, the difficulty may be solved; and the narrative so explicitly gives to the fact, the character of reality; I see not the necessity of resorting to an airy picture. There seems something forced, and unnecessary in it; and if we admit it here, what event in Scripture may not be declared to have been figurative, or fictitious? Indeed, upon this supposition, I see not the necessity nor use of selecting an exceeding high mountain, nor of carrying Christ to the top of it. An illusive scene could have been exhibited as well in a valley, or upon a plain. Besides, in interpreting this passage, and in all our labours, we have the example of our Creator and Preserver, never to resort to supernatural expedients, for the attainment of any end, which may as well be accomplished by natural ones.

But whichever way the tempter showed our Saviour "the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;" certain it is, he presented Him with such a view, as he thought sufficient to inflame His ambition, to infatuate His desires, and to prepare Him to grasp greedily at the dazzling offer, "All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me."

Idle! exclaims the thoughtless scoffer at sacred writ. Can any one suppose the evil spirit would be so stupid, as to expect that this, or any man would

believe he had these things, and the glory of them, at his disposal; or that the Son of God could, in any way, be induced to fall down and worship him? Opinions hastily adopted are often wrong. Sound judgment is the result of serious examination. If we consider the narrative candidly, and compare it with sentiments, at that time prevalent; we shall perceive that, notwithstanding the scoffs of those who love not revealed truth, this was as plausible and deeply insidious a temptation, as could have been devised.

In all nations, some traces may be found of a belief in tutelary beings, who watched and managed the affairs of countries, unseen, and had each his particular province. That the idea of Guardian Angels over the kingdoms of the earth, as well as over favoured individuals, was general among the Jews, is indisputable. It was not without sanction in their Scriptures. We read * of Michael and Gabriel, holding conference about the fate of Daniel's people; and our Saviour says, "The angels of the little ones do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven^m." If then, the tempter, who has all along been supposed to have disguised himself, under some friendly form, feigned himself the guardian of the kingdoms which he showed to Christ; this lover of lies might, with the most plausible assurance, declare they were at his disposal, and this seems the probable ground of the words, with which St. Luke relates he vouched his promise, "for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give itⁿ."

Further. The Jews were almost universally im-

* We read (2 Kings vi. 17.) of "horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha," when encompassed by the host of Syria.—Ed.

^m Matt. xviii. 10.

ⁿ Luke iv. 6.

pressed with the sentiment, that the Messiah would be a temporal prince, vested with all temporal pomp and power. This they gathered from the sublimely prophetic, but misconstrued descriptions in the sacred writings, of the extent of His kingdom and duration of His reign. With these, as with some other passages of Scripture the evil spirit was probably acquainted, whether he understood them or not. He, therefore, well might think that the kingdom of the Jews, with all temporal power and glory, were the most alluring objects he could hold out to the Messiah. In all human bosoms, there are passions which these may kindle into a ruinous flame. Are there not men, whom ambition for empire, and thirst for fame, wealth, and pleasure, could induce to worship God, Reason, Mahomet, or any thing else, which the attainment of their object required? Of the powerful sway of these passions, the tempter had often availed himself with the greatest success. How natural then, for him to think that if this were the Messiah, of whom the Jews mused, and He were in any point vulnerable, nothing would be so effectual as a proffer of “all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.”

As to the condition that He should do him homage, the most venerable Patriarchs, Prophets and men had felt sometimes impelled to prostrate themselves before good angels. Our Saviour had not yet discovered to His adversary, that He knew him; therefore he might hope, that his friendly appearance would justify the condition, and the greatness of the gifts and glory which he promised, induce the Messiah to worship him.

Thus we see, that, far from being unlikely, or stupid, this temptation was the most specious and powerful which this subtle deceiver ever devised. It prompted to the most debasing sin, and the mo

tives were disguised under the most insidious plausibility. It was the tempter's strongest effort, and no doubt, with all the horrid, hopeful anxiety, with which he watched the determination of our frail mother, while he invited her to pluck the forbidden fruit; he now expected the homage, and the ruin of the great Deliverer of our race.

Look well to it, Satan; is thy net strong; hast thou spread all thy most alluring baits? Vain blasphemer! It had been better for thee, if thou hadst before desisted! Till now the Saviour had willingly endured, and calmly replied. But the last daring suggestion excites His holy wrath. His resistance strengthens; He discovers to the tempter that He well knows his vileness; and, with becoming spirit, bids him quit His presence.—“Get thee hence, Satan:”—but first know, that thou wert base, in withdrawing thy allegiance from thy Maker, and art baser in labouring to seduce others from their duty. Right it is, and commendable, and enjoined, too, by the rules of eternal truth, that all creatures give their homage, affection, and obedience to Him only who made them, the Almighty. “It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.” Quick, as the lightning falls from heaven, when he found himself known, the fiend disappeared; owning, and trembling at that authority, which he had been labouring to subvert.

Thus was the triumph of our blessed Lord complete. “Tempted in all points like as we are,” yet, adorable perfection! “without sin.” But what instruction is there for us, in the nature and issue of this temptation? The other two were such as are common to men, and furnished useful lessons: but have we here any thing for our direction? Much,

and of great importance. This, too, was a temptation which we, in some sense, may endure. It is not indeed, probable, that the tempter, will, in visible form, take us to a mountain, and proffer us the kingdoms of the earth, and their glory, if we will worship him. But in the same seducement, in effect, he incessantly strives to draw mankind by very similar means. When ambition displays the pomps of station, the emoluments of power, the gaudy wreath of fame; urging us to pursue them at the expence of duty, benevolence and truth: what does she but say, "All these will I give thee," if thou wilt devote thy life to my gratification? When fortune sets before us her glittering gold, her splendid edifices, her train of sycophants and slaves, her cloak that covers every deficiency; urging us to sacrifice to the attainment of them, honesty, humanity, piety, and peace: what does she but say, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me?" When pleasure spreads her sensual joys, her luxurious gratifications, her enticing amusements, her ease without care; urging us to neglect for them the worship of God, the duties of our stations, and the care of the one thing needful; what does she but say, All these shall be thine, if thou wilt become my votary, and spend thy time and powers in my service? If we comply with these, or any of these enticements, we are then guilty of the crime in which the tempter would have involved our Lord: for what are ambition, wealth, and pleasure, when they would lead us into wrong, but prostituted ministers of vice? Every man, who sets his heart wholly upon any earthly object, devotes himself to the gratification of any passion, or dedicates his life solely to the pursuit of temporal good, regardless of God and His requisitions, in a real sense worships the creature, and is guilty of

idolatry. Respecting the undivided devotion which the Deity exacts, it is most strictly certain “that he that is not with Him is against Him^p :” and it is remarkable that the votary of pleasure is pointedly said to have his God in his belly^q, and the covetous is expressly styled “an idolater^r.” Besides, happiness is the substance of all the promises which ambition, fortune, and pleasure hold out to us, if we will relinquish all other allegiance and serve them. If we comply with the impious condition, are they able to give us this happiness, and make their promise good? No more than the prince of iniquity was, to give “all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them” to the Son of God. When they have made us dupes, they will leave us wretches. Our interest and our wisdom, then, lies in learning from the example of our Saviour the value of resistance. By withstanding the allurements of temptation, and abiding faithful to God and the word of truth, the Messiah eventually obtained all power and glory, which He might have lost for ever, if He had sought them at the hand of one, who with great shows and much fair speech, enticed Him. In like manner if we resist stedfastly every solicitation to alienate our affections, worship, and obedience, from the Creator and His laws; we shall assuredly obtain the full reality of that happiness, with false promises of which the notorious seducers, of whom we have been speaking, would delude mankind. It is written, at the command of the great I AM, before whose word the heavens and earth shall fail, “He that overcometh shall inherit all things^s.”

^p Matt. xii. 30.

^q Phil. iii. 19.

^r Eph. v. 5.

^s Rev. xxi. 7.

SERMON XXXVIII.



ON REPENTANCE.



I ST. JOHN, i. 8, 9.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

THERE is, perhaps, nothing on earth, on which so much of man's best interests depends, and to which the angels of God look with such lively concern, as the repentance of the children of men. This was the burthen of the most earnest admonitions of the Prophets. This was the substance of the preaching of John the Baptist. The Apostles of our Lord began their Gospel with the invitation to repent. Yea the great end of the incarnation and death, and resurrection and ascension of the Son of God was, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations^a."

Brought, my brethren, to the commencement of that holy season, in which the Church, sorrowfully conscious of the imperfection that is in man, has, from her earliest days, invited her members to a more particular exercise of penitence, humiliation and religious reflection, I am desirous of bringing this sub-

^a Luke xxiv. 47.

ject to your view :—not as it respects the Pagan, who, in his repentance, is to turn from his dumb idols to serve the living God :—not as it respects the Jew, the Turk, the Heretic, or the Infidel, who, in their repentance, are to return from their rejection of the Messiah, and the perverseness of their own minds and wills, to a reception of Jesus, and of “ the law of the Spirit of life which is in Him ^b :” —but as it respects the Christian, encumbered, so long as he continues in the flesh, with the infection of a sinful nature, and the consciousness of an imperfect life ; and a part of the perpetual business of whose vocation it is, to confess his sinfulness to Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life. The words I have read to you present a comprehensive view of the subject. They are spoken by the disciple whom Jesus loved. They are spoken by him with a view of his own condition, and of the condition of all the fellow disciples of our Lord. They are spoken by him of Christians, and with an intent to beget in them those very dispositions, and an attention to those very duties, for the cherishing and perfecting of which the season of Lent is consecrated. “ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Here are exhibited to you the ground and occasion which all have to practise repentance, in the certainty of their sinfulness.

And here is presented to your view the great inducement to repentance, in the certainty of its efficacy.

Under these two views of the subject, we shall find all that we are concerned to know of the doc-

^b Rom. viii. 2.

trine concerning it: except that it will be necessary, before we advance to the consideration of them, to adjust our ideas of the nature of repentance.

Briefly then it implies a conviction of our sinfulness in the thoughts, words, or deeds, by which we have at any time transgressed the will of God, and a hearty contrition for the same; a penitential acknowledgment unto God of our sins, with a renunciation of them, and earnest desire, resolution, and endeavour to be freed from them, and imbued with the opposite virtues: and such deeds of restitution, or satisfaction, or amends, for any or all of our offences, as we may be able at any time to make. To distinguish it from the compunction of the devils; (for they, in their chains and torments, regret their iniquities;) it must proceed more from a love, than a fear of God; it must be less a sorrow that we are endangered, than that our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier has been offended. To distinguish it from the remorse of Judas; (for he is said to have repented;) it must be mixed with confidence in the mercy of the Being, to whom the confession is made: the awe must be pious, and not selfish: the fear filial, and not base, which the conviction produces. Indeed, it springs from faith. It is nursed by hope. And when it speaks, it speaks with the feelings of a child to the ear of a father. Christian repentance is sorrowful, but not distracted. It is not more a turning from the wrath of God, than a turning to His love. The companion whom it seeketh is, moreover, Charity.

Such is that repentance, which, after the idiom of the Scripture language, in which a duty is often expressed by some leading branch of it, is signified in the text by "confessing our sins:" and this not unhappily; for no man will confess his sins, who is not conscious of them; nor will any person confess

them unto God, who does not “believe that He is^c,” and desires his forgiveness; nor will they be humbly confessed at all, except by those, who wish to be freed from them; to whom, in the fine language of the Church, ‘the remembrance of them is grievous, the burthen of them is intolerable.’

Let us now proceed to consider the ground and occasion which all have for the practice of repentance, in the certainty of their sinfulness. However humbling the doctrine may be, it is nevertheless true, that “the Scripture hath concluded all under sin^d.” “How,” says Job, “should man be just with God^e?” “There is no man,” says Solomon, “that sinneth not^f.” “In many things,” says St. James, “we offend all^g.” “All have sinned,” says St. Paul, “and come short of the glory of God^h.” “If we say that we have no sin,” says St. John, “we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” “None is good,” says our blessed Lord, “save One, that is, Godⁱ.” The whole scheme of the Christian religion; all its provisions; all its purposes; all its promises; proceed on the supposition, or rather the assertion of the sinfulness of man. It “is a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners^k :” and this saying is “worthy of all men to be” thankfully “received,” for this reason, that “all have sinned.”

This doctrine of the Scripture is very explicitly professed by our Church in the confessions, which are found in all her offices, for the use of all her children; and in her Articles, where she says that the infection of nature, which ‘is engendered of the offspring of Adam, doth remain, yea, in them that

^c Heb. xi. 6.

^d Gal. iii. 22.

^e Job ix. 2.

^f 1 Kings viii. 46.

^g James iii. 2.

^h Rom. iii. 23.

ⁱ Luke xviii. 19.

^k 1 Tim. i. 15.

are regenerated;’ and again, that ‘sin was not in Christ: but all we, the rest, although baptized and born again in Christ, yet offend in many things, and if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*.’

But the evidence of this doctrine, most convincing to every man, is to be drawn from his own observation and experience. In vain shall we look in this region of infirmity for a faultless character. They who approach nearest to God, are, perhaps, most sensible how far off they are from Him. Such, indeed, is the purity of the Divine requisitions, and such the frailty of our nature, that there is enough in man, in his most holy state, to require the sacrifice and mediation of his Saviour to reconcile him to God. Even “if we walk in the light, as He is in the light,” and have “fellowship one with another;” still we shall need “the blood of His Son to cleanse us from all sin¹.” Examine your best deeds. How inconstant are they: how alloyed with worldly feebleness, and selfish considerations! Consider your omissions of duties, which have the nature of sin. How numerous, how often repeated, how frequently without excuse! Look into your hearts and call the passions which are there, into review before you. Are none of them inordinate, and sinful? Is there not among them, if not obtrusive, yet lurking in some secret corner, and occasionally showing itself, pride or anger, envy or covetousness, or lust, or hatred, or vain glory? Look into your minds; and examine your thoughts. Are they never vain, irregular, sensual, uncharitable, or malevolent? Observe your deeds and habits. Is there no sin which most easily besets you: no vice which you spare, as Saul spared

* See the ixth and xvth Articles of the Church of England.

1 John i. 7.

the king of Amalek ^m; no sloth; no unfaithfulness; no neglect of the happiness of your neighbour; no intemperate, no peevish, no criminal indulgence? Try your piety. Is it never enfeebled by listlessness, nor sullied by the accompaniment of unfriendly sentiments towards your fellow beings? Prove your faith. Does it never waver; is it always used? Test your obedience. Is it universal? Take the picture of the life of Jesus Christ. It is not over-wrought. It is what every man would be, if he were perfect. Compare with it your own lives. Ah, dear Lord, it is thus, by the standard Thou hast given us, we detect our deficiencies! When we look upon the features of Thy character, and then look upon our own, we see little in ourselves to give us complacency; we lay our hands on our mouths, and our mouths in the dust, and “cry, unclean, unclean.”

Now amidst these sins and imperfections, of which in some degree or other all men are conscious, that which escapes observation, but which my purpose obliges me to press upon your notice, is the solemn consideration, that in the sight of the pure God, and under the operation of His holy government, any of these sins, much more many of them, are sufficient to subject us to His displeasure, and to incur His dreadful condemnation. “The soul that sinneth,” it is the language of His law, “the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” “The wages of sin,” it is the declaration of His Gospel, “the wages of sin is death.” “Whosoever shall keep the whole law,” it is the decision of inspired wisdom, “whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” So that under the law of God, which the morality of Jesus does not destroy, but rather

^m 1 Sam. xv. 20.

ⁿ Lev. xiii. 45.

^o Ezek. xviii. 4.

^p Rom. vi. 23.

^q James ii. 10.

renders more strict, more spiritual, more complete, the situation of every transgressor is awfully perilous. Unless he be extricated from the dangers to which his transgressions expose him, by availing himself of those means of extrication, which our heavenly Father hath most graciously provided in the Gospel of His Son, it cannot be otherwise, than that his transgressions should bring upon him anger and wrath, and final destruction. What then are these means? Repentance, springing from faith, and producing its proper fruits, is the chief. To the accomplishment of our salvation, it would seem to be necessarily indispensable. For without departing from iniquity, it is not easy to conceive, how any can be free from misery, since these are, in the nature of things, so inseparably connected, that he who chooses the one, must choose the other. Without turning from sin unto God, and manifesting, at least, a desire and endeavour to be conformed to His will, it is not easy to conceive, how any can be holy; and “without holiness, no man shall see the Lord^r.” Here then you may perceive the ground and occasion which all Christians have, to cherish and exercise that true repentance, which the Church teaches them, whenever they assemble and meet together, to beseech God to give them: to seek earnestly that forgiveness of sins, for which their compassionate Lord, aware of the imperfections, which would always be found in them, hath in His own most holy prayer taught them daily to pray. Repentance is to every, even the most perfect saint, essential to his salvation and peace. Nor can any considerate Christian neglect to fly to it, with eager haste and unwearied assiduity, who considers what is further offered to your view in the text, the certainty of its efficacy.

^r Heb. xii. 14.

Shall I, if I repent of my past sins, assuredly obtain forgiveness? It is a question which reason answers not. The solution of it depends upon the will of God. And blessed be His name, He has given us such satisfactory information concerning it, that the repentance ceases to be Christian, which is not accompanied with a belief in its efficacy. The expressions in the text are singularly marked and forcible. They set before us on its proper foundation, this doctrine of Christianity, than which I know of none more full of comfort for the frail inhabitants of this sinful world. Let us ponder the great truths which they contain.

Repentance cannot mend the broken law of God. It can found no claim to favour or reward. Nor is it certain, that it would comport with the wisdom or stability of any government, that violaters of its laws should, on account of their sorrow for what they had done, be always pardoned. Yet, says my text, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." What! is God in justice bound to receive us, when we return to Him? Is the Most High obliged to forgive us, when we truly repent? Herein is disclosed the wonderful mystery of His mercy. He hath bound and obliged Himself. Foreseeing the condition into which we should fall, our merciful Father provided a way, in which the requisition of His justice might be satisfied, and yet sinners be forgiven; in which "He might be just, and yet the justifier of those who believe in Jesus." He gave His Son; who, 'by His one oblation of Himself, once offered, hath made upon the cross a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.' When,

therefore, the penitent believer returns to God, he finds that the penalty which was his due, his Saviour hath sustained; that the debt which was charged against him, his Divine surety hath paid. And the just God, he is confidently assured, will not twice exact that, which His love doth but once require. The everlasting Father, moreover, hath promised to the Son, as the reward of His obedience and sufferings, that "He should see of the travail of His soul"; and also to all those 'who truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His Gospel,' the pardon and remission of all their sins. And He "is not a man that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" All who truly repent and come unto Him by faith, He will give unto His Son, in fulfilment of His promise, and unto them also He will give eternal life. In faithful and just adherence to the covenant of mercy, which He hath made with our race, in Christ Jesus, unto every penitent Christian, God will "forgive his sins; and cleanse him from all unrighteousness" with the blood of the sacrifice, which He hath provided for the purpose. Sooner shall heaven and earth pass away; as soon may the veracity and equity of the Deity fail, as repentant believers fail to obtain from Him the pardon of their sins, and all the unspeakable benefits of the mediation of His Son, Jesus Christ their Lord.

'That we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope' of this efficacy of repentance, God has caused to be recorded for us many impressive and animating examples. When the people of Nineveh humbled themselves for their sins, and turned every one from the evil of his ways,

¹ Is. liii. 11.

² Numb. xxii. 19.

the great city was spared from its doom ^z. Whenever His chosen people returned from their wanderings unto Him, He returned unto them; and they rejoiced in His smiles. It was for his repentance, that David was forgiven. He had violated in a heinous manner God's laws. But when he perceived his guilt, he with a broken heart cried, "I have sinned." And God, as he was assured by the mouth of His Prophet, "put away his sin ^y." It was this that restored Peter to favour. He had, in an evil hour, denied his Lord. But when he thought thereon, "he went out, and wept bitterly ^z." And Jesus remembered him, as soon as He was risen, and committed to him the care of His sheep ^a, and the keys of His kingdom. It was this that obtained for the woman of Jerusalem, who had been a sinner, the protection and peace of the Son of God. When she knew His power and offices, she turned, and came to Him. With deep contrition she lay at His feet, and did "wash them with her tears;" with affectionate devotion she wiped them with the hairs of her head." And "her sins, which were many, were forgiven; for she loved much ^b." The whole company of the saints, who have passed into heaven, were subject to like passions and infirmities with ourselves. They were saints, not because they had no unrighteousness, but because they were cleansed from it. They were taken unto God and the Lamb, not because they never had offended, but because with constant and entire faithfulness they performed the conditions of the new and gracious covenant, into which God had brought them, through the death of His Son: of which conditions, repentance "from dead works, to serve the living God ^c," was a perpetual and very important one.

^x Jon. iii. 10.

^y 2 Sam. xii. 13.

^z Matt. xxvi. 75.

^a John xxi. 16.

^b Luke vii. 44. 47.

^c Heb. ix. 14.

Will it be said that these examples are instances of singular mercy and special favour? And that the inference of the efficacy of repentance, from the faithfulness and justice of God, is too refined for common utility? Let it, then, be considered that the certainty of its efficacy has been declared fully by that Sovereign, on whose will it depends. We have the most comfortable, and satisfactory assurance of it, in innumerable declarations, which, that we might have strong consolation, who flee for refuge to “the hope set before us^d,” our heavenly Father hath in His word vouchsafed to make. “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool^e.” “When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive^f.” “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise^g.” “Whoso confesseth and forsaketh” his sins “shall have mercy^h.” “I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live yeⁱ.” “Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted^k.” “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord^l.” “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones^m.” The passage at the head of this discourse is as full and plain, as it could

^d Heb. vi. 18.^e Is. i. 18.^f Ezek. xviii. 27.^g Ps. li. 17.^h Prov. xxviii. 13.ⁱ Ezek. xviii. 32.^k Matt. v. 4.^l Acts iii. 19.^m Is. lvii. 15.

have been made: and in the parable of the prodigal son, whatever were its first application, is represented, what, I trust, is constantly occurring, in the intercourse of God and His human children. As soon as the prodigal came to himself, and bewailed his conduct, and arose with humility and affection to return to his father, while “he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him^a.” He heard his confession, and gave him a garment to cover and adorn him, from his own wardrobe. He commanded his servants to “put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet^b.” And all his family were called upon to rejoice at the recovery of a son who was lost.

My brethren, you have now seen the necessity which we all have for repentance, and the certainty of its efficacy with our God. How important is this duty! On this grace depends our favour with God, our peace, our final salvation. Except men repent, they perish: if they turn unto God, He will heal them, and they shall live. On this account it is, that such earnest entreaties are used in the Scriptures, to move men to the performance of this duty. On this account it is, that the angels of God are represented as rejoicing “in heaven over one sinner that repenteth^c.” On this account it is, that the Church annually sets apart so large a portion of time, for the more certain and complete accomplishment in us, of this most necessary and momentous work. Be induced then, Christians, to “consider your ways^d,” “and turn unto the Lord your God^e.” Learn from what has been said, to utter in future with increased humility and sincerity the meek confession, which is made here in the temple, whenever ‘we assemble

^a Luke xv. 20.

^b Ibid. ver. 22.

^c Ibid. ver. 7.

^d Hag. i. 5.

^e Joel ii. 13.

and meet together.' Go often with true penitent hearts to the holy table, seeking the tokens and pledges of forgiveness; be penetrated with a sense of your necessities as sinners; disdain not to stand there, weeping at the feet of your Lord, if, haply, He may say to each of you, "Thy sins are forgiven;—go in peace^s." Use, to the purpose to which it is devoted, this holy season; by examining your ways, humbling yourselves before God, and turning to Him with new and more lively resolutions of obedience. Consider that the path of repentance is the only path to heaven. To induce you to use it, remember that it hath been opened for you at the expense of the sacrifice of the Son of God; that it is washed with His blood. Is it rugged at its entrance? Be not deceived by a partial appearance. It is the path of peace. Enter it, and walk in it daily; it will improve as you advance. The further you proceed in it, the further you will leave behind you the infirmities and miseries of your condition; till, at length, it shall conduct you to the borders of that country, of whose felicity it is not the least ingredient that there shall be in it no sin.

^s Luke vii. 48. 50.

SERMON XXXIX.



ON THE PASSION.



ECCLESIASTES, iii. 4.

A time to mourn.

WE enter, to-day, upon the most solemn week of the Christian year. The Church is clothed in her sackcloth. All her services are services of sorrow and deep humiliation. Day after day, we are called upon to attend our Saviour, through the several stages of His passion, till we leave Him in the grave, numbered with the dead. It is a week, which might be rendered to the faithful, productive of the happiest attainments: and I crave your attention, while, with a view to restore to it that devout observance, which its objects claim and it anciently received, and to render your attendance on the services of it, gratifying to your spirits and fruitful of their proper effects, I offer to your notice some reasons for observing the Passion Week, drawn from the institution of it, and some also, drawn from the dispositions and advantages, which the observation of it is calculated to produce.

In the first place, the institution of it is respectful to our Saviour. The world owes its redemption to His blood. The time in which He offered Himself for the sins of men, was the most awful in the annals

of this globe. Nature marked it. The earth shook. The sun was darkened. Rocks were rent. The graves were opened. In a series of sufferings, at which heaven and earth were amazed, the Son of God expiated the offences of man, and restored him to favour with his Maker, and to the hope of eternal life. The seasons of great and beneficial actions have, at the periods of their revolution, been generally distinguished with suitable observation. Is it not due to the great Saviour of our race, when the part of the year returns, in which He endured the heavy "stripes by which we are healed^a," to pause from the bustle of life, to recur to the scenes of His sufferings, and to indulge in the emotions which they are calculated to excite? That He is not insensible to such expressions of our respect, we may infer from His own institution of an ordinance, for "showing the Lord's death till He come^b." The particular time in which He suffered, could hardly have needed a command for its consecration to the remembrance of Him. For who can reflect that, at this time, the great Benefactor of the human race was making that sacrifice of Himself which redeemed them from perdition, and not go to His church to listen to the narrative of His sorrows, and bend the knee to Him in gratitude and adoration?

Again. With respect to ourselves, this institution is proper, to impress us with a lively memory of our Saviour's sufferings. Amidst the blandishments of pleasure and distractions of business, the sufferings of the Son of God are too easily forgotten. It is almost impossible to have His cross constantly in view. His humiliation and His agony give place in our minds to those cares and pursuits, which are inseparable from our existence. But unless His death

^a Isa. liii. 5.

^b 1 Cor. xi. 26.

be properly impressed upon us, it can hardly produce in us its proper effects. It is therefore useful, if indeed it be not necessary, at stated times to retire from the common occupations of life and meditate upon the acts of His Passion, as we do sometimes upon the deeds and sorrows of our departed friends. And what time so suitable for the purpose as that, in which His Passion was sustained, and His life terminated? When may we so well be at the foot of His cross, as in the week in which He hung upon it? Here, in this week, Christians, with other emotions than Pilate felt, “behold the man^c.” They behold Him “bearing their griefs, and carrying their sorrows,” and sustaining “the iniquities of them all^d.” They see Him in the guest chamber oppressed in spirit under the prospect of being betrayed, and offering Himself in the eucharist in presence of His disciples, for the remission of their sins. They accompany him to Gethsemane, and witness the agony in which He sustains the wrath of God, His fervent prayers, His sweat of blood. They go with Him to the judgment hall, and see the humiliation and shame to which He is subjected, the mockery of the multitude, the scourgings of His body, the piercing His temples with the crown of thorns. They ascend Mount Calvary; they behold the cross erected, and see their Saviour extended upon it; they hear Him cry, as He drinks for them the bitterest dregs of the cup of their deserts, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me^e.” He dies! Can there be devised a more effectual way of impressing upon them the acts of their Redeemer’s Passion? Can it fail to produce some effect upon their memories, their faith, their dispositions? It may be, that in their return to their intercourse with the world, the vivid-

^c John xix. 5.^d Is. liii. 4. 6.^e Matt. xxvii. 46.

ness of the impression may be much diminished. And “ He, who knoweth whereof we are made, who remembereth that we are but dust^f,” will, we may humbly hope, pardon the unavoidable operation of the innocent concerns of life, upon the religious feelings of those, who manifest their desire, by stated recurrences to the sources of inspiration, to have in remembrance His marvellous deeds. But still, it is probable, there will abide in their minds some distinct impression of what their Saviour hath endured, from which, under the influence of the dews of Heaven, may spring up some sense of the correspondent obligations. They, surely, will be more likely to be affected by the sufferings of Christ, who with proper affections attend the services of the Passion Week, than they by whom it is disregarded. On this account, it was observed with great strictness by the primitive Christians; from whose practice I would derive a further reason for attending devoutly on this institution.

In adherence to those usages of the ancient Church, which have not been rendered useless by the changes of time, nor shown to be pernicious by the abuse of them, there is, probably, the likeliest way of attaining to the highest effects of the Christian religion. The earliest Christians, influenced by those feelings of their nature, which man has manifested in every age and nation, commemorated the great events of their Saviour's life, at the times when they happened. The week of His Passion was, with them, a week of great devotion. They called it ‘ the holy week,’ and spent it, particularly the four last days of it, in much humiliation, and fasting, and public and private meditations upon the sufferings and death of their Redeemer. Their

^f Ps. ciii. 14.

penitence was deeper, and their faith stronger than ours; and their superiority over us in these respects may, doubtless, be attributed in some degree, to the happy use they made of this and other institutions of the Church, which were founded on principles of human nature, and adapted to promote their growth in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. From the first ages down to the present time, this week hath thus been kept holy; and you will esteem it a felicity that, in your Church, the observance of it is retained: and you may be induced to bestow on it your devout attention, if you now proceed to consider some of the dispositions and advantages, which the due observance of it is calculated to produce and cherish.

And in the first place, a disposition suited to this week, and likely to be promoted in us by the scenes which it commemorates, is Humility. This is the most important of Christian virtues, and in the Collect which is used on the first five days of the week, the production of it in us is represented by the Church, as one end of our Saviour's Passion, and made the object of her repeated prayer. And if any thing will humble the heart of man, it must be the recollection of that helplessness, and wretchedness of his nature, which made the death of the Son of God necessary for his redemption. If any thing can render man ashamed of pride, and make him desire to possess a meek and lowly heart, it must be to behold his Saviour in the scenes, through which He passed in the time of His Passion. Behold, thousands of angels minister unto Him; yet He "washes His disciples' feet^a!" "In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily^b;" yet He "hid not His face from shame and spitting^c!" Lord of

^a John xiii.5.

^b Col. ii. 9.

Is. l. 6.

all; Heir of heaven and earth: yet He endures reproach; He suffers injury and wrong, ignominy and sorrow: He humbles Himself, “even to the death of the cross^k :” He bears the cross on which He will offer Himself, to “take away the sin of the world!” Which of His disciples can follow the Son of God through the stages of His Passion, and not have the pride of his heart reprovèd, and all the vain dispositions of his nature made to bow before humility? Christians, consider the importance of this grace to your peace, your virtue, your enjoyment of the favour of God: and you will perceive it advantageous to be conversant with the scenes, in which it is so impressively taught, so transcendently exemplified.

Another fruit of a right understanding of the Passion Week is Penitence. He who looks at the cross, can hardly fail to be grieved by his sins. It is in the sufferings and death of our Redeemer, that the strongest motives to repentance are found. The observance of this institution, in the first ages, was mighty to produce among Christians humiliation and fasting for their past offences, and earnest devotion of themselves to “newness of life^m.” Their penitential services were multiplied, they put sackcloth upon themselves, and went mourning; they confessed and bewailed their transgressions, while they commemorated the unparalleled sufferings of the Son of God, by which they were redeemed. And scarcely is it possible for the believer, who comes to this “Lamb of God” to put his hand upon Him, that he may be saved; to avoid confessing over Him the sins which oppress him, and lifting his eye to Heaven, that he may sin no more: It was indeed anciently, the penitential week: And we should do

^k Phil. ii. 8.

^l John i. 29.

^m Rom. vi. 4.

well in our use of it, with more than ordinary sorrow, to bewail the corruption of our nature, and imperfection of our lives; to “rend our heart” before the cross, and “turn unto the Lord our God;” while the agonies with which our sins were expiated by Him, are presented to our view.

Another fruit, which a devout observance of this week is calculated to produce in us, is Patience. Man is placed here in the midst of innumerable evils; and the school in which he may learn patiently to bear them, is the best to which he can be sent. And, Virtue of heavenly origin, offspring of faith and hope, which came from above, where shall we behold thee in thy heavenly beauty, but in thy attendance upon Jesus Christ, in the week of His Passion and death? “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.” Patience is by Him. Her hand holdeth upon the skies. Her lips are still. She looketh sometimes to heaven, and sometimes she casteth her eyes meekly upon the agents of wrong, the instruments of sorrow. There is seen in her suppression of the rising sigh, her desire to be still; and when she speaks, it is only to say, It is God. No where can the children of men see so much of the nature and beauty of this virtue, as in the week of their Saviour’s Passion. He hath exhibited her perfect work. As they accompany Him in His sorrows, they may learn to bear their own. Familiarity with His griefs, and with the manner in which He sustained them, will soften the temper, and beget in them an emulation of His gentleness. The things of this life will lose something of their importance, when He is seen willingly renouncing them all; and when He passes through the

^b Joel ii. 13.

^c Is. liii. 7.

trials of calumny and pain, of treachery, agony, and death, with such meek composure and pious resignation, they catch something of His spirit from Him, and learn how to endure. Happy, upon all minds, must be the influence of the scenes of our Lord's Passion, but especially so upon children, whose dispositions are forming, and who, on this account, should attend the services of the Church in the holy week.

Again. We are commanded, when we stand praying for any favour from God, to forgive; and are taught that if "we forgive not men their trespasses, neither will our Father forgive our trespasses^p." And where shall such inducements to the cultivation of this important and most difficult virtue be found, as in the scenes of our Saviour's Passion? We should come to them, that we may see and admire this temper, in all its perfection, and be incited to possess ourselves of it, by the powerful consideration drawn from His love to us. When we see Him washing the feet of him who betrayed Him; feeding the disciples, who He knew would desert Him, with His body and blood; praying for and affectionately encouraging the Apostle, who He foresaw would deny Him; laying down His life for the salvation of His persecutors, and praying for His murderers in the agony of death, that His Father would forgive them: it is impossible, if we be conscious of any hatred or malice in our hearts, but that we should doubt, whether the "same mind be in us which was in Christ Jesus^q." The grandeur of this virtue, as it is seen in Him, may excite our admiration of it, and while we behold how much He hath done and suffered for us, who were His enemies, our hearts will be more open to the inspired

^p Matt. vi. 15.

^q Phil. ii. 5.

inference from it, that we ought to forgive, and love one another.

I add that an attendance on the services of Passion Week, is an excellent preparation for receiving the sacrament at Easter. The dispositions of humility, penitence, submission and forgiveness, which the Passion of our Saviour is so peculiarly calculated to produce in us, are dispositions which ought always to be carried to the holy table. And when will the Christian's faith be so strong; when will his remembrance of his Redeemer's death be so lively and thankful; when will his love and gratitude be so sincere and ardent; as when he hath been with Him in the mazes of His sorrows, beholding Him coming from Jerusalem "with dyed garments," and hearing of all the sorrow with which, for our salvation, He gave Himself to be afflicted in the day of God's fierce anger^s."

Finally. We should keep this week, and attend its services, that we may learn how to die. It is appointed unto us all, to pass through the vale of death. To do it well and happily, should be our most anxious desire. In the conduct of our Lord in the week of His Passion, we have a perfect example. There is a majesty, a transcendent decency, a holy propriety, a peace, in the death of Christ, which renders it worthy to be studied by all mortals. In His care to finish truly the work which His Father had given Him to do; in His final instructions to His immediate family, the twelve, whom He had chosen; in his preparation of Himself by prayer, and the celebration of the Passover; in His patience, and entire resignation of Himself, concerning what He should suffer, to the will of God; in His provision for His mother, and forgiveness of His enemies;

^r Is. lxiii. 1.

^s Lam. i. 12.

and in His humble commendation of His spirit at the last, into the hands of His Father : we see the lineaments of a perfect character, brightening in trial, and consummated in death. As “ never man spake like this man[†],” nor lived like this man, so never man died like Him. If we attend the scenes of His Passion, with a view to the regulation of our temper and conduct, when we shall be departing out of this life unto the Father, it will be good for us to have been with Him in them ; as His precepts teach us how to live, His Passion, haply, may teach us how to die.

These, brethren, are some of the considerations which should commend unto you the observance of the Passion Week. If Solomon, in his day, thought there was “ a time to mourn,” surely, the Christian will find it in this sad, this holy, this affecting week of the sufferings of our dear Redeemer. When you hear of the desertion of Him by His disciples, and the denial of Him by Peter, I doubt not, you are ready to say, if we had been there, we would not thus have done. Be not ashamed, then, to be by His cross, in the season of His sufferings; with His mother, and the amiable women who followed Him, and the disciple whom He loved : if, haply, in reward for your fidelity, He may specially manifest to you His resurrection, and thus enable you to be promulgators to others of the tidings of His salvation, and in the fullest sense partakers, in the day of His power, of “ the joy of our Lord[‡].”

[†] John vii. 46.

[‡] Matt. xxv. 21.

SERMON XL.



ON THE PASSION.



ST. MATTHEW, xxvi. 18.

The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at thy house with my disciples.

THE part of the Gospel history, to which we are brought at this season, is stupendous and solemnly interesting. We are entering upon scenes, by which the heavens and earth are affected; upon scenes, filled with pathos and surprising providence; upon scenes, which involve the eternal destinies of man. All is great; all is amazing; all is mournful, in this week of our Saviour's Passion. Jesus, the Son of God, who for our redemption came down from heaven, makes the important arrangements for His departure from our world; falls, betrayed by a disciple, into the hands of His foes; is "taken from prison and from judgment^a," to the agonies of the cross; expires under a weight of unspeakable sufferings, and slumbers among the dead! We attend the various occurrences in their sad succession; looking through the gloom to the joyous dawn, when we

^a Is. liii. 3.

shall hail Him risen from the tomb, and, in holy commemoration, keep the great eucharistic feast.

In this eventful period of His history, we find our Saviour prescient, collected, and altogether lovely : and not the sublimity of His precepts, not the purity of His life, does more strikingly display the excellence of His character, or more strongly endear Him to our hearts, than the dignity and wisdom, with which He anticipated His approaching fate. A very affecting, and instructive specimen we have, in the Lesson read to you this morning, from which I have taken my text. “ The first day of the feast of unleavened bread, the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto Him, Where wilt Thou that we prepare for Thee to eat the Passover ? And He said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand ; I will keep the Passover at thy house with my disciples ^b.” My design, in the following discourse, is to give these words of our Lord a particular consideration, sure, that the observations they may suggest will not be impertinent to the solemnities of this holy week, and hoping that, under the Divine blessing, they may not be altogether useless.

In the first place, we notice, the precise foreknowledge of His crucifixion, which the words discover Christ to have possessed. From His first entrance upon active life, He seems, indeed, to have had in His mind a full knowledge of all the events which should be accomplished in Him ; and kenning, with prophecy’s highest skill, the exact point of time of every occurrence, declares at one period, that “ His hour is not yet come ^c ;” and at another that “ His time is at hand :” to-day, that he can perform safely amidst His foes the work of Him that sent Him ^d, and “ that

^b Matt. xxiv. 17, 18.

^c John ii. 4.

^d Luke xiii. 32, 33.

after two days, He is to be betrayed to be crucified ^e." At the time when the solemn declaration in the text was made, He was undisturbed in the midst of His disciples. His enemies were then busy in preparations for their great Paschal feast. The rulers had determined that He should not be taken during that feast, "lest there should be an uproar among the people ^f." Under these circumstances, that He should in the course of one day be betrayed, arrested, hurried through the forms of trial, and expire on a cross, was in itself in the highest degree improbable. It was at once the consequence, and evidence of His intimacy in the bosom of God, that He knew, to an hour, the fulness of time when He should bear the sins of many, and declared it frequently to His followers, with such confidence and composure. "Father, the hour is come ^g." "All ye shall be offended because of Me this night ^h." "The things concerning me have an end ⁱ." "Verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me ^k." "Thus shalt thou say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand." In these and several other passages of a similar import, a prophetic consciousness is manifested, whose explicitness and dignity would suggest, what their fulfilment establishes; that in the counsel of redemption, the Author and the Father were one.

This foreknowledge of the time when He should suffer, leads us to remark the voluntariness with which our blessed Lord endured the cross. Though the Scriptures speak of God, as sending His Son to be the propitiation for our sins; as appointing, and giving Him to be our Mediator; yet, we are ever to consider it as the free choice, the unconstrained de-

^e Matt. xxvi. 2.^f Matt. xxvi. 5.^g John xvii. 1.^h Matt. xxvi. 31.ⁱ Luke xxii. 37.^k Matt. xxvi. 21.

sire of the Son, to bear our griefs, and carry our sorrows, and give His life a ransom for us. Ineffably benevolent in His nature, having by His omniscience a clear foresight of the glory, which would redound to the Divine government by the redemption of man, being necessarily consentaneous in His views and wishes with the whole Godhead that dwelt in Him; the Father's will was His will, the Father's counsel was His counsel. And in regard to His manhood, apprized, as He evidently was, of the time and manner of His death, it should seem easy for Him to have avoided it; and, by withdrawing Himself from the scenes and instruments, marked out in prophecy for its accomplishment, to have renounced the offices and sufferings of the Messiah. But instead of this, knowing His time was at hand, He waited for it. Every thing in His discourse and conduct was like an unrestrained surrender of Himself. Though in the moments of extreme agony He prayed that, if it were possible, the bitter cup might pass from Him, it was not absolutely, and without care for the consequences; for if it was His Father's will, He preferred to drink it. Knowing all things that should come upon Him, He quitted not His place nor His work, but rather, having in the elements of the Supper first offered Himself symbolically, went forth to meet His cross.

This free will, with which Christ became a sacrifice for man's transgression, He was careful to inculcate upon the observation of His followers. He speaks of coming into the world, and of leaving it, as things of His choice; of giving His life a ransom for many, as a voluntary act. "No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again¹;"

¹ John x. 18.

“ for as the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself^m. ”

The same doctrine is explicitly taught by all the writers upon the subject, in the Old and New Testament. Nothing like compulsion is conceived, in the humiliation and death of our Redeemer. To have obliged Him, innocent as He was, and omniscient, to bear against His will the heavy punishment of sinful, inferior beings, would not have appeared consistent with the Father's character, and might have diminished the merit of His atonement. Though the Father, therefore, gives or sends Him, there is nothing of force. It is the result of mutual wishes and stipulations. The Son's delight was to make Himself an offering for the salvation of our race, and in the travail of His soul He was satisfied.

This voluntariness of our Saviour's sufferings, it is important for you always to remember. It forms the consideration, which so greatly magnifies His benevolence. It furnishes the motives of that grateful love, which we owe Him. It opens the ground, upon which active philanthropy is most strongly commended to His followers. And it constitutes the unanswerable vindication of the Gospel, against the objections of those, who stumble at the supposition, that a just and holy God should lay upon an innocent victim the iniquities of us all.

Once more. We may remark, in the passage before us, the wisdom and dignity of our Lord's conduct, when His departure from life was at hand. In the first place, He reflected upon it. Sorrowful as it was to be, He did not shrink from the contemplation of it. He gave it a timely consideration. It was the great end for which He was born. It was the act of His being, upon which more depended

^m John v. 26.

than words could express. He was to suffer, and to enter into glory; and an event of such pregnancy, to be rightly conducted, required and deserved preparatory attention. He therefore thought of it much. As it approached, it more constantly occupied His mind, and appeared in His conversation. He finished the work which was given Him to do. He made every arrangement for the important hour. Such and so frequent were His reflections upon it, that it could not take Him by surprise, nor come too soon. What an example for every man living! When is the period at which any of us may not say, "My time is at hand?" But do we often reflect upon it? Are we prepared to meet it? Do we not put far from our thoughts the day of our death, and leave the principal business of this probationary life, to be accomplished at a more convenient season? We may learn from the conduct of our Lord, often to anticipate in our minds our departure from this world to the Father; and if ~~He~~^{we} would entirely imitate His example, much good might arise to ourselves and others, from such anticipation.

For we further observe, that to a consideration of His expected end, He added those arrangements which were proper and important. Among these, His tender disclosure of His approaching crucifixion to His little band of disciples, will arrest the attention of every feeling reader of the Gospel. His interview with them, as exhibited from the thirteenth to the eighteenth of St. John's Gospel, is one of the most affecting pieces of scene and dialogue, that the human mind ever contemplated. He informs them that He is about to leave them, and of the awful issue of the treachery by which His death would be effected. In tender precept, and impressive illustration, He instructs them how to behave, when He shall be gone. He reasons with them of the neces-

sity of His departure, and how it should turn to their benefit. Consoling their sorrows, guarding them against the world, its seductions and trials, instructing them in every excellence, and leading them, in His blessings, to look for happiness in heavenly things; He rises in His troubles, and is loveliest in His saddest hour. How interesting and impressive when, to teach His disciples humility and kindness, He rises from supper and washes their feet! Who can behold unmoved the affecting scene, when oppressed with regret, with concern, with the weight of the afflicting truth, He declared to them that one of them would betray Him? How solemn and paternal does He appear, when instituting and celebrating the great Christian sacrament, of which I shall presently speak! What more affecting than His language; His blessing;—"Little children, yet a little while I am with you";—"love one another."—"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." And again: "These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." The time would fail me to quote all the excellent instructions, and wise arrangements of our Lord, which the consideration that "His time was at hand," prompted Him to make. Yet, long could I descant upon His transactions towards His disciples, His beloved family, in this close of His life. For I consider it as holding out to you and to every good man, an unequalled example, a perfect model by which you may form your own conduct, when your departure shall be drawing near.

^a John xiii. 33.

^o Ibid. xv. 12.

^p Ibid. xiv. 27.

^q Ibid. xvi. 33.

Here you may learn to set your houses in order before you die, and to make every arrangement which may be necessary to the quiet, and conducive to the comfort, of those whom you may leave behind. Here you may learn to gather your family around you, with the voice of affection, to reconcile them to your departure, and, with the counsel of wisdom, to instruct them concerning their lives. Here you may learn from the example of Christ, that peace is better than pleasure to leave to your offspring: and that the last injunctions, which should tremble upon the parental lip, are to have trust in God, and to love one another. Sweet scene, when the head of a household, having timely made all other arrangements, spends his last hours in pointing others to heaven, and breathing upon his family the blessings of religious peace! Sweet scene! It is consoling to survivors; it is elevating to the human character; it must be beheld with pleasure by the Deity Himself.

But I am reminded by my text, and brought by these remarks, to notice a peculiarly striking trait of our Lord's conduct, when He knew that His sufferings were at hand: I mean His concern to eat the Passover. "The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will eat the Passover at thy house, with My disciples."

The Passover was the great ordinance of the law, under which He was born. It was instituted by the Almighty, for His people to commemorate their deliverance from bondage, and their favour with Jehovah; and as it led them to contemplate the greatness of His mercy and power, on whom they were dependant, it must have been to the serious Jew a source of comfort and satisfaction. It was now the thirteenth day of the month Abib, in which they were to make ready, and the even of which was the

commencement of the fourteenth day, when they were to eat the Passover. Our Saviour had uniformly walked in all the commandments of the law, and this ordinance of strong obligation and solemn significance, He had observed with undeviating regularity. Now indeed he knew that before the sacrifice of the lamb would be over, He, of whose own blood its purple stream had for ages been an emblem, would be offered upon the cross. But for His disciples' sake, and for His regard to Divine institutions, He would not, even in this hour of sorrow, abate "one jot" of His obedience. The houses of the Jews were, at this season, common to strangers. It is probable, however, that Christ sent His disciples to a man whom He knew, and had disposed to receive them; that under His roof, they might make the usual preparations. They did accordingly; and there, with the twelve, He spent the last evening of His life, celebrating the appointed Paschal feast. If there were nothing more, this care of our Master to "fulfil all righteousness," and His observance of the ordinance, when the sorrows of death approached, hold out a mirror to every Christian, in which he may see a striking and beautiful image of his duty. But in Him who had no sins to cover, and no blessings to secure, there must have been something of mighty import, to have occasioned the earnest declaration; "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer^t." If we attend to the transactions of this evening, we shall find, that this was indeed the case. It was at this last meeting with His friends, that He abolished the typical ordinance which was about to be fulfilled, and instituted in its stead, with bread and the cup, that sacrament, whereby His death, of which the sacrifice of the

^r Matt. v. 18.

^s Matt. iii. 15.

^t Luke xxii. 15.

Paschal lamb was only a shadow, should in all ages be shown forth “ till He come .” This was, probably, one cause of His anxiety to eat this Passover with His disciples. He now gave them to understand, that they were henceforth to commemorate a greater deliverance than that, which freed them from Egyptian bondage : that, as He had done, they, and all Christians to the end of time, should “ do in remembrance of Him ^x.”

When we consider our Lord, first observing the ordinance which was yet in force, and then instituting upon it the Christian Supper ; His example in the former, and His authority in the latter, furnish His disciples with a double motive to observe His holy sacrament. When I contemplate Him, longing to be with His disciples at this Passover, that He might change it into a joyous memorial of His death ; when I see Him employing the last hours He should spend with them, in celebrating this Christian feast ; when I hear Him saying to His followers, Eat ye all of this bread, which is My body ; drink ye all of this cup, which is My blood ; when I ponder the import of this sacrament, its uses, the affecting circumstances under which it was ordained, and the claim of its Author to our entire obedience :—I see not how any, who with godly sincerity are His disciples, can ever abstain from it. In every period of life, peaceful is the reflection, that we have endeavoured to “ fulfil all righteousness ^y,” “ to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless ^z.” And when the sorrows of death compass us around, and the pains of dissolution are getting hold upon us, memory can present no more pleasing recollection, than that we have eaten of that flesh, and

^u 1 Cor. xi. 26.

^y Matt. iii. 15.

^x Luke xxii. 19.

^z Luke i. 6.

drunk of that blood, of which whosoever partaketh righteously hath eternal life abiding in him. In that trying period, when our time is at hand, we should learn from the example of Christ, to seek in our Passover, the holy viands which may support us, under the terrors and pains which most men apprehend, and many endure, in passing through the valley of the shadow of death. Trying is the hour, and what can be more consoling to the departing spirit, than the pledges of its Redeemer's love; what more animating than the holy mysteries whereby God hath sealed to us the pardon of our sins, and the precious promise of everlasting life?

But finally we must not omit to notice, among the acts of our Saviour when His end approached, His retirement after finishing his purposes, to devotion and communion with the Most High. With the world He had done. His Father alone could support Him in the hour which was at hand. All of business, all of duty, all of preparation that remained, was between Him and His God. Withdrawn therefore from all interruptions, He seeks the Almighty, and gives Himself to ardent prayer. And in this holy occupation Jesus continued, till the commencement of the outrages upon Him. Powerful comment upon the precept of His Gospel, "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray^a." Here, for the present, we shall leave Him; but not, I trust, without learning from His example, the wisdom of betaking ourselves from the world and its phantoms, to the Father of our spirits, when we find our end approaching. Surely it is time to have done with the pomps and vanities of life, when we are on the borders of eternity. Surely it is time to draw near to God, when we are losing our hold upon every thing else. It is

^a James v. 13.

communion with our Maker, that will preserve in us a sense of our connection with Him. And it is the tie which connects us with Him, that will bind to the soul its most precious amulet, the hope of immortality. Happy then are they, whom death, when he comes, finds in communion with their God. Appalled at their devotion, he drops the poison with which he was envenoming his shaft, and instead of taking, resigns to heaven his prey.

Thus I have set before you, some of the instructions suggested by this interesting passage in the gospel of the day. I might enlarge; but already I have trespassed too much upon your patience. One closing observation forces itself upon your minds: that our blessed Redeemer has taught us how to die, as well as how to live; that in all the successive scenes of His Passion, He hath left us “an example, that we should follow his steps^b.”

^b 1 Pet. ii. 21.

SERMON XLI.

ON GOOD FRIDAY.

ST. JOHN, i. 29.

Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

I AM to address you, my brethren, to-day, upon the most solemn subject which can ever be contemplated by man. It is not to the character of any important virtue, that I am to call your attention, but to Jesus Christ, the source and example of all virtues. It is not in the sweet periods of His life, when He is feeding the hungry, instructing the ignorant, and healing the sick, that I am to set Him before you: but in the hour of His crucifixion, when He is nailed to the accursed tree. Here is no glorious light from heaven as on the morning of the Nativity: but the sun withdraws his shining, and the heavens are shrouded in gloom. Here are no multitudes of the heavenly hosts, uttering their joyful acclamations: but in the darkness of the skies, imagination pictures angels and archangels hovering in amazement over their suffering Lord, and all the hosts of the Almighty meditating, in mute astonishment, the issue of the stupendous event. Here is no peaceful scene; no pulse of joy shot through the bosom of nature at the descent of her God; no shepherds re-

turning with joy, nor wise men approaching with gifts: but horror reigns: the earth quakes: rocks are rent: the dead are moved: a wonder-struck multitude, who had gone out as to a common spectacle, are returning, smiting their breasts.

To set this event before you, in all its magnitude, requires other eloquence than mine, lips, touched, like Isaiah's, with coals that have been taken from the altar of heaven. For myself, when I contemplate God "found in fashion as a man," and humbled to "the death of the cross^a," for the redemption of our sinful race, I am overwhelmed by the greatness of the mystery. It is a "depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God^b," which human thoughts are unable to fathom. We know not its relations and influence to other worlds. We know but in part the measure of its importance, and the extent of its consequences to this. And the circumstances of it, the emotions it should excite in us, the fear, and gratitude, and faith, and obedience, it should beget in us; who is able adequately to describe? All I can do is to stand with you at the foot of the cross; to wonder with you, and adore: and taking the language of inspiration for my parable, to exhort you to "behold," in the expiring Jesus, "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

The Saviour of the world is frequently represented in the sacred writings under the figure of a Lamb. For this there were divers reasons. Meek, innocent, and patient, this gentle animal presented a significant emblem of His character who would be "brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He would not open His mouth^c." In that ritual, which, in the twilight

^a Phil. iv. 8.

^b Rom. xi. 33.

^c Isa. liii. 7.

of revelation, shadowed forth the distant substance of the Christian economy, the lamb therefore was appointed to be the sacrifice, which should be offered daily for a sweet savour unto the Lord. But more especially in the Passover, when the victim was slain, by the mark of whose blood God's people were preserved, the lamb was chosen for the victim. In these types was Jesus Christ set forth anciently to the eye of faith, as the sacrifice, with which the sins of the world were to be expiated: and on account of the innocence of His nature, and the efficacy of His blood, prophets, and apostles, and angels, conceive of Him, under the image of a Lamb.

But He is also styled in the text, and in many other passages of the sacred writings, "the Lamb of God:" and for this I shall mention two reasons, which, while you are contemplating the sacrifice of the death of Christ, may impress you with a sense of the greatness of the victim, and of the wonderful loving kindness of our God.

Probably on a part of the very mount on which Christ was crucified, Abraham said to Isaac, "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering^d." The words were prophetic. Jesus is styled emphatically, "the Lamb of God," because He was provided for us by the Almighty. For the purposes for which Christ was slain, man had nothing to offer to his Maker. "All the beasts of the forest were" already "His, and the cattle upon a thousand hills^e." Could man have ranged through all worlds, and called the creatures which are in them his own, he could not have found a victim, whose blood would have been efficacious in the sight of God, to wash away sin. Foreseeing the fall of man, and knowing that there could be found no

^d Gen. xxii. 8.

^e Ps. l. 10.

voice to help, no arm to uphold; God, in infinite mercy, from the foundation of the world, provided the sacrifice, by which the transgressions of His children might be expiated, and they ransomed from destruction. And in the ram caught providentially by his horns, and substituted by the Patriarch in the room of his son, who was first required, was typified the Offering, which the providence of the Almighty had prepared for our race, and should, in due time, be substituted in our stead. Well is He denominated “the Lamb of God,” who was thus provided for, and given to us, by the Almighty.

But where was this precious Sacrifice found? Whence came this Victim, whose blood is of such unspeakable value, and singular efficacy? It is further to be observed by us, that He is styled “the Lamb of God,” because He was near and dear to the Most High. In the person of His Son, God beheld the image of His own glory. He who came down from heaven to be offered in our behalf, was far above all principalities and powers in His state, and without equal in His nature. Near to the Father, as His only begotten, and dear to Him as His perfectly obedient Son, He was with the Father from all eternity the object of His supreme regard, and heir of His glory and worship. Yet this exalted Being, whom angels adore, is sent to take upon Him our flesh, and become obedient to death. This object of God’s delight, this pure and holy, and beloved Heir of His perfections is given to be our ransom and atonement. And it was, probably, with a particular view to Him, as the Lamb provided to be the propitiation of our sins, and to teach us both the value and the efficacy of His blood, that the Father proclaimed at His entrance upon His office, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased †.”

† Matt. iii. 17.

Our need of such an atonement it becomes us to-day to consider. This Son of the Almighty, this immaculate "Lamb of God," is not without great expediency and use sacrificed upon the cross. Not but for purposes of infinite moment, hath it pleased the Father thus to bruise Him. It is not without respect to the glory of His government, that He hath put Him to this unparalleled grief. This "Lamb" was "slain" in the counsels of Heaven, "from the foundation of the world⁸;" and it is in virtue of the mediation and atonement, which He hath consummated on the cross, that the human race were saved from the doom of destruction, and have received from the Almighty the overtures of pardon and everlasting life. His blood is the purchase of our redemption.

Man is 'by nature born in sin,' and consequently, under the government of a holy God, is 'the child of wrath.' This the Scriptures declare of him. This the pages of his history in every age prove. And of this every one has too sensible experience, too indubitable evidence in his own bosom. Of his inability to expiate his own offences, he has every where manifested a common sentiment. Wherever we find him, thoughtful of his condition, and mindful of his God, we find him by an altar, offering a victim, with whose blood he is hoping to propitiate his Maker. No where has he reposed with confidence in his own righteousness. No where has he trusted wholly to his contrition and tears. The universal prevalence of this idea indicates, that it is either very obvious to natural reason, or has been derived to all men from the same external source. That the soul, in some solemn moments, may have just apprehensions of her inability to make repara-

⁸ Rev. xiii. 8.

tion for her offences, might perhaps be admitted. But there is no congruity in the nature of the things, between shedding of blood, and remission of sins; the connection between one and the other is by no means obvious to reason: and we are left to infer that God, who only could be the one unchangeable source of instruction, informed man, soon after his fall, of his inability to be justified without an atonement, and graciously taught him to stay his faith, and soothe his anxieties with typical sacrifices, till the great Sacrifice should be offered for him, in which he should find his peace.

In truth, by the first transgression, man became a debtor to the Divine justice in a sum, which he could never have paid. The arm of vengeance was stretched out against him, and but for the intervention of Christ, he must have gone into irretrievable perdition. And we his posterity “wherewith should we have come before the Lord, and bowed ourselves before the High God^b?” With the sorrows of our first parents, we inherit also their sinfulness. And guilty in the sight of the Almighty, on what ground should we plead for His pardon and favour? Should we trust to our good deeds? Alas! they are inconstant, and the best of them alloyed with many imperfections. Should we trust to our repentance? That, too, is imperfect, and utterly disproportionate to our offences, and followed often by repeated transgression. Should we betake ourselves to the mercy of God? One of His attributes is never exerted in opposition to another; and both the honour of His government, and the happiness of His creatures, would require the execution of His righteous laws. Should we then have recourse, with Jews and heathens, to victims and oblations? In themselves the Lord hath no delight

^b Mic. vi. 6.

in burnt-offerings. Though countless lambs should bleed upon a thousand altars, they could never take away sin. We need "an advocate with the Father," such as the Father only could appoint; we need a "propitiation for our sinsⁱ," such as God only could provide. Were it not for this precious Victim, upon whom the Father looks from His throne, and remembers His covenant and mercies, we should have nothing to plead in mitigation of our sentence, but might justly expect to be driven from His presence, and to lie down in sorrow. At best, we should wander through life uncertain of His favour; and death would overtake us, unconsolated with the knowledge, that there is a fountain set open, in which the stain of our iniquities may be washed away, and a price paid for our redemption from destruction.

The certainty, and efficacy of this sacrifice of Christ, as that which God, in His great love towards mankind, had prepared to take away their sins, remains yet to be considered. Intimations of this His mercy the Almighty gave, in the hour of their conviction, to the first offenders. He afterwards gradually unfolded the scheme of it in prophecies, types, and figures, to His chosen servants in every age. And all the marks by which "the Lamb of God" was to be known; all the qualities, and sufferings, and circumstances of death, by which He was to be distinguished, are found united in Christ.

You behold Him, to-day, offered precisely at the time appointed, in the midst of the predicted week; when "the sceptre was departed from Judah^k," while the second temple was yet standing, whose "vail was" presently "rent in twain from the top to the bottom^l." You see all things that were written, that the Messiah should suffer; by such suffer-

ⁱ 1 John ii. 1, 2.

^k Gen. xlix. 10.

^l Matt. xxvii. 51.

ings it was requisite we should be delivered. The remembrance of the cross should be an incitement in us to all goodness. How shall we, for whom our Lord has done and suffered such things, by living in sin, “crucify Him afresh, and put Him to an open shame ^m?”

Finally. Let us justly estimate the obligations we are under to the Lord, our Redeemer. In heaven He is known as “the Lamb of God;” and “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands” of angels bow, we are told, before Him, “saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessingⁿ.” “The four and twenty elders,” also, “fall down before Him, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints^o.” How great is our obligation, for whose sakes He was slain, to love and adore Him! To the praises, then, which we know to be chanted in the temple above, let our lips and lives say Amen: “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever^p.”

^m Heb. vi. 6.

^o Rev. v. 8.

ⁿ Rev. v. 11, 12.

^p Ibid. ver. 13.

SERMON XLII.

ON GOOD FRIDAY.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 48.

And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.

THE crucifixion of Jesus Christ, is to us the most stupendous, and interesting part of the economy of God. Creation is an astonishing display. The scenes of nature strongly interest, through the consciousness that we have in them a part. Every object about us fills the contemplative mind with amazement. But before them all, for grandeur of design, for solemnity of circumstance, for greatness of expression, and for connexion with man's destiny and duty, is the mystery of the cross. This envelopes all that is important to our race; all that will nourish astonishment for ever, and ever deserve our most grateful consideration. To be, indeed, actual spectators of the crucifixion, and with "the people who came together to that sight, to behold the things which were done," was not our lot. Yet to ponder it as a thing accomplished, with its mighty consequences, the sacred narrative, and our interest in it require: nor will reflection ever fail to furnish such views of the subject, as will compel the good man to smite his

breast with even deeper amazement, and juster determinations than theirs, whom the text exhibits returning, awe-struck from the solemn scene.

It is now the season in which the mighty event had its accomplishment. Having carried us through the sad occurrences which preceded it, the Church has brought us, to-day, to the foot of the cross, that we may contemplate its truth, magnitude, and import. But who shall set these in a full light? For me, I am lost in this “depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God^a :” yea it is a theme too deep for human expression. Yet to assist your conceptions of its greatness, and suitably to improve this holy time, I would raise your contemplations to the greatness of the Person who suffered, the greatness of the sufferings He endured, and the greatness of the end, or consequence of His suffering. These are points, with which your breasts should be thoroughly penetrated, on this sacred day; and, if properly considered, may exceed in impressiveness upon the believing mind, the actual sight of the transactions, which wrought such emotions in the Jewish spectators.

Of the greatness of the Person who suffered, how shall I give you an adequate idea! Consider His origin. An eternal emanation* of God! “The only begotten,” and “well beloved Son” of the Father^b! The equal sharer of the glories of the Godhead; the noblest inhabitant of heaven! Consider His state. It was “He, by whom all things were made, and without whom was not any thing made that was made^c ;” —He, into whose hands the everlasting Father had put all power; the Creator

^a Rom. xi. 33.

* Ὁς ὡν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης, καὶ χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, Heb. i. 3. Vide Parkhurst in loco.

^b John i. 14. Mark xii. 6.

^c John i. 3.

and Lord of heaven and of earth. Consider His character; He lived on earth a perfect being. The unsullied purity and sublimity which were in Him, and shone through the veil of His flesh, realize, in fact, all that the mind can form of ideal beauty, or rather furnish the only image of perfect excellence, with which the mind is acquainted. He “did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth^d.” Before Him the sages who approach nearest to perfection, are as nothing; yea our conceptions of angelic excellence will not raise us to the majesty of His character; for with conscious inferiority, they bow themselves in His presence, and are commanded by the Highest to worship Him^e. His unconquerable meekness and patience, His unequalled love and dignity of soul, the signals of Divinity which He displayed at death, and the agitations of all nature as He expired, wrung from His foes, even from His guards and crucifiers, the just acknowledgment of His greatness, “Truly, this was the Son of God^f.” Like the sun, He rose amidst the mists of morn, brightened on His course, and set without contracting spot or blemish, or sustaining any diminution of His glory, in all that lustre which he unceasingly shed, while “travelling in the greatness of His strength^g.”

Here the transition is easy from the Person, to the greatness of the sufferings He endured. Prophecy, the mysterious Messenger of heaven, was early, and at various periods, sent to announce to mankind the appearance of this great Personage in their world. With different degrees of precision, at different times, she drew the character she described, the course of the coming Christ. But in every portrait,

^d 1 Pet. ii. 22.

^e Heb. i. 6.

^f Matt. xxvii. 54.

^g Is. lxiii. 1.

in every sketch, conflict and suffering were conspicuous. Her first whisper was, that "His heel" should be wounded by the serpent, whose "head" He would "bruise^b." As time advanced, she unfolded gradually all He should endure, from the persecutions of His infancy, to the last insult of the piercing spear. Now she breaks forth as if beholding one covered with anxiety and blood: And now, with pencil dipped in saddest hue, she gives the entire and affecting piece. "He shall grow up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: He hath no form nor comeliness: and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief!—He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare His generation? for He was cut off out of the land of the livingⁱ."

Such was the description which prophecy gave of Him, whose ancient herald she was. Her picture of His griefs was not too highly wrought. He realized them all. To pass over His early humiliation and poverty; to omit the persecutions, troubles, and difficulties, which marked His life: the guest chamber and judgment hall, Gethsemane and Calvary, will furnish specimens of all the sorrows, which human nature can taste and deprecate. Behold the commencement of His Passion, when with deep anguish He perceives, that one, whom He had honoured, should betray Him. Dread apprehension of the approaching weight of woe brings on "an agony," which nature scarcely sustains, sweating, "as it

^b Gen. iii. 15.

ⁱ Is. liii. 2, 3, 7, 8.

were, great drops of blood^k," through intense distress. In sorrowful retreat He is arrested as a thief in the night, and friendship's token is prostituted to designate Him. Now He is dragged before an heathen tribunal; and mockeries, buffeting and spitting, from a rabble populace, are silently endured. Though pronounced innocent, He is delivered to the scourge, and wanton cruelty contrives new pains. At length He is doomed to death, and hurried with malefactors to the shame and tortures of the cross.

Great as is the Person who is immolated on the cross, and, uncommon as is the measure of His sorrows, the manner is equally wonderful in which He endures them. It is here we may learn to endure. Observe His meekness and patience. This Son of God is led "as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth^l." Ponder His humility. He is God: but He takes upon Him "the form of a servant^m." He submits to be bound, to be scourged, to be mocked: He submits Himself "to death, even the death of the crossⁿ." Consider His conduct towards His crucifiers. They exhaust their ingenuity to torment Him. They spend their strength in vexing Him. No insult, no mockery, no cruelty which they can devise, is omitted. But not an emotion of resentment rises. There is something of the God in His deportment. They excite His commiseration: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do^o." Examine His resignation. His "soul is exceeding sorrowful^p." "Being in an agony," under the woe He sustains, "His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the

^k Luke xxii. 44.

^l Is. liii. 7.

^m Phil. ii. 7.

ⁿ Phil. ii. 8.

^o Luke xxiii. 34.

^p Matt. xxvi. 38.

ground¹." Under the feelings of nature He wishes, if it were possible, this dreadful hour might pass from Him; "nevertheless, not My will, but Thine, be done." See him die. His anguish ruffles not His bosom. To show that nature is not exhausted, and His death voluntary, He cries "with a loud voice." And what are His words? "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." And when He had so said, "He gave up the ghost²." Search the pages of history. Go to all the scenes of death. Bring together all the great ones of the earth; where will you find such meekness, such patience, such piety, such benevolence, such fortitude, such generosity, such equanimity? Who hath suffered, who hath died, like Jesus Christ? The lustre of His greatness illumines the body of death. We forget, for a moment, the cross, in admiration of the wonderful virtue which encompasses the victim upon it. Surely, thou Virgin Mother, though "thy soul be now pierced through with a sword³," some admiration of His transcendent greatness in death, must occasionally brighten thy mind; thou wilt keep all these things, and ponder them in thy heart.

Amazing scene! Unparalleled sufferings! How exact a counterpart of prophecy's descriptions! We can scarcely contemplate them without adopting her words: "Was ever sorrow like unto His sorrow, which was done unto Him, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted Him in the day of His fierce anger⁴?" But observe the testimonies which God, in this awful hour, gives to the character of His Son. The situation of the heavenly bodies admits of no eclipse. But nevertheless the sun is darkened! It is not the country, nor the season, of extraordinary throes of

¹ Luke xxii. 44.

³ Luke ii. 35.

² Luke xxiii. 46.

⁴ Lam. i. 12.

nature : but, the earth quakes ; the rocks are rent, the graves are opened ! No voice of an archangel is heard ; no trump to God sounds : yet many of them that sleep in the dust, now hear the voice of the Son of God, and awake, and are seen with Him in the city, partakers of His resurrection^u ! Long has the Holy of Holies been hidden from every eye, but that of the High Priest. Man saw not yet the Mercy-Seat. But as Jesus dies, the veil of the temple is rent from before the Cherubim, and shortly after, the temple itself is demolished, and Jerusalem, the glorious holy city, passes away.

Do any question the extremity of the sufferings which Christ endured ? They are recorded by Heathen and Jewish, as well as sacred historians. Are the supernatural concomitants of the crucifixion doubted ? The awful darkness is particularized by several profane writers, which, at that season, could not have been caused by eclipse ; and there are not wanting considerate men, who conceive that the earth yet bears the marks of her convulsions. Are the effects of the scene upon the minds of the crucifiers thought improbable ? Scarcely can the sceptic, who has not lost all feeling, ponder the account of it without similar emotions. The circumstances of Christ's sufferings wrought deep conviction of His Divinity in one of the most famous and ingenious of His adversaries, to whom prophecy had in vain opened her wonders, and miracles their strength.

But we hasten to what gives still more interest to the crucifixion ; the purpose of it. Wherefore is the Son of God thus bruised ? Why does this spotless, glorious Being, thus die ? These are sorrows “ wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Him in the day of His fierce anger^x.” But is God displeased with

^u John v. 22. Matt. xxvii. 52, 53.

^x Lam. i. 12.

His beloved Son? Is there anger for Him who hath done “no sin^y?” No. He suffers, “the just for the unjust^z.” “The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all^a.” Alienated from his Maker by transgression, and having voluntarily subjected himself to the penalty of sin, man must have perished, had not the Eternal Son appeared in his behalf, to expiate his sins, and satisfy the demands of offended justice. We see human nature desolate. Men are subject to sin, and to the consequences of it, pain, and misery, and death. Every person carries the evidence of this in himself. He sees it in all about him. Fallen and helpless, he has nothing to offer to propitiate his Maker. Repentance he cannot have without his Maker’s help, and when he has it, it makes no atonement. Future obedience he would have owed, if he had not sinned. This, therefore, makes not satisfaction. Besides, his obedience, when he has turned to his Maker, is all imperfect. His own righteousness, to the end of his days, is much alloyed. How, then, shall his Maker be reconciled? How shall the wrath of Heaven be turned away? He needs some friend to stand between him and his God, and make his peace. Satisfied would be the justice of Heaven, and sure his salvation, if there were some one to take his sins, and sustain the punishment of them. But where should such a prevailing intercessor, where should such a disinterested Saviour, be found? His fellow men? they can do nothing. Every one for himself needs a deliverer. No man “can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom^b” for his own soul. The angels? they owe for themselves a perpetual obedience: and who among them would be of sufficient

^y 1 Pet. ii. 22.

^z Is. liii. 6.

^a 1 Pet. iii. 18.

^b Ps. xlix. 7.

strength, if indeed of sufficient benevolence, to sustain for a sinful world, the wrath of its offended God? “ God looked, and there was none to help :—therefore His own arm brought salvation ^c.” In the person of the Son, He came down from heaven to purchase our redemption with His blood. “ He is our Peace ^d.” “ He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows ^e.” God “ hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him ^f.”

By graciously giving Himself a ransom for us, and consenting to pour out His soul unto death, Christ arrested the arm raised to execute the just sentence upon the sinner, and restored man to the favour of his God. To make this atonement for fallen man, and effect this reconciliation between him and his offended Creator, was the vast purpose of our Saviour's death. A world of beings is saved by it from impending destruction. Having interceded for them, He, in the fulness of time, made their satisfaction, by bearing “ their sins in His own body ^g” upon the cross, and through the everlasting righteousness which He brought in, became their peace. The Prophets and Apostles, though remotely distant, in sweet accord proclaim, “ He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities ^h.” “ He was delivered for our offences ⁱ.” “ We have redemption, through His blood ^k.” “ By his stripes we are healed ^l.” But not only life, the hope also of *eternal* life, is given us in our redemption. “ For if,” says St. Paul, “ when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by

^c Isa. lxiii. 5.

^f 2 Cor. v. 21.

ⁱ Rom. iv. 25.

^d Eph. ii. 14.

^g 1 Pet. ii. 24.

^k Col. i. 14.

^e Isa. liii. 4.

^h Isa. liii. 5.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 24.

his life ^m." While we behold in the cross the seal of the remittance of the penalty, to which man had subjected himself, we behold in it, also, the earnest of his future felicity. Having by " His one oblation of Himself, once offered, made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world," Christ entered into the Holy of Holies with His own blood, there " to appear in the presence of God for us ⁿ." While thus we contemplate Him, pleading His merits with the Father, and think amazed, how in this work the Father hath commended to us His love, we are enabled to adopt the inspired sentiment, " He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things ^o?"

And yet we have, perhaps, but an imperfect knowledge of the consequences of this great event. That there are higher orders of moral beings, and that it has reference to them, the Scriptures plainly evidence, and declare. But what their natures, numbers, or condition, and how they are interested in the mystery of redemption, we are not informed. We know, that by it is made known " to principalities and powers," the " manifold wisdom of God ^p;" that angels make it the subject of their consideration; that the hosts of heaven are not less occupied than the ransomed of the Lord, in celebrating the praises of the Lamb. Still, to perceive the Christian mystery, in all its connections; to behold it in all its importance and results, is doubtless impossible till the final consummation, when we shall cease to " see through a glass darkly ^q," and be admitted to the presence and full fruition of God.

Christians! These are some of the most striking

^m Rom. v. 10.

ⁿ Heb. ix. 24.

^o Rom. viii. 32.

^p Eph. iii. 10.

^q 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

parts of the crucifixion. As we ponder, we should profit. The Church brings us to the cross, that we should think of them, and that we should think of them for our good. While we consider who it is that died upon the cross, we may learn, how much love and gratitude we owe to God, who “spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all^r ;” and to the Son who consented to empty Himself of all His glory ; to be thus abased ; thus to die ; that He might make ‘satisfaction for the sins of the world,’ and redeem men from destruction to eternal life. While we contemplate the extraordinary sorrows, which the Son of God sustained, and by which He made the expiation, we may learn how great an evil sin is, and find the strongest incitement to repent of our past offences, and to endeavour to cultivate the dispositions and duties which are pleasing in God’s sight. From the manner in which we have seen our Lord sustaining His sorrows, we should learn to be meek and humble ; to be patient ; to be gentle towards all men ; to forgive our enemies ; to be obedient to the will of God. The testimonies, which, at His death, confirmed the character of the Son of God, should establish our confidence in Him ; and from our knowledge of the end, for which He suffered and died, we should draw hope, and faith, and peace.

Thus I have endeavoured to assist your conceptions of the magnitude of the event we commemorate, by setting before you the greatness of the Person who suffered, the greatness of His sufferings, and the greatness of the ends which they effected. When collecting our views of the subject, with how much greater amazement and devotion should we “smite our breasts,” than the awe-struck multitude who saw only the solemnity, without the import of the

^r Rom. viii. 32.

scene! For us, the Son of God laid down His life. Impressed with the odiousness of sin which required thus to be expiated, let His blood purge our consciences from evil works. With gratitude for His sufferings, “let us go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach^s.” Let it be the holiest occupation of our hearts, to “show His death till He come^t.” And kindling our love at the exhaustless source of His, let it be the main object of our lives to attain, through His merits, to an union with the ten thousands that surround His throne, in singing, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing^u.”

^s Heb. xiii. 13.

^t 1 Cor. xi. 26.

^u Rev. v. 12.

SERMON XLIII.

ON GOOD FRIDAY.

ISAIAH, liii. 5.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

WE are called, this day, to witness a scene of such sufferings, as have been, but once, realized upon the earth. The innocent Jesus, who descended from heaven to bless and instruct our race; “who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth^a;” whose life had been one uniform display of love to mankind, and Divine perfections, is betrayed by a disciple, seized by a rabble band, dragged to judgment, as a base criminal, and amidst the most wanton barbarities, and aggravated humiliations, condemned to be crucified. By inconceivable agonies of body and mind, His condemnation is preceded. It is followed by every cruelty, which unfeeling malice can inflict. To the torture and mockery of a crown of thorns, they bind His sacred head. “He hides not His face from shame and spitting^b.” The cruelties of the scourge lacerate His body. And it is not till humanity is fainting under its burthen, that they lead Him away to crucify Him. At Golgotha, the

^a 1 Pet. ii. 22.

^b Isaiah l. 6.

cup of suffering overflows. Every ingredient which can embitter it is infused. To the cross, the most ignominious and painful instrument of death, the patient victim is nailed. With taunts and insults, inhumanity and outrage, are the agonies of crucifixion aggravated. An awful withdrawing of the Divine smile, compels from the overwhelmed sufferer, the cry, “ My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me^c ?” A pause ensues. The wonderful man in patience possesses His spirit. Exhausted, at length, with the weight He bears, and conscious of the accomplishment of some mighty purpose, the Author of our faith cries, “ It is finished :” and with unsullied innocence “ gives up the ghost^d.” Earth feels the death, and quakes. The heavens are wrapt in gloom. The guards appalled confess a Divinity. The spectators amazed “ smite their breasts and return^e.”

Great God ! Is this the Son of Thy love, whom Thou didst send to visit and instruct our world ? Under Thy government is He thus received by those, whom He came to bless ; and requited with a heavier fate than is allotted to the basest of the sons of men ? Wherefore hath it pleased Thee thus to “ bruise” Him ? Wherefore, while Thou dost behold, is the innocent Heir of Thy perfections and love put to this unparalleled grief, ignominy, and death ?

The end and design of the sufferings of Christ are explained to us by the Prophet of the Most High, in the pathetic words of my text : “ He was wounded for our transgressions ; He was bruised for our iniquities ; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him ; and with His stripes we are heald.”

But what means the Prophet when he speaks of beings without health or peace, and obnoxious to

^c Matt. xxvii. 46.

^d John xix. 30.

^e Luke xxiii. 48.

punishment? The offspring of the Eternal must necessarily be all pure; and as man was made and fashioned by Him, he must have come from his Maker's hands without sin, unhappiness, or imperfection. It is evidently of a ruined race the Prophet speaks; for to no beings, not corrupted from the state in which the Almighty formed them, can the character of transgressors, laden with iniquity and misery, be ever applied.

The truth is, the wretched condition which the text supposes to belong to man, is the condition in which he is left by the Fall. Revelation teaches us, what it would be difficult not to believe, that when the Almighty formed man, He made him upright and just, furnished with the means, and fitted for the enjoyment of unadulterated happiness. That moral nature, which was his glory, and capacitated him for the felicities for which he was designed, required that he should be free: and his Sovereign Creator thought it best, that a sense of his dependence should be impressed on him, and his obedience tried by an easy, benevolent, and explicit law, which with His own lips, He gave him. Had we time, we might show in this economy the wisdom and goodness of the Deity, and His royal regard to the welfare of His new moral creatures. But at present it concerns us only to observe, that in the use of that freedom, by which he was ennobled, man violated the law of his Maker, in defiance of the awful penalty of death, with which it was sanctioned. The Divine displeasure was now incurred; misery and destruction became the sinner's doom, and thus the whole race were ruined. The solemn monuments of this fall are every where too numerous. Alas! we too certainly carry them about us in this earthly tabernacle. All that we inherit from the first Adam is a nature subject to a curse; its peace with its Author,

and with itself, broken; its spiritual and moral health impaired; and death, its awful desert. If the justice of the Most High should be executed according to His law, the fruit of the transgression must inevitably be an utter extinction from His creation, or a hopeless state of continually increasing sinfulness and misery.

But loved for ever be our God; His feelings for the creatures of His hand are the feelings of a Parent; and He was tenderly solicitous, in some way consistently with His truth and holiness, to recover His prodigal offspring from the ruin which they had incurred. His holiness filled Him with an abhorrence of sin. His immutable truth required, that the law He had given should be executed. The honour of His government over all orders of intelligent beings, and, for aught we know, the measure of their respect for it, were implicated in the punishment of the transgressors. Yet His infinite mercy pitied the victims of temptation; His benevolence wished to save this fair portion of His creation, from the fatal fruit of their sin.

Here it was that the fulness of the Father's wisdom, and holiness, and love, were displayed in devising the scheme by which He would accomplish His gracious desire. If any one could be found to take man's guilt upon him, and bear its desert; if there were any being, sufficiently holy to expiate sin, and sufficiently benevolent to devote himself to the work, who would place himself in the stead of man, and answer fully for his transgressions; the hapless creature might be rescued from death, and the justice of Heaven at the same time satisfied. There is nothing in reason, or the nature of things, with which this would be incompatible; but if the act were voluntary in the substitute, there would be every thing to aggrandize his virtue. To manifest the immuta-

bility of the Divine government, while it displayed its mercy, would fill the redeemed with gratitude, and the strongest motives to future obedience. But how great, how disinterested, how infinite, must be the love which would undertake the work! How spotless, and exalted in himself, must the being be, to expiate with the Almighty the sins of man! and, would not such a deliverance entitle the benefactor, who would consent to devote himself for its accomplishment, to as great returns of homage, and love from men, as their creation claims? These considerations indicate the propriety, if not the necessity, that the person who should be the propitiation for our sins, should himself be Divine. Such a person the Father beheld in His own adorable Son; the eternal emanation* of His glory, and “express image of His Person.” Him He resolved to give for our ransom. On Him He determined to lay our iniquities, and by making Him an offering for sin, every way adequate and acceptable, to redeem us from the awful demand of the law, and defeat the triumph of the adversary. To Him, who was to be our peace, how solemn the work! Yet He was a Son who inherited all the Father’s compassion, and whose Father’s will was His own. He saw, and pitied man. He rejoiced to accomplish the gracious purpose of God. In His Father’s pleasure and the travail of His soul, the sons and daughters whom His death would bring unto glory, He saw the reward of His sufferings, and was satisfied. When therefore neither sacrifice, nor offering, nor burnt-offering for sin, presented the means of fulfilling Jehovah’s desire to save our race, then said this dutiful and benevolent Son, “Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God!” Thy pleasure is My pleasure. The honour of Thy government

* See note, p. 510.

† Heb. i. 3.

‡ Heb. x. 7.

I am concerned to uphold, while I compassionate these helpless beings. Myself I offer to bear their sins, and make reconciliation. "I am content to do it; yea, Thy law is within My heart ^h."

By this stupendous arrangement in the council of Heaven, the awful cloud was removed, which hung over man, and the beamings of Divine favour returned upon the dismayed offenders. They were taught to trust in the Divine mercy, and though solemnly instructed in the unhappy consequences of their transgressions, received from the mouth of their Judge the promise of a Redeemer. Sacrifice was instituted to cherish in them the hope of pardon, by darkly revealing the method in which it should be obtained, and carrying the spirit of faith forward to the great atonement. And in the fulness of that time, which the Father for reasons of inscrutable wisdom had chosen, our gracious Deliverer, the Eternal Son of the Highest, appeared in our flesh, "to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself ⁱ." This was the end of the amazing sufferings which, without sin or murmur, Christ endured. Not for Himself was He cut off. For us men, and for our salvation, He came down from heaven, and on the cross paid the price of our deliverance. He perfected obedience in our nature; submitted to the curse of the law in our behalf; offered Himself without spot or blemish to God, a full satisfaction for our sins: and through the efficacy of His precious blood we live; an everlasting righteousness is brought in; God is reconciled to us; and we are made capable of obtaining eternal glory. Thus "was He wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed."

^h Ps. xl. 10.

ⁱ Heb. ix. 25.

There are ever men, to whom all the ways of Heaven are grievous ; whom nothing pleases, but the vain offspring of their own proud minds. To these it is to be expected, “ the cross of Christ ” will yet be “ foolishness ^k.” From the doctrine of their depravity, from the mysterious nature of Christ, and from their own views of the character of the Deity, they will attempt to raise a scorn upon the sufferings of the Redeemer for our salvation. But shall our faith, which rests upon the fullest evidences of the truth of the Gospel, be shaken by the cavils of speculative men ? Shall we, who have found in the doctrine of Christ, that rest for our spirits which they need, quit it, because it presents to us wonders which surpass our comprehension ? There is, indeed, something in our redemption through the blood of Christ, which fills us with amazement. The Apostle styles it, the “ mystery ” of the cross ^l. And what is not mysterious with which we are acquainted ? Can we more clearly discern the wisdom of the arrangements for our present subsistence ; or the mercy of the Deity in the miseries with which the earth is filled ? Badly, then, must it become us to doubt the expediency of the means, which the Most High hath chosen for our salvation. Whether any other way might have been advised for man’s deliverance ; why the expiatory sacrifice was deferred to so late a period ; whether the sufferings of our Saviour might not have been dispensed with, or diminished, it is not our business to inquire. It is enough for us to know, that “ those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all His Prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled ^m.” Consider then, ye doubtful, the evidences which encompass you ; that ‘ we are born in sin, and are the children of wrath.’ Reflect, how imperfect, with all your ef-

^k 1 Cor. i. 17, 18.^l 1 Cor. ii. 7, 8.^m Acts iii. 18.

forts and attainments, is the purity and virtue of your character. Contemplate yourselves, as going into the presence of the infinitely holy, and awfully just God, and ask yourselves, if you have not need of a Mediator with Him ; of something more than your own merits to propitiate His favour ? But turn from the Son, whom He hath set forth as your Redeemer, and to whom else will you go ? Will you make atonement for your own transgressions ? Ah ! wherewith will you make it ? Look back, and see every where, the indications which man has given, of his sense of the need of an expiation of his guilt. See in the thousand libations, and the ten thousand sacrifices, with which he hath sought to propitiate his God, his want of something more than his own virtue, to commend him to his Maker ; his want of something more than his sorrow, to turn away the wrath of the Most High. Rejoice then, that God hath condescended to provide for the world a sacrifice, which would be acceptable in his sight ; whose blood would be of sufficient value and efficacy to take away sin. Under your consciousness of the wounds of the serpent, for the healing of which, Jesus, by Divine appointment, is lifted up upon the cross, “ Look unto Him, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth ”.

Such is the solution, which the Scriptures furnish, of this day’s stupendous scene ; the Son of God, in the form of man, expiring beneath the ignominy and agonies of the cross. This is that wonderful scheme, into which, St. Peter tells us, “ the angels desire to look ° ;” and the contemplation of which must compel the Christian to exclaim, “ O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! ”

By our meditations on this subject, we may be led

° Is. xlv. 22.

° 1 Pet. i. 12.

p Rom. xi. 33.

to appreciate, with chastened joy, the deliverance purchased with Christ's blood. We find ourselves by nature the slaves of sin, the children of sorrow, and the prey of death. Tracing these evils to their source, by the light of revelation we discover, that a transgression, of which they are the consequences, subjected man, who till then was the possessor of innocence and peace, to the most fearful expectation of destruction. He stood upon the brink of perdition; and had he been left to himself, must, with his race, have perished for ever. What words, then, can express the magnitude of the deliverance, wrought by the mediation of the Son of God? Is there any thing valuable in life? Is there any thing pleasant in hope? Is there any thing precious in the favour of God? Is it our happiness that the sceptres of sin and death are broken? Do we rejoice, that the kingdom of heaven is opened to our anxious spirits, and that "we have an Advocate with the Father^q," whose intercessions cannot fail to prevail? We owe all to the merits of that atonement, which our Redeemer made for us, "in His own body on the tree^r." It was this, which rendered "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified," the only object which the transported Apostle "determined to know^s." The remembrance, that man was the occasion of these sufferings of the Saviour, will ever mix with our sense of salvation emotions of sadness and regret. But we are unjust to the cross, if we do not glory in it, as the foundation of our redemption from ruin to our present hopes of eternal life; and consider its efficacy in procuring the remission of the first transgression, as our best assurance, that He who expired upon it, "is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by Him^t."

^q 1 John ii. 1.

^s 1 Cor. ii. 2.

^r 1 Pet. ii. 24.

^t Heb. vii. 25.

We should, further, be impressed by the mystery we commemorate, with the immeasurable depths of the love of God. Of this, indeed, we are conscious in our being and capacity for happiness. We learn it from His daily providence, and it is proclaimed by all His works. But in the gift of His Son for our salvation, it is brought home to our hearts. In this we are made most sensibly to feel, that "God is love." The attributes of the Deity are all displayed in the accomplishment of our redemption, exhibiting a Deity, whom we are both to love, and fear, to reverence and adore. But mercy rules the work. The attribute which absorbs our attention is love. In the gift of the beloved of His bosom, to ransom us from the penalties of sin, He has furnished a pledge of His compassionate regard for the welfare of His creatures, as great, as it is affecting. And what return shall we make for infinite, unmerited benignity? "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

But I pass to the peculiar obligations we are under to the Being, whose sufferings we are commemorating. "Greater love," as He told His disciples, "hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." But to rank among His friends, men had no title. They had no claim to His regards. Upon the authority of His Father they had trampled; yea they would be His foes, and crucify Him. Yet for their sakes, He left a dignity and happiness, greater than the highest seraph possessed; "humbled Himself to be found in fashion as a man, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Herein indeed is love. Let me lead you

" 1 John iv. 16.

† John xv. 13.

* Mic. vi. 8.

‡ Phil. ii. 8.

to Calvary, and with other emotions than Pilate felt, bid you “ Behold the man ^a !” Surely “ He bears your griefs, and carries your sorrows, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of you all ^b.” For you He suffers. For you He dies. And the emphatic, “ It is finished ^c,” is but the requiem of his departing spirit, that He has completely accomplished your redemption. How transcendent this benevolence ! At what a price hath He purchased our safety ! Shall we be ashamed of His name, or indifferent to the prosperity of His Gospel in the world ? Shall we not devote to Him our best affections, and “ go forth unto Him, without the camp, bearing his reproach ^d ?” Shall we not, with the symbols which He hath hallowed, frequently place before ourselves and others, memorials of His death, and by every means in our power, increase His satisfaction in the work He hath wrought ? Surely it is our duty to acknowledge Him, in all our ways ; and to the utmost extent of our ability, to save the pain of beholding base ingrates in those, whom He died to redeem. If there be any thing like moral obligation, His love may challenge our most ardent attachment ; and “ if ye love Me,” says He, “ keep My commandments ^e.”

This leads me to remark, in the last place, how much it behoves us, by complying with the terms of the Gospel, to see that this sacrifice of Christ be a “ savour of life unto life, and not of death unto death” to us ^f. You have seen with what paternal solicitude, at what an amazing expense, with what unmerited mercy, our Creator hath rescued us from the jaws of destruction. With the blood of His Son He hath sealed to us a gracious covenant, and given us a new opportunity to become heirs of immortality and glory. “ How” then “ shall we escape, if we

^a John xix. 5.

^b Is. liii. 4. 6.

^c John xix. 30.

^d Heb. xiii. 13.

^e John xiv. 15.

^f 2 Cor. ii. 16.

neglect so great salvation ^s ?” Is this redemption a ground for presuming on the Divine mercy ? Have we now nothing to fear or do ? Because Christ gave Himself an offering for the world, may we continue in sin, and hope for glory ? Far otherwise. If there were any ingenuousness in us, the sufferings of our Redeemer would fill us with an abhorrence of vice ; and His cross be the strongest motive which could influence us, to strive in future for a perfect obedience. We are not our own ; we are “ bought with a price ^h ;” and God forbid that He should ransom any of His creatures from death, to a liberty of transgressing His laws without fear of punishment. To this end saith the Apostle, Christ “ died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again ⁱ.” It is an humble, though exalted ; an holy, though free ; a probationary, though immortal life, to which we are begotten through the blood of our Redeemer. And if with such inducements and aids to a “ patient continuance in well doing ^k,” we fall through our own perverseness, greater must be our condemnation. Wherefore, beloved, as the word of our God exhorts, “ pass the time of your sojourning here in fear : forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold ;—but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot ^l.”

^s Heb. ii. 3.

^h 1 Cor. vi. 20.

ⁱ 2 Cor. v. 15.

^k Rom. ii. 7.

^l 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

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